

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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**Lao People's Democratic Republic: Amnesty International urges immediate and unconditional release of long-held peaceful demonstrators, to guarantee freedom of speech, and to fully respect the rights of asylum-seekers**

***Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Lao People's Democratic Republic***

Amnesty International welcomes the engagement of the Lao People's Democratic Republic with the Universal Periodic Review as part of its stated efforts to promote and protect human rights.

It deeply regrets, however, that the Lao People's Democratic Republic rejected the recommendation to release peaceful demonstrators.<sup>1</sup> At least five men were arrested on 26 October 1999 for attempting to hold a peaceful demonstration in Vientiane and calling for peaceful economic, political and social change. Three are reported to remain in detention despite having completed their 10-year prison sentences. Thongpaseuth Keuakoun, a father of seven children, Seng-Aloun Phengphanh and Bouavanh Chanhmanivong should have been released at the latest in October 2009. Amnesty International strongly urges the Lao authorities to demonstrate its commitment to protecting human rights in practice and to release the three men immediately and unconditionally.

Amnesty International welcomes the government's support of those recommendations, announced in the Addendum to the report of the review, that call for full implementation of provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) related to freedom of speech, including through review of domestic legislation.<sup>2</sup> The organization is disappointed, however, that recommendations to revoke laws that suppress the right to freedom of expression and assembly were rejected.<sup>3</sup> The reasons provided for rejection appear to reflect the government's wish to retain the strong limitations on the right to freedom of expression currently in place, which are contrary to the ICCPR provisions it claims to support. Amnesty International urges the government to reconsider its position on these recommendations.

Several states made recommendations with regard to the thousands of Lao Hmong, including refugees and asylum-seekers forcibly returned from Thailand to Laos in December 2009.<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International regrets the government's only partial support for these recommendations and urges it to ensure unhindered and independent access by UNHCR and humanitarian agencies to all returnees in resettlement sites at Phalak and Nongsan in Vientiane Province and Phonkham in Borikhamsay Province. While the authorities have organized several visits to these sites for diplomats and journalists, full and free access was not provided and opportunities for returnees to speak freely to the visitors without repercussions were extremely limited. This hampered a proper assessment of conditions and treatment of returnees.

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<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/15/5, paragraph 99.3.

<sup>2</sup> A/HRC/15/5, paragraphs 98.41, 98.43 and 98.44, and A/HRC/15/5, Add.1, paragraph 1.

<sup>3</sup> A/HRC/15/5, paragraphs 98.42 and 98.45, and A/HRC/15/5, Add.1, section III, paragraphs 25 and 26.

<sup>4</sup> A/HRC/15/5, paragraphs 98.27, 98.28, 98.29, 98.30, 98.31 and 98.32.

The Lao government has a responsibility to respect the right of all persons to seek asylum, as provided in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Amnesty International welcomes the government's assurances that all Lao citizens, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, age or other ground, may apply for travel documents at any time. The organization urges the government to uphold this provision at all times, as recommended in the review, and to refrain from any actions which may interfere with this right.

**Background**

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Lao People's Democratic Republic on 21 September 2010 during its 15<sup>th</sup> session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered the oral statement above. Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis of the review through its submission on Lao People's Democratic Republic:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA26/003/2009/en>

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