

## PRESIDENT OBAMA REMEMBER YOUR PROMISE TO THE HMONG, By Joe Davy, January 20, 2009

As you are sworn in today as the 44th President of the United States I ask that you remember your campaign promise to your loyal Hmong American supporters.

Many of them have relatives who continue to suffer overseas in Thailand and Laos. You have pledged that, "The U.S. must be clear in calling for all parties to respect international law and ensure that displaced Hmong are not placed in harm's way. As President, I will restore America's commitment to human rights abroad..."

Well, there is a group of 158 UNHCR recognized refugees currently in urgent need who are being held hostage under torturous conditions at Nong Khai immigration jail, Thailand. For over two years now, a group of mainly young children have been forced to live inside two tiny 9 by 9 meter mosquito-infested cells for 22 hours a day. Most animals could not survive these inhumane conditions. The group has become chronically sick and is on the verge of committing a mass-suicide any day now because of the U.S. government's silent complicity in their torture.

You talk about respect for international law and human rights, well I can think of no other example where these values are being so obviously ignored and blatantly disregarded as in the case of our former allies, the Hmong. In fact, international law is being made a complete mockery out of due to the Lao and Thai governments holding these Hmong refugees hostage and not allowing them resettlement in a third country.

Some two years ago, during a failed forced deportation attempt, the United States boldly stepped forward volunteering to resettle many of this group but have since remained ominously quiet. Meanwhile, mothers hold their sick infant babies hoping that the outside world will hear their cries.

By continuing to remain silent the US becomes totally complicit in the physical and psychological torture of these innocent women and children who are told on a regular basis by Thai authorities that no third country is willing to accept them, an outright lie. The refugees are told that if they refuse to return to Laos then they will spend the rest of their lives in this overcrowded immigration jail.

If we continue to treat our former Hmong allies in such a cruel way what kind of message are we sending to our new Iraqi and Afghani allies? They're going to think that we may abandon them at some point, as we are now doing with the Hmong. To add even more insult to injury, the US and Laos are now exchanging military attaches while at the same time the Lao military continues to hunt down our former allies hiding in the jungles.

This past June, eight of your former colleagues in the US Senate wrote a joint letter to the Secretary of State urging the U.S. to rapidly intervene with the Thai Prime Minister to avert forced repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos where many face legitimate fear of persecution.

Just today, Amnesty International has released another damning report on the cruel treatment of these Hmong refugees. They along with many other international organizations such as the UNHCR, Human Rights Watch, Doctors without Borders (MSF), and Refugees International have all voiced their serious concerns for these refugees.

As our new President I feel it's high time to show the world our respect for human rights and upholding international law. Let's send a clear message to our allies that we will not abandon them, and immediately engage the Thai government to stop forced repatriation of the Hmong.

Respectfully,

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