

THAILAND UPDATE**Thailand's Repatriation of Laotian Hmongs: Setting the Record Straight****Past policy and humanitarian record**

- As a result of Indochina conflict and between 1975-2003, Thailand repatriated some 600,000 displaced persons from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, for resettlement in 3rd countries, with almost 40,000 of remaining in Thailand and granted permanent immigration status and soon citizenship.
- Thailand, however, has continued to face the problem of millions of illegal immigrants of various groups including the Laotian Hmongs. Since 1984 Thailand has provided safe temporary shelter for over 150,000 displaced persons from neighboring countries, mostly from Myanmar. The Thai government and several NGOs have provided all basic necessities. Since 2007, Thailand has facilitated over 50,000 displaced persons from Myanmar for resettlement in 3rd countries, about 40,000 of whom in the US.
- Thailand's policy and actions all along have been guided by international human rights law and humanitarian principles.

Policy and record on the Laotian Hmongs

- After the resettlement of the 14,000 Laotian Hmongs from Tham Krabok to the US in 2003, Thailand continued to experience large numbers of additional Laotian Hmongs illegally entering the country, which Thailand considered illegal immigrants as the Indochina conflict situation in Laos ended some 30 years ago. Since 2007, Thailand had provided shelter for about 7,800 Laotian Hmongs in Petchaboon and another 158 in Nong Khai provinces. From 2008-2009, through cooperation with Laos, Thailand has facilitated voluntary returns of over 3,200 Laotian Hmongs, all of whom had been treated well in Laos as confirmed by various international organizations and diplomatic missions in Vientiane. Through out this time, Thailand had explored all possible solutions and sought cooperation from Laos and finally jointly agreed to the return the rest of Laotian Hmongs by 2009.

The latest repatriation: an orderly and safe return

- As agreed, Thailand and Laos managed an orderly and safe return of the remaining some 4,300 Laotian Hmongs in Petchaboon and 158 in Nong Khai on December 28, 2009. The Laotian government has given assurances regarding safety and its willingness to facilitate request to resettle some of the returnees within 30 days. Interested countries and organizations can contact the Laotian government directly on the resettlement issue and will be invited to visit the returnees in due course. We had therefore put in place a process that should benefit all sides concerned. Thailand's decision was not taken lightly and was carried out after thorough and serious consideration. The process provides a realistic and durable solution to this long standing issue.
- The *Vientiane Times* reported on January 11, 2009, that last week Reps. Eni Faleomavaega (D-American Samoa), Mike Honda (D-California), and Rep. Anh Joseph Cao (R-Louisiana) visited Ban Phalak, a location in Vientiane capital province where a number of the past and recent returnees have been settled. Rep. Faleomavaega said at a press conference on January 9, 2009, that "There's no indication of discrimination or harassment or mistreatment of the people in Phalak village." He also said "Right now there's a lot of misinformation. There have been accusations made that the Hmong people coming from Thailand are being executed by the government of Laos. Our purpose is not to come to criticize and pass judgment on something we do not have enough information on."
- The Thai government continues to closely follow up with the Laotian government regarding the assurances given by the Laotian government and safety and well-being of the Laotian Hmong returnees. Thailand stands ready to cooperate closely with the US and the international community in working with the Laotian government on this important matter.

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