

**STATEMENT OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOURCE ACTION CENTER**  
**ON**  
**MONTAGNARD REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS**  
**AND HMONG REFUGEES PRESENTLY IN THAILAND**

**Prepared for the Public Meeting on FY 2007 Refugee Admissions**

*Presented by*

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*To*

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration  
U.S. Department of State

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## **HMONG REFUGEES IN THAILAND**

Thank you for allowing us to speak today on behalf of Southeast Asian refugees who remain in grave conditions and desperate need for protection overseas. My name is Doua Thor, Executive Director of the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

We continue to monitor the situation in Petchabun, Thailand where Hmong refugees continue to live in makeshift homes with hopes of resettling in a third country. We remain concerned and hopeful that there will be a durable solution for this population. There are news reports that reflect the fact that this is a vulnerable population with no protection from any government entity.

Recently, there have been reports of missing children who were taken away from their family. According to the Asian American Press<sup>1</sup>, a major newspaper serving the Asian American community in St. Paul, MN, reported that, according to the U.S. Embassy in Laos and Radio Free Asia, on November 28, 2005, following a church choir practice, 29 Hmong refugees, an adult woman and 28 children (26 girls and 2 boys) while returning to their home in Petchabun, they were apprehended by Thai authorities and transported to a local jail. There have been speculations that these 29 individuals have been deported back to Laos or have been trafficked. This poses a grave concern for SEARAC, particularly because these are children who are vulnerable and without adult supervision. We are concerned that the families have not been able to receive adequate information and have not been able to establish sufficient communication with the Thai authorities, therefore, creating a barrier to finding the missing children.

SEARAC recommends the following:

- We encourage the governments of the United States and Thailand to implement humane and lasting solutions to the dilemma of longstanding Hmong refugees from Laos who are now living in a makeshift village in Petchabun, Thailand. Solutions available to these refugees should include third-country resettlement in the United States and a positive integration plan for the remaining refugees.
- We recommend the governments of the United States and Thailand to fully implement and expedite an investigation into the missing children who were taken from the Petchabun, Thailand area and return those children to their family safely.
- We recommend and urge this Administration to continue America's loyalty to its suffering allies by offering the option of voluntary resettlement to Hmong-Lao refugees still in need of a durable solution after nearly 30 years.

## **MONTAGNARD REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA**

The current situation of the Montagnards in Vietnam and those who have fled to Cambodia remains a concern for us and refugee advocates. Montagnards continue to be persecuted because of their religious beliefs and remain a vulnerable and targeted population. According to the recent Human Rights Watch report, 355 Montagnards have been imprisoned since 2001 because

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<sup>1</sup> "Protests over detained children," *Asian American Press*, February 24, 2006.

of religious and peaceful activities<sup>2</sup>. More than sixty of those currently serving prison sentences were arrested in Cambodia or near the Cambodia and Vietnam border. Approximately 200 Montagnards have fled to Cambodia as of April 2006 in hopes of being resettled in a third country, and a number of Montagnards have returned voluntarily to Vietnam. For those who have returned to Vietnam, UNHCR has had the opportunity to screen potential refugees for resettlement and have determined several cases for resettlement. However, thirty-six individuals have been interviewed but did not qualify under UNHCR's standards, but may be eligible under the United States' refugee determination. As we continue to monitor the situation in Vietnam and Cambodia, we remain steadfast that the United States will accept the resettlement of more Montagnards.

In conclusion, we encourage the United States Government to continue to work towards a durable solution for both of these populations before the situation gets worse. Unfortunately, our government has failed our strongest allies who fought along side of the United States during the Vietnam War because they are deemed as terrorists or have provided material support. The Hmong and Montagnards were combatants for the United States and risked their lives to protect our freedom, in which they may never experience because of the way our law was written when the REAL ID and Patriot Act became law. The Hmong and Montagnards are only two of many groups who should not be treated as terrorists, but with humanitarian protection from the United States. We urge the United States Government to act fast to rectify and find a solution that will not harm the very group we need to protect. Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> "No Sanctuary: Ongoing Threats to Indigenous Montagnards in Vietnam's Central Highlands." *Human Rights Watch*. Vol. 18, No. 4. June 2006.