

# £Lao People's Democratic Republic @Update on "Re-education"

Amnesty International has recently learnt of the release since 1987 of some 185 political prisoners who had been held without charge or trial for "re-education" in various places in Attapeu province of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos). At the same time, the organization remains concerned about 33 other political prisoners who are still held without charge or trial for "re-education" in Houa Phanh province.

On a number of occasions since 1986, Amnesty International has expressed concern to the Laotian authorities about the restriction imposed on people without charge or trial in Attapeu province, who included people detained or sent there for "re-education" in 1975 or 1979. The organization now understands that all of these people have finally been freed to live and work at places of their own choice. Former prisoners interviewed by Amnesty International in Thailand in January 1991 attributed their release to the policies of "new thinking" adopted by the Laotian government. As an organisation opposed to the indefinite detention or restriction of political prisoners without charge or trial, Amnesty International has noted with satisfaction that the penal and criminal procedure codes and other legislation recently promulgated by the government in connection with its new policies appear to contain no legal basis for such arbitrary practices to continue in Laos.

Amnesty International is urging the government to take further action to end the apparently unlawful restriction without charge or trial of the 33 political prisoners who it believes are still restricted to Houa Phanh province after having been originally sent there for "re-education" more than 15 years ago. A list of these restrictees is found in an appendix to this document. They were sent to Houa Phanh for "re-education" in 1975 or 1976 because of their positions under a former Laotian government. According to evidence from a wide variety of sources they are currently compelled to maintain residence in the Sop Pan area of Houa Phanh. Amnesty International believes at least some of them are prisoners of conscience, detained solely on account of their non-violent opposition to the current government.

Amnesty International has also received information alleging that on several occasions since September 1990, local security personnel attached to the Sop Pan administration have threatened some of the restrictees that they will not be released unless they pay bribes. In other instances, Sop Pan security authorities have allegedly attempted to prevent the release of individuals from restriction by making false criminal allegations against them. It is said that false accusations of possession of weapons or sexual misconduct have been used by local authorities to obstruct the release of particular restrictees, and also as a way of extorting money from them. In addition, there are allegations that Sop Pan security authorities have sexually abused the wives of a number of

restrictees, and that on 9 February 1991 they assaulted one restrictee at home and beat him unconscious. It is said that information about the alleged threats and other incidents has been withheld from central and provincial level government authorities by those responsible among the local security forces. They have reportedly sometimes committed the alleged abuses when drunk, or with the help of common criminal prisoners, including people held for murder, from a detention centre known as Camp 14, near Sop Pan.

Amnesty International is not in a position to evaluate allegations that Sop Pan security forces are abusing their authority, but we are concerned that if such misconduct is indeed taking place, it could prolong the restriction without charge or trial of political prisoners who have already been held for more than 15 years. It is also concerned that the alleged acts of physical violence against restrictees or their wives by Sop Pan security authorities could constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

The continued restriction without charge or trial of these 33 people raises particular humanitarian concern in view of the fact that many of them are elderly and in poor health. The recent death in Sop Pan of one long-term restrictee, Thanh Soumpholphakdy, underlines this concern. Amnesty International's information suggests that those still detained feel their cases have been forgotten by the central authorities. They fear that they will never be released from restriction, and as a result, some of them have become severely depressed. The organization has received information indicating that at least two restrictees have thought of suicide after despairing that they would ever be allowed to return to their original homes and live normally with their families.

In view of the above, Amnesty International is urging that the Laotian Government take all necessary steps to ensure that these people do not continue to be indefinitely restricted without charge or trial in Houa Phan province. It is urging that the central authorities look into their cases, immediately release any who are held for their non-violent political beliefs or activities, and ensure that unless others are to be promptly charged with recognizably criminal offences and fairly tried in an independent and impartial court of law, they also be released. It is also asking the authorities to investigate allegations that restrictees and their wives have been subjected to physical abuse, and if these allegations are well-founded, to bring to justice any persons who may be responsible.

APPENDIX

*POLITICAL PRISONERS STILL RESTRICTED IN THE SOP PAN AREA  
OF HOUA PHANH PROVINCE*

1. BOONLU NAMMATHAO
2. CHANTHALA SIHACHAK
3. DO PHENGTHONGSY
4. HOUMPHANH NORASING
5. KHAMKO BOUTMUONGNONG
6. KHAMLOM THONGPHANH
7. KHAMPHA PRASEUTH
8. KHAMPHAN PRADITH
9. LAKHONKHAM BOUPHANOUVONG
10. LAMMATHOU BOUPHANOUVONG
11. LY TENG
12. MOK
13. ONE-CHANH MAHACHIT
14. OUANE PHENEPHOM
15. PANGTONG CHOKBENGBOUN
16. PHANH NOLA
17. PHAO ABHAY
18. PHEUI MIXAIPHONH
19. PHOMMADETH THAMMACHITTO
20. SALAT RAJASAK
21. SENGSOUVAN SOUVANNARATH
22. SIHARATH PHASOUK
23. SING CHANTHAKOUMMANE
24. SING RATTANA BOUNKHONG
25. SOMNUK THONGPHANITH
26. SOMPHET VONGSOUVAN
27. THUCK CHOKBENGBOUN
28. TIAO MONIVONG KINDAVONG
29. TIAO SAYAVONG MANOROT
30. TIAO SISOU MANG SISALEUMSAK
31. TIAO VANNASENG SAYASANE
32. TONG PAO SONG
33. YONG YE THAO