

Save the Hmong Vietnam Veterans and Their Families

WHEREAS the U.S. recruited Hmong to fight in the Vietnam War alongside U.S. soldiers. These veterans and their families have since 1975 experienced systematic persecution and the daily threat of death:

- During the Vietnam War from 1961-1975, the United States came to Laos to recruit tens of thousands of Hmong to fight in the Vietnam War. The Hmong saved thousands of U.S. soldiers by blocking the North Vietnamese from extending the Ho Chi Minh Trail into Laos. They rescued many American pilots who were shot down by the North Vietnamese. Approximately 60,000 American soldiers and over 35,000 Hmong died as a result of this war.
- Since 1975, the military of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) has continuously used chemical weapons, air and ground attacks, and starvation tactics to exterminate the Hmong who have been in hiding for the past 33 years, causing the deaths of an additional 65,000 Hmong. Those Hmong who surrendered to the LPDR have never been seen again; and

WHEREAS there is a current escalation of violence by the LPDR against the Hmong:

- Approximately 15,000 Hmong are still surrounded by the military and trapped in the jungles of Laos. These are mostly women and children of the second and third generation of the Hmong Veterans of the Vietnam War. On March 23, 2008, the current government of Laos (LPDR), in cooperation with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), has issued a new order and drafted a comprehensive strategy to mount a major military offensive to exterminate thousands of Hmong who continue to hide in the jungles and mountains of Laos, including thousands of unarmed women and children.¹ Soldiers who kill a Hmong person who is hiding receive an increase in rank and a \$600 reward²;
- Over the last eight years, approximately 8,000 Hmong have come out of the jungles of Laos to seek refugee status. They now live in the Huay Nam Khao camp in Phetchabun Province of Thailand. According to the Thai government they are illegal immigrants and will be repatriated. If sent back to Laos, they risk being tortured, jailed and even killed. Both the Lao and Thai governments have refused to allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees³ to monitor these people;
- Many Hmong, whether they fought in the Vietnam War or not, have had to flee from Laos to seek asylum in Thailand due to genocide or religious and political persecution; therefore be it

RESOLVED that the La Crosse Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) encourages its congregations to offer its members the opportunity to sign a letter addressed to the United States government requesting the following:

1. For the Hmong Vietnam veterans and families who are hiding in the jungles of Laos:

We ask the U.S. Government (a) to send a delegation to work closely with the Lao government to grant permission for the Hmong Vietnam veterans and their families to leave the jungles of

¹ See http://presszoom.com/story_144108.html

² See <http://frontpagemagazine.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=BFCD612-EC24-4237-BDC1-5FC0E61F6C3F>

³ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country.

Laos, (b) to arrange for their placement in a safe zone outside of Laos, (c) to grant them refugee status, and (d) to allow them entry into the United States and/or other countries.

2. For the Hmong Vietnam veterans and families currently in Phetchabun, Thailand:

We ask the U.S. Government (a) to send a delegation to work closely with the Thai government to allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to screen the Hmong Vietnam veterans and their families, (b) to grant them refugee status, and (c) to allow them entry into the United States and/or other countries.

3. For all other Hmong who are seeking asylum because of genocide, or religious and political persecution:

We ask the U.S. Government (a) to send a delegation to put pressure on the Thai and Lao governments to follow the International Human Rights Law⁴ and (b) to allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Amnesty International to monitor the living conditions and safety of these Hmong in Laos and Thailand; and be it further

RESOLVED that ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson be requested to send a letter expressing the concerns in the aforementioned “resolved” to the U.S. President, Secretary of State, and members of Congress, and to the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation; and be it further

RESOLVED that Pastor Houa Moua furnish ongoing educational materials regarding these issues, and that each congregation be requested to seek out a contact person or committee (such as an ELCA Hunger Advocate, Mission Interpreter, Pastor, or Social Ministry Committee) to educate its members about these issues; and be it further

RESOLVED that the La Crosse Area Synod encourage congregations (a) to consider sponsoring Hmong refugees, and (b) to find resources or set aside financial support for food and shelter, for up to three months, or until such time that these families can find work or other assistance; and be it further

RESOLVED that the La Crosse Area Synod Council forward this resolution to the ELCA Church Council’s Executive Committee for proper referral and disposition under the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church, including possible consideration and action by the ELCA Church Council and referral to the Global Mission unit and the Church in Society unit; and be it further

RESOLVED that the 2008 La Crosse Area Synod Assembly requests that the ELCA Church Council forward this resolution to the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Submitted by the Synod Council, Agape Asian Ministry-ELCA, the Agape Partner Subcommittee, Bridge Of Life Lutheran Church, Pastor Donald Fox from Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Church, and Pastor Kent Johnson (AMOS) all from the La Crosse Area Synod of the ELCA.

⁴ The International Human Rights Law is a system of laws, both domestic and international, designed to promote human rights. Human rights law is made up of various international human rights instruments - treaties which are intended to punish some violations of human rights such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. There are also a number of international courts which have been constituted to judge violations of human rights including the European Court of Human Rights and the International Criminal Court.