

Hmong International Human Rights Watch

Statement of Laura Xiong, Executive Director

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The Permanent Forum On Indigenous Issues-May 12-23-2003, N.Y.

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Dear Mr. Chair, Members of the Permanent Forum, Distinguish Members of the United Nations, NGOs, Brothers and Sisters of the Indigenous Populations:

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude and appreciation to the Leaders of the Permanent Forum for your efforts and commitment to make this event possible. Without your leadership, we would not have the opportunity to be here and to discuss our issues. Your representation to the UN has opened a dialogue between the governments and the Indigenous Peoples. Such dialogue will establish a prolific relationship and develop an affinity of economic and social status among all parties.

Indeed, astute leaders will change the world a little at a time.

My name is Laura Xiong. I am a Hmong ethnic minority from Laos. I would like to make the following statement concerning the issue of economic and social development that affect the indigenous peoples.

A few years ago, the Laos Government received million of dollars of foreign aid to eradicate opium productions. Opium was the only cash crops for the majority of the Hmong population in Laos. When the opium eradication program began, none of the Hmong minority report receiving the aid from the Laos Government.

Very recently, many shooting incidences have occurred in Laos. In each incidence, the Hmong minority were to be blamed. They are being labeled as terrorists, bandits and insurgents. In fact, the Hmong are not allowed to own guns, but the Low Land Lao are permitted to own guns of their choice.

Slash and burn is another major issue that the Lao government used against the indigenous peoples. Thirty years ago, Laos' overall forest area covered more than 70% of the entire country. Currently, the country's forest area has been reduced to less than 40%. The Ethnic Hmong minority's slash and burn technique was not responsible. The government allowed three public companies monopoly on fuel importing, mining and the timber industry in Laos to make profit from the virgin forest.

As an indigenous woman, I don't understand why any country can allow such perfunctory government to rule a nation and to incriminate the indigenous peoples in surreptitious deforestation. The government should establish a mechanism to dialogue with the indigenous peoples to prevent such imputation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair for allowing me to express my concerns.

Laura Xiong