



EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 26/05/93

Distrib: PG/SC

Date: 30 November 1993

MEDICAL CONCERN

**Thongsouk Saysangkhi
Latsami Khamphoui
Feng Sakchittaphong**

LAOS

Amnesty International is concerned for the three men named above who have been sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment and who are adopted as prisoners of conscience. Thongsouk Saysangkhi and Latsami Khamphoui are former deputy ministers and Feng Sakchittaphong an official in the Ministry of Justice. The three were arrested in October 1990 for their peaceful advocacy of political and economic reform and were brought to trial two years later in November 1992. Prior to sentencing they were held in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, but were moved for trial to the remote northeastern province of Houa Phan where they are now imprisoned. All three men, who are in their mid-fifties, are believed to be in need of medical care, but there is reported to be no medical attention available in the prison in which they are held.

Background

Thongsouk Saysangkhi was Deputy Minister of Science and Technology until August 1990 when he resigned his post after criticizing the government for "restricting popular liberties and democracy". His letter of resignation spoke of the need for political reform in the country, including a move to a multi-party system of government. He stated that, as he felt unable to continue in government, he was resigning both his ministerial post and his membership of the governing Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Latsami Khamphoui is a former Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Forestry who, in January 1990, wrote a lengthy letter to the country's political leadership setting out criticisms of the political and economic systems. Feng Sakchittaphong, an official in the Ministry of Justice, is reported to have joined the two others in writing an article advocating multi-party democracy.

The three were arrested in Vientiane after the letters written by Thongsouk Saysangkhi and Latsami Khamphoui were circulated in Vientiane and elsewhere; they had also held meetings at which the creation of a multi-party political system was advocated.

Following their arrest, the three men were accused in the government-controlled media of treason and "acting against the law to overthrow democracy". Although accusations were brought in the press, no formal charges were brought against them prior to their trial. During their two years in pre-trial detention they were held in dark solitary confinement cells in the main detention centre in Vientiane. They repeatedly asked to be brought before a court to contest the legality of their detention and exercise their right of defence. They are reported to have nominated three Lao and four foreign lawyers with whom to confer, but all requests for legal representation were denied.

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT**

1 Easton Street, London WC1X 8DJ, United Kingdom

Tel: (44) (71) 413 5500 Telegrams: Amnesty London WC1 Telex: 28502 FAX: 956 1157

E-mail: (GeoNet) mcr1:amnesty-is, (GreenNet) amnestyis@gn.apc.org

The three were finally brought to trial on 4 November 1992 before the People's Court in Sam Neua, the capital of Houa Phan province, where they are reported to have been charged with "making preparations to stage a rebellion and conducting propaganda against the Lao People's Democratic Republic, gathering groups of people to create disturbances and carry out slanderous charges against other people, and creating disorder in prison". The men were denied any access to a defence lawyer during their trial.

Thongsouk Saysangkhi, Latsami Khamphoui and Feng Sakchittaphong are now imprisoned in Prison no 7, Houa Phan province. The prison is remote, situated in a mountainous region some 5 km from the Vietnamese border. Access to the prison and communication with the outside world are difficult and the prisoners are allowed no newspapers or radios.

Thongsouk Saysangkhi, Latsami Khamphoui and Feng Sakchittaphong are held together in one cell and are all reported to be in ill-health. Thongsouk Saysangkhi is reported to suffer from diabetes which requires dietary control; during his three years' imprisonment he is believed to have been without any real medical attention. He is also reported to have a cataract and to be suffering from urinary tract problems manifested by urinary retention; this is said to have begun some months after his initial detention.

Feng Sakchittaphong is also reported to suffer from urinary tract problems with symptoms similar to those of Thongsouk Saysangkhi. He is also reported to be epileptic and is currently said to be suffering from considerable anxiety. Latsami Khamphoui suffers from chronic hepatitis.

There is concern for the well-being of all three, given their long sentences and the lack of medical attention in the prison. It is reported that, in cases of medical emergency, permission is required from Vientiane before a doctor can be called.

After Thongsouk Saysangkhi, Latsami Khamphoui and Feng Sakchittaphong were sentenced in 1992 the government is said to have initially denied that they were being held in Houa Phan province and to have stated that they were still in Vientiane. It has been suggested that the reason they were transferred away from the capital was to remove them from the public eye.

Amnesty International is calling for their immediate and unconditional release. None of the men has committed any recognizably criminal offence and the sole reason for their imprisonment is their criticism of the government and their calls for moves towards a multi-party system.