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News Flash

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Laos: 15 year prison sentence -- following a two hour trial

Amnesty International expressed deep shock today at the 15 year prison sentences handed out to two journalists and their US interpreter, arrested 4 June whilst reporting on the on-going internal armed conflict in Laos. Two of the four Lao nationals who were assisting them were also reported to have been given harsh prison terms today, one reportedly receiving a twenty year prison sentence.

"Fifteen year prison terms after a trial lasting two hours defies belief" said the organization after hearing the verdict.

The trial of the group, including Thierry Falise, a Belgian journalist, Vincent Reynaud, a French photographer, and their interpreter US national Naw Karl Mua, was inexplicably held in the remote north of the country despite their pre-trial detention in the capital Vientiane. The trial lasted little more than two hours and was not open to the public or foreign journalists. However, the French and American Ambassadors were present in the court-room.

The Lao authorities did not make public either the identities of the Lao nationals or the exact charges being brought against both them and the three foreigners. Information received by Amnesty International named the ethnic Hmongs as 27 year old Thao Moua and Char Yang who are believed to have acted as guides for the journalists, and Pa Fue Khang, reportedly the driver of the group. The identity of a fourth Lao national believed to be in detention is unknown.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Lao authorities to be transparent about this case, amid conflicting reports of the death of a Lao national at the time of their arrest.

"This show trial only confirms our continued concerns about fair trial and access to due process in Laos and makes a mockery of justice", said Amnesty International.

"The Lao authorities must make public the identities of the Lao nationals in this case, charges against them and sentences given, and confirm that they had access to a defence lawyer for their trial in accordance with both Lao and international standards of justice", said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International has expressed grave concern for several years about conditions of detention in Laos and fears that all those arrested are at risk of torture and ill-treatment, particularly those from ethnic minority groups who are perceived by the authorities as hostile to the government.

Public Document

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