OPEN LETTER TO PM CHULANONT July 24, 2007

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Open Letter to His Excellency Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont

Regarding your promise to allow third country resettlement for the Hmong

refugees detained at Nong Khai IDC

Prime Minister

General Surayud Chulanont

Office of the Prime Minister

Government House, Phitsanulok Road

Dusit, Bangkok 10300 Thailand

Dear Prime Minister,

In early February this year, you publicly announced that the group of 153 Hmong refugees detained at Nong Khai IDC would not be deported to Laos. You clearly stated these refugees would be allowed to resettle in a third country.

Immediately following your public announcement, third countries quickly agreed to resettle these refugees. Just a month later, sad to say, your government did a direct turnaround and put a hold on third country resettlement, holding these refugees in limbo for the past 5 months.

On June 9, your government went ahead and forcibly deported a group of 160 Hmong refugees from four IDC facilities in Phetchabun province. This was immediately after your government had assured the UNHCR and foreign diplomatic community that this group would not be deported. Two UNHCR recognized refugees were among this group but had managed to escape just before the forced deportation. They are now hiding somewhere in Thailand. The police reportedly used electrical devices, such as stun guns, to shock the refugees and force them onto the deportation vehicles. This brutal treatment resulted in some of the Hmong refugees trying to take their own lives, rather then be forcibly deported. One of the refugees drank pesticide and reportedly died shortly after being deported to Laos. About five others were knocked unconscious before being dragged onto the deportation trucks.

News of this violent event soon prompted the June 12 and June 29 escapes from the Nong Khai IDC facility, in which seven refugees escaped. Two of these refugees have since been captured and are now, oddly enough, facing criminal charges of possibly three years in jail even though they are recognized refugees and not criminals. This has also scared the other refugees who are still on the run. They are now genuinely afraid to turn themselves in because the Thai government label them as “criminals”.

Beginning on June 30, the remaining 149 refugees held at Nong Khai IDC have all been put under lockdown in their tiny overcrowded cells. This includes infant children and the elderly. They have not been allowed out for well over three weeks and are becoming very sick because of this, some of whom are in critical condition. The Nong Khai IDC authorities have been telling them they must remain there indefinitely with no hope of being released in the coming months or years. This has caused the traumatized group to nurse suicidal thoughts, as they see no hope for their future.

These Hmong detained at Nong Khai IDC are all UNHCR recognized refugees, and as such, should be treated humanely. According to international law refugees have certain rights, including the right not to be forcibly deported to a country where they face political persecution, such as imprisonment or death.

Amnesty International, an internationally respected human rights group, has already initiated a letter writing campaign on behalf of these refugees, urging your government to put a halt to any deportation attempts.

On behalf of the Hmong refugees detained at Nong Khai IDC, I ask that you follow through on your promise and respect international law by allowing these refugees to resettle in a third country as soon as possible. I ask that these refugees detained at Nong Khai IDC be allowed out of their crowded cells during the day and that the sick be given immediate medical attention.

Respectfully,

Laura Lo Xiong, Executive Director

Hmong International Human Rights Watch

www.hmongihrw.org