

Hmong International Human Rights Watch

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Dear Mr. Chair, Distinguish Members, Brothers and Sisters of the Indigenous:

As Hmong Representative from Hmong International Human Rights Watch, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of the Permanent Forum Members on their election. I also want to thank all of you for your commitment and dedications to the Indigenous People of the World.

The Indigenous people should not be treated differently from what has been proclaimed in the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "all human are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Further more, Article 1 of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People says, "Indigenous peoples have the right to the full and effective enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized in the charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law."

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today because we believe that our brothers and sisters, parents and relatives of the Indigenous families are being denied these basic rights. They have no rights to freedom of movement and residency. Their rights to self-protection and self-defense as well as their rights to self-determination and decision making are being denied and rejected.

Let me share with you some of the critical issues which are continuously affecting the Hmong people in Laos. The Hmong are an ethnic minority whose ancestors derived from Central to Southeast Asia several thousand years ago. Unfortunately, the Hmong's homeland has been conquered by other more powerful groups and our rights have been taken away. These kinds of conquests have forced the Hmong people to flee for their lives and have been scattered throughout the world.

The Hmong's greatest problems are in Laos and are unique in that they stem from a historical relationship between the United States Government and United States Central Intelligence Agency. As I speak today, 27 years after America ended her war in Laos, the Lao Government continues to wage war against and harass the remaining Hmong population. The current policy of the Lao Government can only be described as a "systematic" discriminatory policy against the entire Hmong population. Such policy includes genocide and persecution.

Despite the Geneva Convention of 1962 and 1973, the Lao Government has illegally brought in thousands of Vietnamese soldiers in guise of construction or development workers to kill off the remaining Hmong who are taking refuge in Sysomboun Special Zone. Currently, there are over 17 military bases locate inside this area. Evidently, the war against the Hmong in Laos has not stopped and the holocaust continues.

Because we are indigenous people and we have no representation before the United Nations, therefore our historical, mutual relationships with the United States Government and its Central Intelligence Agency was to blame for retaliation. The Hmong were forced to flee into the jungles of Laos after the Vietnam War - to avoid mass killing practices carried out by the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese-backed Lao People Democratic Republic (LPDR) military. Currently, foreign donors are supporting the LPDR's "special development" programs in Saysomboun Special Zones, indirectly contributing to the LPDR's campaign against the Hmong. Obviously, such programs will only help to bring in more Vietnamese soldiers under the same false pretense as being development workers - to continue their genocidal practices against the Hmong in this area.

We must also point out that the United Nations and foreign states are eager to support these special programs not because the programs will bring wealth and stability to Laos, but that these programs can benefit foreign nations economically because the natural resources in Laos remain largely untapped. The regards for human life and the safety of the indigenous people of Laos are of no consequences to the international community because of greed.

Because the war in Laos did not end when it should have, the Hmong people continue to seek political asylum in other countries. Now, there are more than 32,000 Hmong refugees in Thailand without UNCHR protection. On May 11, 2002, the Bangkok Post reported that The Supreme Command of the Thai government had endorsed plans to relocate more than 32,000 Hmong refugees to Ban Na Pho Camp at the border of Laos and Thailand. This is a step in the wrong direction because Ban Na Pho is a repatriation camp. It is the very same camp in which other Hmongs were forced and coerced back into the killing fields of Laos.

Evidently, the Hmong leader, (*Vue Mai*), who was instructed by the UNCHR to lead the repatriation has disappeared. Those who were forced back shared the same stories. Their husbands are dead or have mysteriously vanished, children become orphans and the world turns a blind eye – believing that Laos has become a free and democratic society.

When I was in Geneva last summer I reported this pressing issue before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Working Group on Indigenous Populations. For over 4 years, our organization has been requesting that the UNHCR recognize these serious crimes by the Lao government against humanity and provide protection for Hmong refugees - but nothing has been done. The Hmong refugee problem in Thailand and Laos has dramatically worsened over the past several years because the UNHCR has failed to recognize and to properly address the Hmong refugee crisis once and for all.

The sad truth is that my people do not have any representation before the United Nations, which puts our concerns at the very bottom of the totem pole. We basically have no rights at this point. Our homeland has been occupied by the state; our natural resources are being exploited without consultation. Whenever something goes wrong, the Hmong people are used as “scapegoats.” When we try to stand up for ourselves and defend what’s rightfully ours, we become labeled as “Bandits” and “terrorists.” The Hmong in Laos have no “due process of the law” when it comes to the Lao justice system, especially when the government is involved.

My brothers and sisters of the Indigenous, we had come here today not because we want to complain. We are here to inform the world about the numerous human rights violations being committed against our families and friends without a proper human rights protection. As a child, a wife, a mother, and a representative of the Hmong people, I swear that what I have said today is true. As I speak, my heart cries and my throat tightens. My people are helpless and can’t defend for themselves as the world turns its back on them. They are living in a state of “twilight” without an end in sight. What can I do to rescue them?

The United Nations, state agencies, members of the Permanent Forum and the Indigenous Representatives of the world, please listen to my plea and offer your assistance. I am helpless as I watch my people “suffer and die while their fates are being discussed in committees,” but if you listen to my words and help me speak, then you can help me save my people once and for all.

On behalf of the Hmong people, I would like to propose the following:

- 1) We ask the UNCHR to grant refugee status to the 32,000 Hmong Refugees in Wat Thakrabok, Thailand and the relocation to Ban Na Pho must be stopped.
- 2) We ask the United States Government, the United Nations, and Amnesty International to press the Lao Government to stop interfering with the Hmong in Sysomboun Special Zone. The Vietnamese troops must withdraw from Laos and the military bases must be eliminated for the safety of the Hmong and other indigenous people in Laos.
- 3) The Lao Government must develop a new mechanism of true leadership and to establish mutual agreement with the Hmong Freedom Fighters in lieu of using genocidal warfare to eliminate them.
- 4) We demand that the Hmong prisoners, including Vue Mai, Boua Chong Lee, Michael Vang, Ly Houa, and many others who are still in prison be released immediately without any reservations. This is because the prisoners mentioned above were never tried for their crimes. They remained “political prisoners of war.”

Thank you for your time, and best wishes to you all.

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