

**PUBLIC**

**AI Index: ASA 39/011/2006**

**18 August 2006**

**Further Information on UA 159/06 (ASA 39/007/2006, 07 June 2006) and follow-up (ASA 39/008/2006, 23 June 2006) – Fear of forcible return/ health concern**

**THAILAND**

**At least 231 ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees**

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The group of at least 231 ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees, which has been detained in northern Thailand since June, is at immediate risk of being forcibly returned to Laos. If returned, the refugees could face serious human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment.

Amnesty International has received unconfirmed reports that the Thai authorities have now begun to take steps to forcibly return the group of refugees, which includes women and children, to Laos. The refugees are reportedly being transported by bus and truck from detention facilities in Phetchabun province to an area in northern Chiang Rai province, close to the Laotian border.

This group arrived in Thailand claiming they fled from Laos to avoid persecution by the authorities. They aimed to join a group of around 6,000 ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees who are living in make-shift camps in Huay Nam Khao, in Phetchabun province. The recent arrivals were arrested by the authorities in early June for illegal entry into Thailand, and were initially held at Khao Kho district jail in overcrowded conditions and with insufficient food. In late June the 231 were moved to different detention facilities across Phetchabun province.

One group of 27 ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees, who had been living in the Huay Nam Khao camps, were forcibly returned to Laos on 5 December 2005. Amnesty International received reports that they were detained incommunicado in deplorable conditions, and that some had been tortured or ill-treated. Most of this group are children.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Approximately 6,000 ethnic Hmong Laotians are living in the makeshift refugee camp in Huay Nam Khao. They started arriving there in large numbers in 2004, seeking refugee status. The majority of them claim they have been persecuted because of their connection with rebels in an ongoing conflict with the Lao military. The Thai authorities define them as "illegal" immigrants, while the Lao government has expressed doubt that they are Lao nationals.

Some ethnic Hmong rebel groups, who fought with the US during the Viet Nam war and its spill-over fighting in Laos, have continued sporadic resistance to the current Lao regime since it came to power in 1975. Up to a third of the Hmong minority in Laos, estimated to be 300,000 in 1970, are believed to have fled abroad around that time, the vast majority resettling as refugees in the US. An unknown number of Hmong and other minorities have remained in the jungle to this day, hiding from the Lao military. Some have continued armed resistance to the Lao government, but most are not believed to be involved in fighting.

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

- expressing concern at reports that the Thai authorities are preparing to forcibly return 231 ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees to Laos, where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment;
- reminding the Thai authorities that under international law they are obliged not to return anyone to a country where he or she would be at risk of serious human rights violations;
- urging the Thai authorities not to forcibly return any of 231 Hmong Laotian refugees to Laos;

- expressing concern that other ethnic Hmong Laotian refugees have been forcibly returned to Laos, where they have faced serious human rights violations.

**APPEALS TO:**

Kongsak Wantana  
Minister of Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
Atsadang Road  
Bangkok 10200  
Thailand

**Fax:** + 66 2 226 4371

**Salutation:** Dear Minister

Torphong Ampan  
Governor  
Phetchabun Province  
Thailand

**Fax:** + 66 5 671 3173

**Salutation:** Dear Governor

Worakiart Somsoi  
Governor  
Chiang Rai Province  
Thailand

**Email:** [chiangrai@moi.go.th](mailto:chiangrai@moi.go.th)

**Fax:** + 66 5 371 1123

**Salutation:** Dear Governor

**COPIES TO:**

Kovit Wattana  
Commissioner General  
Royal Thai Police  
Rama I  
Patumwan  
Bangkok 10330, Thailand

**Fax:** + 66 2 251 5956

and 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 29 September 2006.