

LAO HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, INC., U.S.A.

Positions of the Organization

2006

Background

The Lao Human Rights Council, Inc., U.S.A. (LHRC) was formed as a non-profit corporation under section 501-C3 in 1992 in the State of Wisconsin. The basic organizational goals of the Council set forth at that time were:

To protect and free the Hmong, Laotian, and Indochinese refugees from repatriation and forcible return from Thailand to their country and other countries which would threaten their lives, liberty, and freedom and prevent and stop forced repatriation of refugees.

To bring to the attention of the international community and the United Nations the desire of the Hmong, Laotian, and Indochinese refugees to seek asylum and resettlement because of political, social, and racial persecution against their will, lives, and liberty.

To bring to the attention of the U.S. Congress and Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, the U.S. Government, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and other governments around the world, through direct communications and education, the human rights violations against the Hmong people and the Indochinese refugees in Southeast Asia.

To aid persons from Indochina to secure political asylum, resettlement, and family reunion in the United States and the Free World.

To request the United States, the First World, and the Free World to accept more Indochinese refugees for resettlement in their countries.

To request the international community, private and public organizations, and the United Nations, to provide better facilities, housing, standard of living, food, water, clothing, medical care, health protection, human basic needs, and other necessities of life, for the Hmong and Laotian refugees who are in Thailand, Southeast Asia and other parts of the world.

To pursue objectives on humanitarian principles for Hmong and Laotian refugees who are in Thailand and Southeast Asia.

To call direct attention, to the United Nations and International Communities, to the need to set up an Anti-piracy program and a human rights program along the Mekong River border between Laos and Thailand. These programs are for the purpose of protecting and saving lives, liberty, rights, and freedom of political asylum of the Hmong refugees who cross from Laos to Thailand for survival and democracy.

To form a human rights foundation in order to promote human rights principles

and to provide humanitarian aid to the Laotian and Hmong refugees who are in Thailand, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere in the world.

To call attention to the need for an Orderly Departure Program, and to request the United States Government, the United Nations, and the International Community, to set up an Orderly Departure Program to allow Hmong and Laotians who want to, to leave directly from Laos to reunite with their families in the United States and the Free World.

To promote human rights and the dignity of man as embodied in the Articles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To respect and promote human rights, liberty, life, freedom, territorial and political asylum of Hmong and Laotian people. Primary objectives are to monitor and report on human rights practices and violations. These can be done by encouraging the International Community to protest the governments that are responsible for the violations. In addition, to prevent human rights violations against the Laotian and Hmong people in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the world.

To promote and achieve the goals of political asylum, territorial asylum and refugee resettlement of the Hmong people in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of December 10, 1948; the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of July 28, 1951; and the Declaration on Territorial Asylum of the United Nations of December 14, 1967.

To promote and advocate human rights and civil rights for the Laotian people, especially the Hmong ethnic group.

To study and report on the problems of human rights, civil rights, political, social and economic conditions of the nation of Laos.

To advocate, educate and appeal changes in the United States foreign policy, international law, and policies of other nations in the world, toward the Laotian refugees in Southeast Asia.

To stop forced repatriation of refugees from Thailand to Laos.

To engage in, aid and advocate refugee resettlement and political asylum from Southeast Asia to the United States and Third Countries.

To engage in and advocate non-partisan research, study and analysis, for the benefit of the general public of questions affecting the public interest in both the public and private sectors, to publish reports, newsletters and studies and to prepare educational materials; and to conduct educational activities, including forums, lectures, meetings, conferences, debates, and other like activities in support of the general purposes of the organization.

To serve as an educational and information bureau regarding Hmong and Laotian Americans and refugee issues and human rights and civil rights purposes.

To act as a humanitarian and charitable corporation in order to assist refugees from Laos in coping with their political asylum, refugee resettlement, family reunion, nutritional, educational, social, economic and vocational purposes. To act as sponsor or co-sponsor for Laotian refugee resettlement, including their social welfare, human services, and family support.

To assist other charitable, educational and social welfare organizations in the

conducting of similar activities within the purpose of the Corporation. To raise, accept, and request contributions, donations, funds and financial assistance from private and public agencies for the purpose of the Corporation.

These goals continue to provide the basic framework of LHRC today. The challenges facing the ethnic Hmong people in the world continue to be real. The Hmong have made great strides in assimilating into various cultures throughout the world, but there are still Hmong living in Thailand and Laos that suffer deprivation, despair, fear, and hostility at the hands of governments and citizens of the countries in which they live.

Over the years from 1992 to 2006, the purposes and directions of the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc. U.S.A. have been modified and updated. The purpose of this position paper is to clearly set forth the goals of the LHRC as they are now.

The strong desire of the LHRC is to act as a catalyst of change in this sad state of affairs. This desire is not to bring about the creation of a new nation in which Hmong people can live. It is not to change the existing governments of Laos, Thailand, or other countries. It is to help the Hmong who live in these various countries as they quest for peace, for reconciliation, and for safety and security. The Hmong who now live in fear in the mountains of Laos and Thailand can become productive members of the societies of these countries, taking their place alongside of the citizens of these countries. They can learn the cultures of Laos and Thailand just as the people and the governments of these countries can learn the culture of the Hmong. They can become valued citizens of both Laos and Thailand as those nations work hard to become a part of the new economic culture of the world. Yes, they will want to value and preserve their own customs and traditions, just as the Lao and Thai do as well. The LHRC sees clearly that there is not an inconsistency in this desire at all. Thousands and thousands of Hmong have sought refuge in the United States and other countries, bringing with them the rich cultural heritage of their past and have found that they can embrace the ways of the nations that have chosen to host them without losing their identity and their own traditions.

The Vision

With the stated organizational goals of the LHRC in mind, this position paper seeks to provide a clear look at the beliefs of this organization and to demonstrate some of the ways in which a Hmong politically neutral organization can be a valuable part of the process of bringing peace and understanding to the ethnic Hmong who deserve this freedom.

This position paper is presented in the hope that it will give all who peruse it a clear understanding of the beliefs of the organization and its Board of Directors.

We invite all who subscribe to these values and positions to join with LHRC as it

works to bring about positive changes in attitudes and actions.

The leadership of the LHRC strongly supports the concept of allowing the Hmong who now live in the mountains of Laos and Thailand to relocate within these nations and to become a part of the social and economic structure there. We believe that the vast majority of Hmong living in Laos and Thailand do not wish to leave Southeast Asia for other parts of the world. We believe that they can, in a peaceful fashion, integrate themselves into the cultures of these countries and live their lives in peace and in harmony. We believe the time has come for those Hmong, those Lao, and those Thai who have fought each other in the past to lay down their arms, set aside their differences, and move ahead in the 21st Century world's economic, political, and social structure. We believe this can be done as each group retains its individual cultural beliefs. We also believe that there may be individual Hmong in Thailand who would prefer to return to Laos, their traditional homeland, to reunite with their families there. It is our hope that this could be accomplished in peace as well.

We Proudly Set Forth The Following Positions of Importance

I. With regard to the Government of Laos we believe:

The Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (LPDR) is, of course, a communist government, formed after the close of the Vietnam Conflict. In the eyes of many nations and people outside of Southeast Asia, it is considered to be repressive, in terms of human rights, with an economy that provides for the subsistence of its people, but is not flourishing. There is a one party political system in place at this time. The assets of the nation focus largely on a fairly large labor force, relatively speaking, most of which is semi-skilled or unskilled. This labor pool is attractive to manufacturers who desire to produce relatively simple textile and other products in mass quantity.

We believe that the infusion of Hmong workers into the mix of labor available would have a positive effect in terms of diversification of economic opportunity, not only because of the well-known Hmong work ethic, but because of the agricultural abilities of the Hmong. Naturally, for the Hmong to integrate into the Lao work force, training in terms of general education as well as vocational skills would be important, but could be accomplished at relatively low cost.

II. With regard to the Government of Thailand, we believe:

The current government of Thailand is a monarchy, but with strong democratic beliefs. This government has done an excellent job of assessing the assets of the country and utilizing them in a diverse manner. Manufacturing, tourism,

agriculture, and commerce are all thriving within Thailand. The recent disaster of the tsunami has impacted on the country in a negative way, of course, but the rebuilding process is well underway.

We believe that supplementing the fine work force of Thai people with Hmong labor will enhance not only the recovery from the tsunami in Thailand, but can provide a unique pool of labor to expand agricultural capabilities and other skill areas making Thailand an even more potent economic force in the future. Again, training is a key factor in achieving this expansion of economic capability.

III. With regard to the role of the United Nations in this dynamic process, we believe:

We perceive the United Nations as a most valuable catalyst for change in the region. The United Nations, with its strong positions well known with regard to human rights and humanitarian aid is in the proper position to insure that all parties to the changes that we propose in Southeast Asia act in a manner consistent with the spirit of peace and justice.

The United Nations has the will and has the ability to bring all parties to the diplomatic table and to negotiate an agreement that is fair and just to all.

The LHRC will support the settlements reached by the United Nations, with the firm belief that their judgment will be in the best interest of not only the Hmong, but the Lao and Thai governments and people as well.

IV. With regard to the role of the State Department of the United States in this process, we believe:

We respectfully suggest that the role of the State Department of the United States, working in harmony with the United Nations is to provide the necessary support, expertise, and strong voice of reason so necessary to the successful negotiated settlement of the issues surrounding the Hmong and the governments of Thailand and Laos.

The fact that the United States has entered into agreements with both Thailand and Laos regarding trade makes them a partner of interest in the actions proposed and agreed upon.

The United States has a unique friendship with the Hmong people that spans many years now and it is our belief that the U.S. Government desires to see a successful negotiation that brings peace to all.

V. With regard to the role of the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc., U.S.A. in this process, we believe:

First, the LHRC can offer a pledge of unswerving support for the efforts of the United Nations, the State Department of the United States, and all other groups who join in this quest for peace and understanding. The LHRC and its Board of Directors are recognized for their leadership in the Hmong world, not only in the United States, but throughout the world.

The LHRC has established communication linkages with the Hmong in the mountains of Laos and Thailand. Regular telephone services between the people in Southeast Asia and leaders in the United States can serve as a valuable tool to keep the Hmong apprised of progress being made on their behalf.

The LHRC also has effective communications with the Hmong throughout the free world. We can serve as an important linkage to these Hmong people who have strong interest in what is happening to their families and friends in Southeast Asia.

The Hmong leaders in Laos and Thailand have great respect for the leadership of the LHRC. As progress for peace and understanding is made, the people in the mountains will know of the efforts being made. The trust that they will place in the LHRC leadership will help in the transitional efforts that will lead to peace.

The LHRC has consistently placed itself in a position of political neutrality, not only within the traditional sense of that position, but also within the realm of Hmong politics as well.

It is recognized that there are many groups who seek to effect changes in the way the Hmong are being treated in Southeast Asia. The agendas of these groups are many and varied. While the LHRC respects the rights of each of these groups to have their own agenda and their own goals, our motives are open and honest for all to see. We want for the fighting, the deprivation, the suffering to end. We want for the Hmong people in Southeast Asia to move forward with their lives in peace and with understanding. We stand strongly for human rights and for equality for all people.

We also recognize that there are many who claim to be the "true leaders" of the Hmong people. We recognize many of these individuals and groups and applaud their efforts to lead the Hmong people. We also know that all of these groups and individuals have not fulfilled their expectations nor those of the Hmong that they wish to serve. We do not position ourselves in the role of THE leaders of the Hmong world, but rather we feel that LHRC by their neutrality can provide a safe and secure platform of leadership that welcomes all who share our goals.

We further believe that the role of these various groups and leaders as we go forward working with the United Nations and the State Department of the United States is that of being supportive, of providing assistance, if and when asked to do so, and in providing assurance for the Hmong people throughout the world that

their cause is being addressed in a timely and professional manner.

While LHRC may strongly support many efforts on the part of other groups, there will always be those groups that have agendas that are contrary to our purposes. In those cases, while we respect the differences that exist, we will not actively support nor endorse their actions. The primary criteria we subscribe to is peace and understanding, not the agenda of disrupting existing governments, violence, or separatism.

SUMMARY

It is the strong desire of the LHRC to begin, as soon as possible, to lend our support to the United Nations and the State Department of the United States as they embark on a peaceful, diplomatic, negotiation with the Governments of Laos and Thailand, as is necessary, to bring about the settlement of the many questions regarding the appropriate ways in which the Hmong people in both of those countries can find peace and understanding.

We will give our pledge of support to this effort, will work to help achieve consensus among all parties of interest, and will stand ready to provide such assistance as we are asked to perform.

We recognize that the LHRC is not in a position to do the necessary negotiating on behalf of the Hmong but know that there may be unique insights or other assets that we can provide.

We have great faith in the power, the intellectual capabilities, and the strong motivation that the United Nations and the State Department of the United States possess. We are willing to tell the Hmong people in the world that we place the fate of those who live in repression and fear in the hands of these great organizations.

We, the Director and the President of the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc., U.S.A., unanimously agree with the positions taken in this document and by our signatures attest to that fact. The Board of Directors of the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc. U.S.A. unanimously supports these positions.

Vaughn Vang, Director