

Recommendations for Hmong Refugees from Laos Presently in Wat Thamkrabok, Thailand

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SEARAC and HND – both national nonprofit refugee organizations managed primarily by and for Americans with heritage in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam – 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 in Thailand, principally at Wat Thamkrabok. *Solutions available to these refugees should include third-country resettlement in the United States.* Similar Hmong refugees who have left Wat Thamkrabok and are now living on the margins of Thai society should also be the beneficiaries of a generous approach to refugee resettlement on the part of the U.S. Government.

Hmong support for the United States during the Vietnam War and resulting heavy casualties are well known. Following the War, hundreds of thousands of Hmong fled Laos for refugee camps in Thailand. Thousands later left the camps, including Ban Vinai, for fear of repatriation, and many found relative sanctuary in Wat Thamkrabok, a Buddhist temple in central Thailand. According to a recent *New York Times* article,² approximately 15,400 Hmong refugees from Laos now live at the temple grounds. Others have since left the temple and now live on the margins of Thai society, without access to Thai citizenship or the possibility of integration into that country. Many inside the temple grounds, as well as outside of them, still possess the documentation of refugee status they obtained in refugee camps.

¹ Ms. Yang has visited Wat Thamkrabok five times to investigate the situation of refugees there.

² "Thailand Says U.S. to Take Vietnam War Era Refugees," *New York Times*, July 21, 2003:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/21/politics/21JUST.html?tnemail1>

These refugees continue to exist in impoverished and vulnerable circumstances. Without access to Thai citizenship, they lack full rights in that country, are often victims of exploitation, and remain there only under the temporary permission of the Thai Government.

Since the end of the Vietnam War in Laos in 1975, these remaining Hmong refugees have been trapped in a country that has repeatedly restated its unwillingness to fully integrate them, and they urgently require a durable solution to their insecurity. For many, and particularly those with close relatives in the United States, resettlement in the U.S. would be the best option. For those who choose not to resettle, we should aim to provide a durable solution with support towards attaining self-sufficiency in Thailand.

Historically, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has offered resettlement as a means of protecting special groups – such as the Hmong of Laos and the Montagnards of Vietnam – who were and continue to be persecuted and to suffer hardship because of their pro-American stance. We recommend that this Administration continue to demonstrate America's loyalty to its suffering allies by offering the option of voluntary resettlement to Hmong still in need of a durable solution after nearly 30 years.

We also request your reply, to advise us as to what can be done to assist these people, many of whom are our family members.

We would be pleased to provide you with more specific information. And we stand ready to serve as a resource in your efforts to protect the human rights of vulnerable groups – through resettlement and other means – in Southeast Asia.

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