

TESTIMONY

on

**REPATRIATION OF
HMONG REFUGEES FROM
THAILAND TO LAOS**

by Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt

before

**The House of Representatives
Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for holding these Hearings.

Allow me to introduce myself briefly. I am a writer, historian, and journalist who covered the Vietnam War in the 1960s. I also reported from Laos--the secret war in the critical Lao theatre of the Vietnam War. I am also the author of a book published recently by Indiana University Press entitled "Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, The Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992." This book reflects 14 years of my research and writing. It is the story of how the Hmong people, a distinctive ethnic minority in Laos, fought first with the French against the Japanese and the Viet Minh, and then with the Americans against the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao communists.

I want to emphasize that I am not an employee of a Non-Government Organization receiving money for Hmong refugee resettlement work, nor am I a lobbyist--paid or unpaid--for the current government of Laos, nor am I associated with any organization attempting to do business in Laos.

I have worked among the Hmong living in the U.S., France, and Asia for many years. I think that it is important to focus on some aspects of the character and values of these people whose history is thousands of years old.

Hmong traditional society emphasizes the importance of the family--which is understood not as a nuclear family but what we would call an extended family -- and the clan. Hmong society is organized around the clan, with clan leaders making major decisions after much consultation.

In Hmong culture, honor and truthfulness are highly revered traits. In Hmong culture, if one lies, one can lose face for a lifetime. Losing face results in being unable to obtain a "good" spouse, never being invited to homes or celebrations, and being ignored in clan decision-making.

The current position in some circles to treat Hmong reports of coerced repatriation and persecution and abuses by the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the "LPDR," as "lies," but to believe the denials of abuses as "truth" is

untenable, illogical, and sanctions continuation of abuses. So far, there have been no penalties by the U.S. against the LPDR for its human rights violations nor for its persecution of its Hmong minority returnees.

I might also add that the charges of Hmong untruthfulness and observational unreliability seems somewhat ironic since for 13 years the U.S. relied on their accurate, critical observations and intelligence gathering in conducting the Lao phase of the military operations during the Vietnam War.

Mr. Chairman, a great irony here is that the Hmong, whom the U.S. counted on for years as its truthful and reliable observers, now report that they are being forcibly repatriated to this dark and ruthless regime, providing significant and credible documentation to substantiate their experiences. Yet some U.S. officials in the U.S. Department of State incredibly have concluded over the past several years that the victims--the Hmong--are lying about coerced repatriation, abuses, and persecution against Hmong returnees in Laos AND that the abusers are telling the truth.

In October 1991 I testified before the House Subcommittee on International Law, Immigration, and Refugees. At that time, I warned Congress that voluntary or involuntary repatriation of Hmong political refugees and asylum seekers under the Tripartite Agreement (signed by the U.N. and the Governments of Thailand and Laos) from Thailand to the Lao People's Democratic Republic was plagued with problems. At that time--two and one-half years ago--I strongly recommended a moratorium on Hmong repatriation to Laos and an independent and objective investigation into the rightness of such a policy.

A continuance of this ill-conceived and inadequately administered repatriation policy calls into question the Clinton Administration's avowed commitment to "reinforcing democracy and protecting human rights [as] a pillar of our foreign policy."

The present U.S.-supported policy of coerced Hmong repatriation is also in stark contrast to the Administration's human rights policy toward China. This duplicity in a neighboring country cannot have gone unnoticed by China. The question is: did the U.S. notice?

HUMAN RIGHTS IN LAOS

It's not as if the Department of State did not know what was going on in Laos. I refer to the State Department's current Country Report on Human Rights Practices.

This report is damning. It concludes that the ruling Lao communist party restricts freedom of speech, press, and assembly, denies the rights of privacy and of citizens to change their government, and monitors international mail and phone calls, Lao society, and foreigners. Arrests are made on unsupported charges: accusers' identities are withheld. Trials are not public. Prisoners--many political prisoners--labor for both state and private enterprises. Human rights groups are not allowed. There is no freedom to travel without government permission. Suggesting a multi-party political system brings long imprisonment. Importantly for the Hmong, minority tribes have virtually no voice in decisions affecting their lands.

I quote from this report.

- * "The Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) is a Communist one-party state."
- * "The Ministry of the Interior (MOI) remains the main instrument of state control. MOI police monitor Lao society and foreign nationals in Laos, and the LPRP (Lao People's Revolutionary Party) uses informants in workplaces and residential communities."
- * "Freedom of speech, assembly, and religion are restricted. . ."
- * Academic freedom remains tightly controlled. Laos academicians are sometimes denied permission to travel abroad for conferences or training. The Government also restricts and monitors the activities of Western scholars doing research in Laos.
- * "Those accused of hostility to the regime are subject to arrest and confinement for long periods of time. Three former government (LPDR) officials continued to serve their 14-year sentences for advocating

a multiparty system and criticizing restrictions on political liberties."

- * "People may be arrested on unsupported accusations and without being informed of the charges or of the accusers' identities."
- * "In 1992, the MOI began making late-night inspections of households to insure that all those in the house were registered with the police."
- * "The Government also began reinstating worker's committees among Lao employees of embassies and international organizations [which undoubtedly includes the NGOs and UNHCR that are tasked to monitor returnees]."
- * "Under the new land decree, the "national community" owns all land. Private "ownership" is in the form of land use certificates."
- * ". . . monitoring of international mail and telephone calls continues."

Here I will read to you from a letter dated April 3, 1994, written by a Hmong man interviewed by Marc Kaufman, which appeared in his Philadelphia Inquirer article "Casualties of Peace" on February 27, 1994, about Hmong repatriation. This Hmong wrote to his uncle in the U.S. as follows:

"I would like to inform you that on March 30, 1994, the article by Mr. Marc Kaufman arrived at P.O. Box. . . , Vientiane, Laos. . . . He [Kaufman] was the reporter who interviewed me in January 1994. The article included my picture and statements.

"However, I did not see the article because some authorities checked and took over the article. The authorities passed the article to the Lao Government and the UNHCR for translation and investigation. Therefore, I would like you [my uncle] and Mr. Kaufman to be aware that my life is in trouble and in danger now because the authorities are

watching me closely. So I am concerned about my safety in Laos.

"I want you [uncle] to call Mr. Kaufman to recall his article back if he can. He must not send any more articles to the P.O. Box. . . . I want you to ask Mr. Kaufman to help me when I get in trouble. Mr. Kaufman should help me when I have problems because of the article."

Continuing to quote from the DOS report:

- * "The Government reacts harshly to expressions of political dissent."
- * "The Government retains the right to require citizens to obtain official permission for internal travel, and foreign residents in Vientiane must obtain permission to travel outside the prefecture. Similar restrictions apply to foreign tourists except when their travel in Laos is with an officially sanctioned tour group."

And, Mr. Chairman, of particular note to us here today:

- * "There are no domestic human rights groups. Any organization wishing to investigate and publicly criticize the Government's human rights policies would face serious obstacles, if it were to be permitted to operate at all."

I repeat, this reflects the current State Department analysis of conditions in Laos.

As recently as last month, on March 3, 1994, those working in the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, Laos, prepared a four-page document entitled "The Repatriate Life." The author of the document states "NGO's working with returnees may not post staff outside of Vientiane. Similarly, all UNHCR staff live in Vientiane."

It is important to note that travel in Laos requires government approval.

"The Repatriate Life" report, while ostensibly showing there is no problem with the repatriation efforts, admits

that the LPDR has denied the U.S. Embassy and UNHCR attempts to visit returnees' resettlement villages in Xiang Khouang Province, the area of the Hmong homeland, where there are returnees. Where Hmong refugee resettlement areas were visited, the villages--some would call "Potemkin refugee villages"--the repatriation resettlement sites for returnees to Laos appear to be surrounded by LPDR military. And whenever visits were permitted, they were carefully managed and government interpreters were provided.

This is not proper monitoring. Proper monitoring must have unannounced on-site field visits by credible independent investigators, using non-biased interpreters with the U.S. Government standing firmly behind a non-retaliation policy for the persons interviewed.

It is most troublesome to learn that while the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane is unable to properly monitor returnees, it is willing to accept as truth this limited LPDR directed "evidence" to conclude that "Consistent with reporting from UNHCR and its implementing NGOs in Laos, repatriates from the camps in Thailand tell the embassy they are not persecuted, harassed, or treated worse than their neighbors."

Since unannounced, on-site, objective, non-LPDR-approved monitoring of returnees is not possible and since it is unlikely that credible independent investigators, using non-biased interpreters will be permitted, and since the U.S. Government is probably not in a position to protect Hmong returnees who give information about retaliation by LPRD authorities, repatriation of Hmong to Laos should be stopped immediately.

HMONG ALLIES

Let me remind us all that the Hmong were staunch U.S. and Thai allies in the critical Lao secret theatre of the Vietnam War. It was the Hmong, or "Meo," with U.S. backing, who kept the North Vietnamese Army at bay in northern Laos, gathered critical intelligence, rescued downed aircrews, and defended navigational sites in Laos that allowed precise, all-weather U.S. air strikes against enemy targets in northern Laos and North Vietnam. The Hmong did this at great loss of life and property.

When the communists came to power in Laos in 1975, they launched a campaign to eliminate the old order,

including the minorities allied with the U.S., and the royal Lao family. The extermination of the beloved King and the royal Lao family in "seminar" camps is a well-hidden story.

Interior Laos became a gulag where opponents were tortured, starved, denied proper medical treatment, and forced to perform slave labor. The communist Lao regime was so ruthless in its "ethnic" and "political cleansing" that from 1975 to the present over ten percent of the population fled. Another estimated ten percent were killed or died from abuse.

Tens of thousands of Hmong escaped Laos to Thailand, from where many were resettled in the West. Some 135,000 now live in the U.S. Many are now U.S. citizens. Many still have family in Laos and in refugee camps in Thailand. Some 35,000 to 50,000--maybe more--remain in Thailand, afraid to return to Laos because they fear persecution and retribution. Yet some of these Hmong political refugees and asylum seekers are being involuntarily repatriated to communist Laos, their sworn enemy, in a program using U.S. tax dollars--some paid by Hmong Americans.

Their fear is not without justification. Laos remains a repressive and totalitarian state. The current Marxist-Leninist regime is suspicious of those--particularly ethnic Hmong--who fled the communist regime. Returnees report abuses and status below that of those who did not flee.

Today, in 1994, hostilities between the communist government and the minorities continue as does the "ethnic cleansing." Some Hmong who have returned to Laos have **re-escaped** to describe the brutalities, including death, inflicted upon returnees by Lao authorities. Other Hmong who returned have disappeared.

There is the disappearance of Vue Mai, a former Hmong soldier during the time of the American involvement in Laos. In 1991 he was recruited from a refugee camp in Thailand by U.S. Embassy staff in Bangkok to promote Hmong repatriation. With State Department blessing, he travelled to the U.S., urging Hmong to return to Laos and seeking to quell obvious fears and concerns. Vue Mai disappeared on September 11, 1993 in Vientiane. According to the U.S. Committee on Refugees, he was arrested by Lao security forces.

UNHCR representative Vernon Blatter explained to the Hmong in the U.S. in early January of this year that the disappearance in Laos of Hmong leader Vue Mai was not the UNHCR's responsibility--although Vue Mai had agreed to lead Hmong repatriation to Laos under the monitoring and auspices of the UNHCR. The UNHCR representative said: "UNHCR has no power to investigate and to monitor Vue Mai and other problems of Hmong returnees in Laos. So the Hmong people in America must be responsible for their family members in Thailand and returnees in Laos."

Look at the photograph of a Hmong man on the cover of the Philadelphia Inquirer Sunday Magazine, February 27, 1994. Here is one of Vue Mai's relatives who volunteered to return under the Vue Mai/U.S. Embassy plan before it was understood to be a deceitful plan and before Vue Mai disappeared. Here is a man--a former soldier associated with the U.S. in its secret war in Laos--and he is crying in fear that the U.S. supported repatriation of him and his family will take place soon.

While many Hmong want to return to their Lao homelands, the fact is that they cannot return safely because the current Lao government remains perhaps the most closed, secretive, and repressive in the region.

REPATRIATION OF HMONG FORMER ALLIES

Forced repatriation of Hmong political refugees and asylum seekers from Thailand to Laos has a long and documented history. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights highlighted these abuses in its 1989 report "Forced Back and Forgotten: The Human Rights of Laotian Asylum Seekers in Thailand". So has the Lao Human Rights Council and others interested in human rights violations against Hmong and Lao in both Thailand and Laos.

In 1989 the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights reported "Screening [to determine refugee status] is conducted in a haphazard manner with little concern for legal norms. Extortion and bribery are widespread. And despite an observatory role, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, in Thailand has proven incapable of ensuring a reliable and fair procedure."

The UNHCR and the State Department insist that the LPDR does not know if a returnee is a voluntary repatriate

or a forced returnee. This secrecy, they argue, protects returnees from reprisals. The Hmong insist that this is not true: that the LPDR knows the status of each returnee and whether he had any associations with the Americans, had any anti-LPDR activities, or had anti-LPDR relatives.

For Tragic Mountains, I interviewed David Merkel, a member of Congressman Bill McCollum's staff, who went to Thailand in 1992 on a fact-finding mission to investigate reports of forced repatriation. He was told by U.S. officials that the LPDR did not know whether a returnee was voluntary or involuntary. He discovered, however, that "They were lying about this. There is a code in the series of numbers and letters that accompanies each name that signals who are 'screened out' and being forced back and who are volunteers."

Little has changed. Since it is obvious that neither short-term nor long-term security of Hmong returnees can be adequately monitored or ensured by the UNHCR and U.S. State Department officials, the Hmong refugee plight in Thailand is a humanitarian emergency.

Individuals with long familiarity with the details of the policies, personnel, and problems in the Hmong refugee and repatriation issues in Thailand have concluded that among the most serious shortcomings of the U.S. Embassy Refugee Section in Thailand (and potentially embarrassing to the Clinton administration) is its apparent policy of not talking directly to refugees nor taking seriously the grave concerns of Hmong refugees in Thailand--particularly at Na Pho Camp. Na Pho is a repatriation camp from where some 12,000 Hmong will be repatriated, voluntarily and involuntarily, back to Laos. These Hmong have no opportunity for family reunification or resettlement in a third country. They are doomed for repatriation to Laos.

My research shows that virtually all information about the conditions in Na Pho camp reported to the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok comes through either the UNHCR or the Thai Ministry of the Interior, MOI, which runs and guards the camps. This is like asking the "foxes" to report on the conditions of the "chickens." As a result the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok has little accurate knowledge of the Hmong situation in Na Pho camp or of Hmong experiences in the screening process, or of camp life and the denial of life's essentials--food, water, and charcoal--to scare and threaten refugees to volunteer to return, or of their current feelings about repatriation to Laos after the

disappearance of Vue Mai, or of the number of people in this camp who fear persecution if they are returned to Laos, or of the desire of many in this camp to reunite with their families in the West.

It is important for qualified, informed people with ethnic and historical knowledge of the Hmong to talk directly to the refugees in Na Pho camp and not just rely on officials of the Thai Ministry of Interior and of the UNHCR. Why is this not the case?

It is important to understand that ethnic ignorance of the Hmong by U.S. policy-makers helped create this problem before us today.

One Hmong, a former soldier twice gravely wounded in the fighting in Laos, whose parents, two brothers, and two sisters were killed by communist soldiers, wrote his Wisconsin Congressman, Steve Gunderson, about the forced repatriation of his sister on Thanksgiving 1993 from Na Pho camp in northern Thailand to Laos.

"I have just received a telephone call from my sister--and brother-in-law-- [a former soldier]. They said that the U.N. used Thai soldiers to gun point at every family and told them to sign a volunteer repatriation. While I was speaking to my sister on the phone, a [Thai] soldier took the phone and spoke to me. He said that they only do what the U.N. wanted them to do and that my sister will have to be repatriated with force. During the conversation, my sister and brother were crying and yelling for help."

The U.S. Embassy in Bangkok responded to Gunderson's query, admitting that this Hmong's family was part of a group of 382 to be repatriated but insisted it was voluntary and claimed: "We have confirmed that the allegation made of Thai soldiers coercing the Hmong to repatriate at gunpoint is simply untrue."

There are hundreds--maybe thousands--of cases like this of Hmong coerced into returning to Laos through a repatriation program in which corrupt and flawed "screening" process "screens out" many who are, in fact, political refugees and asylum seekers.

Should we try to rescue this woman and her family who were forcibly repatriated last Thanksgiving? Should we rescue the Hmong man who appeared in the Philadelphia

Inquirer article who now feels his life is in danger as a result of receiving a copy of that article through the international mail and having it confiscated by the Lao authorities? What about all those other Hmong who have been forcibly repatriated? Isn't the answer obvious?

Corruption and unfairness in the screening process to determine refugee status in Thailand remains widespread. Over the past three years, an impressive number of first-hand and eye-witness testimonies document this. While this documentation is substantial, the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok and the State Department's Bureau of Refugee Programs in Washington insist that there is no credible evidence that Hmong are being involuntarily returned to Laos or that Hmong returnees face persecution and abuse at the hands of their enemies, the communist Lao People's Democratic Republic authorities.

Only this past February, Marc Kaufman, in an investigative article for the Philadelphia Inquirer, documented ongoing involuntary repatriation of Hmong to Laos and described an entrenched and deceitful campaign by U.S. State Department and UNHCR personnel to discredit Hmong American leaders and Hmong refugees--and to manipulate Congressional investigations.

All this, plus the documented executions and atrocities by Lao authorities against Hmong forcibly returned in the 1980s by the Thais, and the residual animosity toward the Hmong based on the Vietnam War, are loud warnings that the Hmong fear of persecution is real and that objective, effective, and frequent monitoring of Hmong returned to Laos is probably not possible.

It is no wonder, then, that since this U.S.-backed repatriation program began, some 15,000 Hmong have escaped the camps in Thailand. This figure may be much higher. Some 12,000 Hmong have found sanctuary in Wat Tamkrabok, a Buddhist temple north of Bangkok. Another 12,000 Hmong are held in Na Pho Camp--the last stop before repatriation to Laos. Many of these insist that they will be forced back against their will. Many of these have family members in the U.S., some of whom are U.S. citizens.

This desperation is most evident among those in Na Pho camp in northern Thailand. This is a repatriation camp. Those held here know that they are to be repatriated to Laos. This fear and desperation shows in audio tapes,

letters, phone calls from these refugees to their American relatives, pleading for help to stop their repatriation.

Some capitalize on this desperation by extortion--as in the infamous case of the 305 asylum seekers whose U.S. relatives, last summer, paid some \$200,000 to Thai officials so that their kinsman would not be returned to Laos, but could, instead, be united with their families in the U.S. Hmong Americans paid the ransom for their relatives, but instead of facing the prospect of family reunification, they learned, helplessly, that they had been shipped to Na Pho camp from where many were returned to Laos--their greatest fear.

Logic would say that if the Hmong in Na Pho refugee camp had willingly signed up and were eager to return to Laos, why, then, is there a need for increased security at Na Pho? Why the installation of a high-security area inside the camp with metal fencing? Why are outsiders unwelcome at this camp? Why are so many cassette tapes and letters coming from those in Na Pho reporting that they are being forced to return to Laos?

Refugees in the camp who resist or refuse to put their thumb print or signatures on a form, indicating consent to be returned to Laos, are punished. Some are jailed in the high security facility and put on greatly reduced rations. Others are coerced into "volunteering" to return to Laos through threats of dramatically reduced food, water, and charcoal rations.

Today we are discussing whether it is good policy to return the Hmong to one of the most repressive, secret and brutal regimes in the area--the Lao People's Democratic Republic--a regime that has vowed "to wipe them out."

I think this is not a good policy.

Congressman Toby Roth, in whose Wisconsin district many Hmong live, called for these Hearings, noting that many Hmong "fought against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. They rendered a great service not only to the United States, but to Thailand as well. To simply force these people back into communist Laos is to sentence them to certain retribution for their commitment to defeating communism."

MORATORIUM ON ALL HMONG REPATRIATION TO LAOS

Mr. Chairman, I now want to spend a few moments on the need to call an immediate moratorium on all repatriation of Hmong to Laos.

Hmong political refugees and asylum seekers fled to Thailand to escape the harsh regime in Laos. These disenfranchised people who face coerced repatriation to Laos are former allies of the U.S. in the secret theatre of the Vietnam War. They have suffered "ethnic" and "political" cleansing by the Lao People's Democratic Republic primarily as a result of their long fight against the communist Lao and Vietnamese in Laos and their close and important relationship with the U.S. during the Vietnam War.

Repatriating Hmong political refugees and asylum seekers to a hostile environment in the LPDR is most troublesome--and certainly viewed by most returnees as unusually cruel. In spite of assurances by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Refugee Programs, the U.S. Embassies in Laos and Thailand, and NGOs, independent, objective, third-party monitoring of Hmong returnees by qualified human rights personnel cannot take place. This is verified by the U.S. State Department's own current Country Report on Human Rights Practices and by "The Repatriate Life" report written by personnel in the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane that I described before in my testimony.

I believe that any reasonable person would have to conclude that coercing political refugees and asylum seekers who have fought against this regime for years back to this totalitarian environment, to a government which has vowed to "wipe out" those who had allied themselves with the U.S. in the fight against the communist forces now in power, cannot in any way be justified. It is against all concepts of justice and human rights and should be stopped immediately.

In February 1994, Congresswoman Pat Schroeder wrote a letter to the King of Thailand, asking him to intercede on behalf of these Hmong and to stop repatriation. She pointed out that the 1991 Tripartite Agreement under which the Hmong are being repatriated has been invalidated because of "the ongoing bloody civil war in Laos . . . , well documented cases of mandatory (forced) repatriations of Hmong to Laos . . . gross violations of human rights by

the Lao government which has closed Laos to all monitoring by independent human rights organizations."

I want to point out that also last month, in a bipartisan letter to His Majesty King Bhumipol Adulyadej of Thailand, 16 members of this House asked the King to intercede on behalf of the Hmong refugees in Na Pho refugee camp, at Wat Thamkrabok and elsewhere in Thailand. They also suggested a four-year moratorium on Hmong repatriation. Let me read from this letter, spearheaded by Congressman Duncan Hunter, dated March 1, 1994, to His Majesty:

"It now appears, from a number of recent events, that the Tripartite Agreement has been nullified. Hmong are being unfairly screened out and denied refugee status. . . If the UNHCR and the United States Department of State cannot guarantee the safety of such a high profile Hmong leader (as Vue Mai) in Laos, how will the security of less prominent Hmong be ensured? The Lao government continues to bar international human rights organizations from visiting or monitoring the country. Moreover, U.S. Embassy officials in Laos are not permitted in some provinces where Hmong have been repatriated because of the ongoing civil war."

This U.S. policy to support coerced repatriation of our former Hmong allies seems to be in violation of principles sacred to most Americans. Yet, today, their tax dollars are being used for this purpose.

I strongly recommend an IMMEDIATE four-year MORATORIUM on all Hmong repatriation from Thailand to Laos.

After a MORATORIUM is in place, Mr. Chairman, I recommend that the Congress request a Presidential Determination authorizing \$10 million from the Emergency Refugee Migration and Assistance, ERMA, fund [under Section 2(c) (1) of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, as amended, 22 U.S.C. § 2601(e)(1)], to send emergency humanitarian assistance to allow the Hmong refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand to remain there until they can be resettled in third countries over several years. We must help save the Hmong refugees and asylum seekers at Na Pho repatriation camp, at Wat Thamkrabok, and others in hiding or in jeopardy in other camps in Thailand from being sent back to Laos against their will.

The U.S. Government's current interest in Laos focuses on seeking a resolution of the American POW-MIA issue and on curtailing the trafficking of drugs, one of the main sources of hard currency for the LPDR. The U.S. official position seems to be accommodation of the current regime in order to effect gains on these two issues. There is little U.S. pressure--or even interest by some parts of the State Department--to push for the elimination of human and civil rights abuses or to push for a multi-party political systems in Laos. You can see why the professionals in the State Department, who never had a working relationship with the Hmong like the Defense Department and CIA did, seem little concerned. That, however, does not justify State's policy, let alone spending our money doing it. Hmong continue to suffer as a result of their previous association with the U.S. Like the Kurds in Iraq, the Hmong, another minority, have been abandoned and sacrificed by the U.S. to supposed greater geo-political considerations.

Congress might follow the suggestion of several of your House colleagues who recently wrote to Congressman David Obey asking that the funding of Hmong repatriation stop.

"It is our understanding that taxpayers' money--\$1.5-\$2 million--may again be appropriated in Fiscal Year 1995 to send Hmong refugees and asylum seekers from Thailand back to the repressive communist government in Laos."

These members asked that

"this funding be transferred to the appropriate account and be specifically used to provide emergency humanitarian support for the Hmong--in Ban Napho refugee camp, Wat Tham Krabok and elsewhere in Thailand--until they can be safely resettled in third countries (like France, Canada, and Australia) in three or four years."

Hmong value greatly the family and their expansive extended clan families. It is quite clear that many of those trapped in Thailand who face repatriation to Laos have relatives in the U.S. (and Canada, France and Australia). I recommend that these Hmong families be entitled to family reunification directly from Thailand. I should point out that some of those facing repatriation

have no family remaining in Laos; their families have all resettled in the West.

There are those who have romantic notions--for whatever reasons--toward the current regime in Laos. But historically, I should also point out that, in general, refugees don't lie. We have learned--or should have learned--that when there are large groups of people coming out of a country claiming persecution, whether it is proven immediately or years later after a number of people are dead, it usually bears out that they have been telling the truth--that persecution has taken place.

Aryeh Neier, until quite recently Vice Chairman of Americas Watch, an international human rights organization established by the Helsinki Accords, said: "Trying to monitor human rights in closed countries is extremely difficult. One has to start with the assumption that one can never do anything about human rights violations until the facts have been assembled and then published. Publishing human rights violations is the enemy of abuses. Silence is acquiescence. The worst abuses take place when no one is paying attention."

In addition to the Vietnam War, there is another lesson to be learned here from American history. It is the lesson of how for years we treated our own Native American Indians. In many respects, the Hmong from the mountains are as different from the Lao people of the lowlands as Native American Indians were from the white man. We should remember that for years we treated Native Americans as second-class citizens and cared little about their extermination, as we resettled them to places where they did not want to live. The Lao are doing the same with the Hmong and we should not be a party to it.

Listen to this Hmong's words about life in Laos, recorded on cassette tape on February 8, 1994 and sent to a Hmong American.

"Since 1975, after you left, I have returned to Phonsavan and many things have happened. The communist put so much pressure on our people. 11 members of my family had died from food poisoning . . . We are so hungry. . . . The communist discriminate, prejudice against the Hmong, and especially the lowland Lao hate the Hmong. They took away our land, our rice fields, even a piece of land as large as a our palm, they took. They said that the Hmong did not and do not possess anything in the

lowland. The Hmong are mountain dwellers so they must go back to the mountains where you belong. Now they chase the Hmong out of the lowland and even in the mountain where we live they do not let us live."

"There are many things I want to tell you. . . . I don't cry but tears are running on my eyes. We are like the snake that is half dead. We don't know what to do in order to get up and go, because we do not have anything. We want to walk but there are too many berry bushes. We are like little birds that have no wings to fly. We are waiting . . . like grass waits for the rain."

Let us open our minds. Let us open our hearts and feel the pain of these people--once honorable and important allies. We owe them special support.

The Hmong suffered--and continue to suffer--greatly for their costly alliance with the U.S. and Thailand. The vestiges of that worthy and proud people now huddle in refugee camps and other sanctuaries in Thailand, terrified of forced repatriation to their former enemies who have publicly sworn to punish them. They are now caught in a minor backwater of the current flow of global politics and economics in Southeast Asia. Surely, the great nations of the U.S. and Thailand are capable of this last compassion for those who gave so much of themselves in the cause of freedom.

Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee, a final plea. I have known the Hmong well for almost 20 years. I have heard their pleas for so many years. I know them to be truthful people. I know that they have been unjustly abused for some time.

Please give your special, individual attention to follow up on what you have heard here today. Do not let the Hmong desperate present plight be brushed away with "we are on top of this situation." That is merely "business as usual" in the complex process of administrative procedures while more Hmong suffer. There is more to this issue than has been discussed here today. Please continue your inquiries to delve deeper into this shameful matter.

I thank you and particularly the Hmong thank you for your attention and interest, and for your willingness to hold this hearing over the objections of the Department of State.