

HMONG REFUGEES IN THAILAND FEAR OF FORCED REPATRIATION, January 2, 2009

Hmong International Human Rights Watch, Nebraska-January 2, 2009- Hmong Refugees in Thailand fear of Forced Repatriation. Approximately 400 Thai military troops deployed to refugee camp in Huay Nam Khao, Phetchabun, Thailand.

On December 31, 2008, approximately 250 military troops were deployed to the camp premises, equipped with riot gears and guns. According to the refugees, the military troops set up tents around the camp in four units, each unit consisting of 50 soldiers and some are moving around. This group removed their tents and equipments and left the camp at 9:00AM on January 2, 2009. At around 4:00PM, another group of 120 new military troops have arrived. Eyewitnesses stated that in the past two days these soldiers have been training and practicing on beating, handcuffing, and pushing people into deportation vehicles.

On December 23, 2008, Thai military officials called for a meeting with the Hmong Leaders in the camp to question about a rumor that the Hmongs in Huay Nam Khao are planning another protest and may burn down the village after the New Year celebration. The Hmong New year celebration will end on January 2, 2009. On December 26, 2008, Thai military officials called for another meeting and advised everyone in the camp to be cautious in case the rumor turns out to be true. Thai military officials also informed the community that military troops would be deployed to the camp to ensure safety.

The Hmong leaders asked the Thai officials regarding the deployment of military troops to the camp. The Thai officials explained that there are two Hmong refugee camps currently in Thailand, one in Chiang Rai and the other in Huay Nam Khao. Neither the Thai authorities nor any NGOs recognize the one in Chiang Rai Province. Thai authorities have been informed that the new group in Chiang Rai plans to protest to gain the Thai government's attention. They believe the group in Huay Nam Khao may join the new group and call for another protest. Therefore, the Thai government must deploy military troops to guard the group in Huay Nam Khao. They further stated that if after the New Year celebration nothing happens, the military troops would be removed.

By watching the soldiers's violent trainings, the Hmong refugees are very worried and terrified. They believe forced repatriation may take place at anytime soon.

According to our sources, the group in Chiang Rai Province includes Hmongs from Vietnam and Laos. The refugees from Vietnam claim to have been persecuted by the Vietnamese government due to religious belief. The group from Laos claims to have been persecuted by the Lao government due to the 2003 fighting in Sam Neau.

The vast majority of the population in Huay Nam Khao is packing their belongings and preparing to face the consequences. Some cannot decide whether to volunteer to return due to hopes of third country resettlement while some of them will not return to Laos under any circumstance due to well-founded fear of persecution.

The Hmong refugees in Huay Nam Khao request that the Thai government allow UNHCR to get involved before repatriation takes place. They also beg that the Thai military troops not use force against their will.

Hmong International Human Rights Watch collaborates with the Hmong communities in the US and abroad to request that the Thai government provide counseling services to the returnees before repatriation takes place and force repatriation not be used against the wills of the Hmong refugees who have well-founded fear of persecution. We strongly believe that there are Hmongs in Huay Nam Khao with legitimate refugee claims, and they should be protected under the international refugee laws.

By Laura Lo Xiong, Executive Director

Hmong International Human Rights Watch

