
PRESS RELEASE BY JOE DAVY, December 17, 2008

USA stop the torture of Lao-Hmong refugees being held hostage at Nong Khai jail, Thailand

A group of 158 UNHCR recognized Hmong refugees from Laos, consisting mainly of women and children, have been held under what can only be described as torturous physical and psychological conditions for well over two years now with no signs of ever being released.

These refugees have committed no crime yet are being treated much worse than convicted criminals. For well over two years now, these refugees have been forced to live in windowless, severely cramped, mosquito infested cells for 22 hours a day. These Hmong, including their infant children, are constantly sick due to the unsanitary yellowish colored water they have to drink and bathe in.

The children cry all night due to either the intense heat or the cold damp floors that they have to sleep on. Meanwhile, the parents suffer from a host of chronic physical and psychological illnesses brought on by their inhumane living conditions.

The severe confinement has caused the group to suffer from chronic leg cramps and blood-clotting which has caused a multitude of recurring illnesses. These 158 Hmong have been forced to live inside two 12 by 12 meter cells. This does not include sharing these cramped living quarters with as many as 20-30 other foreign inmates who are detained here at any given time and who find the living conditions unbearable even though they may stay for as little as a few nights.

Most of the adults sleep just 3-4 hours a night waking up several times because of horrible recurring nightmares brought about due to their precarious situation. Most of the adult population here shares the main symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), such as inability to sleep, waking up in the middle of the night due to nightmares, severe depression, panic attacks, hypervigilance, and suicidal ideation. Many keep reliving that awful failed deportation attempt back on January 30, 2007 when Lao authorities were allowed up to their second floor cells spraying the group with some type of chemical agent in order to disable them and drag them from their cells.

The Hmong refugees are under constant bombardment of verbal and emotional abuse, which is much more devastating than the horrid physical conditions they are forced to live under. They are constantly told via the news media and Thai authorities that they are in Thailand illegally, that no third country is willing to take them (an outright lie!), that they will live the remainder of their lives in jail if they don't voluntarily return to Laos.

The most recent victim of these inhumane living conditions is a 35-year old Hmong woman who gave birth just three months ago. It was a complicated birth and the woman never fully recovered, having repeat migraine headache attacks which now seem to have been due to internal bleeding of the brain or a cerebral aneurysm. On December 15, 2008, she fell unconscious and had to be rushed to the hospital for emergency treatment. Since then she remains unconscious in critical condition and is scheduled for brain surgery on December 18. She reportedly has a 50/50 chance of making it so there is a chance she may not survive. It is strongly believed that the stressful living conditions were what brought this attack about. In fact, the current situation at Nong Khai jail is like a ticking time bomb, with many adults ready to take their

own lives due to this most recent traumatic incident.

The USA needs to put an immediate end to this horrible inhumane situation by putting heavy pressure on the Thai government to allow these Hmong refugees to resettle in third countries, as originally agreed upon. The USA should take a very aggressive approach on this matter and give these Hmong refugees equal treatment under international refugee law, as they have done so with the Nepalese, Burmese, North Korean and other refugees in Thailand.

Joe Davy

Hmong Advocate

Co-Founder of Hmong International Human Rights Watch

Chicago