

PUBLIC

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UA 142/07 Fear of forcible return/arbitrary arrest

THAILAND 48 Lao Hmong asylum-seekers

The Thai authorities are reportedly preparing to forcibly return a group of 48 Lao Hmong asylum-seekers, including at least 30 children, in breach of international law. The 48 are now held at a police station in the northern province of Phetchabun. On 8 June members of the group telephoned relatives in Thailand, saying that armed police was forcing them onto trucks in order to forcibly return them to Laos.

The 48 had fled to Thailand on 23 May, reportedly after being harassed and threatened by the Lao authorities. On 31 May, they were arrested in a makeshift refugee camp at Huay Nam Khao village in Phetchabun province. Since then they have been held at the Lomsak police station.

The group has had no opportunity to apply for refugee status, through either the Thai authorities or the UNHCR.

If they were forcibly returned to Laos, no international human rights organisations would have access to them to monitor their well-being, and Amnesty International believes they would be in danger of torture and other serious human rights violations.

Like all other countries Thailand is obliged under international law not to return anyone to a country where they would be at risk of serious human rights abuses.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The refugee camp at Huay Nam Khao is home to up to 8,000 ethnic Hmong Lao refugees. The Lao refugees started arriving at the camp in large numbers in 2004, seeking refugee status. Most claim to have been persecuted because of their connection with ethnic Hmong armed resistance groups, who fought alongside the USA against the communist Lao forces during the Viet Nam war (1965-1975) and its spill-over fighting in Laos.

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

- urging the authorities not to forcibly return the group of 48 asylum-seekers in Lomsak;
- 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;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that this group is given access to a fair and satisfactory process to determine their claims to refugee status;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all who are in need of international protection inside Thailand are provided with such protection.

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
spokesman@thaigov.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
permsec@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 20 July 2007.