

Statement
Of
Nou Vang
Hmong National Development
On
FY 2009 Refugee Admissions
(Hmong in Phetchabun)
To
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
U.S. Department of State

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My name is Nou Vang. I am the Executive Director of Hmong National Development, Inc. (HND), a national advocacy organization affecting policy change on behalf of the Hmong American community across the country. As a former refugee who came to the United States from Thailand at the age of 5, I am pleased to be able to submit a written testimony today to highlight the predicament of nearly 8,000 Hmong refugees currently in Thailand

Hmong Refugees:

HND remains concerned about the ongoing issues affecting thousands of Lao-Hmong refugees living in a camp in Thailand's Phetchabun Province. Aside from one medical NGO, access has repeatedly been denied for international NGOs to enter the camp to provide basic humanitarian assistance to this population. The Lao and Thai governments have indicated that they will be deporting all individuals in the camp back to Laos by the end of this year. This poses great concerns for us as the Thai government has repeatedly denied access to UNHCR to assess the refugee status claims of this population. Instead, the Thai government has instituted their own screening process which has not been disclosed to organizations invested in this population. As a result, there are grave concerns that those with legitimate refugee claims will not be screened properly and will ultimately be repatriated without any safeguards to their human rights once back in Laos.

As a result of this dire situation, many in the camp have protested in hopes of drawing international attention to this issue. Hmong refugees in Phetchabun have gone on hunger strikes, resisted deportation and most recently, approximately 2,000 individuals lost their basic shelters to a fire that broke out in which was believed to have been set intentionally to draw international attention to their desperate situation.

We understand that the Thai government continues to pursue the policy of returning Hmong refugees to Laos without consideration and involvement of international stakeholders. As such, many in the camp fear what will happen to them if they are returned to Laos against their will. HND strongly believes that a comprehensive solution is needed to ensure that the rights and safety of those who are ultimately returned to Laos will be protected. Currently, there is no system in place to monitor the situation of these returnees as Laos has strongly resisted this notion. We urge PRM to continue advocating for a comprehensive and durable solution to the situation of the Lao-Hmong in Phetchabun, Thailand.

As a national advocacy organization working on behalf of Hmong Americans, HND has received numerous emails, letters and phone calls from concerned citizens across the country on this matter. Many Hmong Americans have family members in this camp and are deeply affected by this issue. We urge PRM to take a leadership role to ensure the safety of this vulnerable population.

HND recommends the following:

- We urge PRM to ensure the creation of humane and lasting solutions to the dilemma of Lao-Hmong refugees Phetchabun, Thailand through multilateral discussions with international stakeholders. Solutions should include third country resettlement for those who are found to be *bona fide* refugees.
- The human rights of individuals who are ultimately returned to Laos should be safeguarded through diplomacy efforts with the Lao government to allow an international monitor for this population. A strong integration plan for returnees should also be implemented.