

2007

Further Information on UA 324/06 (ASA 39/017/2006, 29 November 2006) and follow-ups (ASA 39/018/2006, 8 December 2006; ASA 39/002/2007, 19 January 2007; ASA 39/003/2007, 29 January 2007) - Fear of forcible return/arbitrary arrest

THAILAND **16 Lao Hmong asylum-seekers**
153 Lao Hmong refugees, including 77 children and nine infants

The Thai authorities attempted to forcibly return the 153 Lao Hmong refugees on 30 January, reportedly using teargas. They abandoned the attempt by the end of the day, after they received assurances from third countries willing to accept the 153 for resettlement.

The 153 are now back at the Nong Khai Immigration Detention Center, where provision of electricity and water has been cut off intermittently. No-one from outside has been allowed access to the refugees, two of whom need urgent medical attention.

The authorities first dragged the women and children from their cell, loaded them onto buses and took them to the Lao border. Among them were two women who were eight months pregnant, a two-week-old infant and two men, who had been removed from hospital to be deported. One of them suffers from a serious liver condition; the other has recently undergone surgery for a bullet wound to the face.

The authorities used teargas in an attempt to force the men to leave their cell, where they had barricaded themselves in. Twenty boys were also in this cell. Police reportedly used teargas three times and tried to saw through the bars but were unable to get in.

As the deportation attempt was halted, the women and girls were later taken back to their cell in the IDC. After some delay they received food and water. The men and 20 boys are still barricaded in their cell, as they fear being deported to Laos, where they would be at risk of torture. The two sick men have been handcuffed to the wall outside the cells. The one who with the bullet wound is reportedly in need of immediate medical attention: blood is oozing from the wound.

There is no further information about the group of 16 Lao Hmong asylum-seekers forcibly returned to Laos on 26 January, who were reportedly held in a detention facility in Paksan on their return.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Up to one third of the Hmong minority in Laos, estimated to be around 300,000 in 1970, are believed to have fled abroad between 1975 and 1990, the vast majority resettling as refugees in the USA. Most Hmong in Laos are integrated into mainstream society, but an unknown number have been hiding from the authorities, particularly the military, in isolated pockets in the jungle since the end of the Viet Nam war (1965-1975). These groups are living in extreme poverty, hardship and disease, and violent onslaughts against them by the Lao military are regularly reported.

The estimated 7000 Lao Hmong asylum-seekers living in the makeshift refugee camp at Huay Nam Khai have arrived there since 2004. Most claim to have been persecuted because of their connection with ethnic Hmong rebel groups who fought alongside the United States during the Viet Nam war and its spill-over fighting in Laos.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that the authorities used teargas during violent attempts to forcibly return 153 Lao Hmong refugees, including 77 children and nine infants, from the Immigration Detention Centre in Nong Khai to Laos;
- urging the authorities to put an immediate and permanent end to any attempts at deportation of this group of recognized refugees;
- urging the authorities to ensure the safety of the refugees, including adequate provision of food and water, and immediate access to medical care, the UNHCR and other independent humanitarian agencies;
- urging the authorities not to hinder attempts to arrange speedy resettlement of the group to a third country;
- reminding the authorities that under international law they are obliged not to return anyone to a country where they would be at risk of torture, ill-treatment or other serious human rights violations;
- urging the authorities to allow the UNHCR unhindered access to Lao Hmong asylum-seekers in order to properly assess their cases and to ensure that all those seeking asylum in Thailand have access to fair and satisfactory

procedures to determine their refugee status.

APPEALS TO:

Head of agency with responsibilities for border areas and refugees

Secretary-General

Prakit Prachonpachanuk

National Security Council

Government House, Phitsanulok Road

Dusit, Bangkok, 10300 Thailand

Fax: +66 2282 5131

Salutation: Dear Secretary-General

Prime Minister

General Surayud Chulanont

Office of the Prime Minister

Government House, Phitsanulok Road

Dusit, Bangkok, 10300 Thailand

Fax: +66 2282 5131

Email: opm@opm.go.th

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Nitya Pibulsonggram

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Wang Saranrom, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Fax: +66 2 643 5320

Email: minister@mfa.go.th

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Thailand accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 March 2007.
