

Thailand, Laos Crisis: Lao, Hmong Human Rights Forum To Discuss Plight of 8,000 Refugees

By Center for Public Policy Analysis

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The Lao Human Rights Council will host a Lao-Hmong human rights forum on the plight of over 8,000 Lao-Hmong political refugees and asylum seekers facing the threat of forced repatriation back to the communist regime in Laos that they fled.

The Lao Human Rights Council will host a Lao-Hmong human rights forum from 10:00 A.M.-2:00 P.M., Saturday, September 29, 2007, at 2198 South Memorial Drive, Appleton, WI, on the plight of over 8,000 Lao-Hmong political refugees facing the threat of forced repatriation back to Laos. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt, Nobel Prize Nominated Photojournalist, writer and Southeast Asia scholar.

Dr. Merritt is the author of the book "Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans and the Secret Wars for Laos" (Indiana University Press). She will discuss her book as well as current human rights and refugee issues in Thailand and Laos (see <http://tragicmountains.org>).

Dr. Merritt will address issues regarding the plight of some 8,000 Lao and Hmong refugees at Nong Khai and Ban Huay Nam Khao and will discuss a recent U.S. Senate letter by U.S. Senators Russell Feingold (D-WI), Herb Kohl (D-WI), Norm Coleman (R-MN), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Diane Feinstein (D-CA) to the U.S. Secretary of State about the refugee crisis.

"We are honored to have Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt speak to the Laotian and Hmong community regarding the current emergency human rights and refugee crisis in Thailand and Laos, especially the fate of the over 8,000 Hmong refugees at Huay Nam Khao, Petchabun, and Nong Khai, Thailand," stated Vaughn Vang, Director of the Lao Human Rights Council. "Lao and Hmong from across the United States are especially concerned about the ongoing killing and persecution of unarmed Hmong civilians in Laos by the military forces of Laos and Vietnam," Vang said.

Dr. Hamilton-Merritt will also seek to discuss the recent arrest of Hakit Yang and two other Hmong-American citizens, and their Lao-Hmong guide, Pao Vang, in Laos on August 25, 2007. She is also slated to discuss Amnesty International's 28 page report, issued in March of 2007, regarding the killing and mass starvation of Hmong civilians and refugees in Laos.

Hakit Yang and two Hmong-American citizens from St. Paul, Minnesota were arrested in Laos on August 25, 2007, by Lao military and security forces in Xieng Khouang Province, Laos. They were moved to Phonthong Prison, in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, where they were jailed for five days before being moved to an unknown location.

"I am deeply concerned about the plight of the Hmong refugees in Ban Huay Nam Khao and Nong Khai, Thailand as well as the three Hmong-Americans who have disappeared in Laos," stated Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt. "We will discuss these and other issues, including the recent arrest and disappearance of three Hmong-Americans in Laos, at the Lao-Hmong human rights forum in Wisconsin," concluded Dr. Hamilton-Merritt.

Dr. Hamilton-Merritt has been repeatedly invited to testify in the U.S. Congress, both House and Senate,

on human rights and refugee issues regarding the plight of the Lao and Hmong people. At a recent session of the U.S. Congressional Forum on Laos, held earlier this year in Washington, D.C., she discussed the release of Amnesty International's human rights report on the dire plight of the Hmong people in Laos noting along with T. Kumar, Amnesty's advocacy director, that the Lao regime was using food as a weapon in its attack against the Laotian and Hmong people.

"The recent Senate letter to U.S. Secretary of State of State Rice by Senators Feingold, Kohl and others is an important additional step in helping to stop the forced repatriation and addressing the current refugee crisis facing over 8,000 Lao-Hmong political refugees and asylum seekers at Huay Nam Khao and Nong Khai, Thailand," Dr. Hamilton-Merritt concluded.

The event is cosponsored by the Lao Human Rights Council, the Center for Public Policy Analysis and a coalition of Lao and Hmong community leaders and organizations.

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The Center for Public Policy Analysis is a Washington, D.C.-based think tank and research organization focusing on foreign and national security policy issues.

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