

UNPO SUMMARY ON THE SITUATION OF THE HMONG SUBMISSION TO THE 4TH CYCLE OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW LAO PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

UNPO is an international, nonviolent and democratic membership organization committed to amplifying the voices of unrepresented peoples and nations, safeguarding their fundamental rights. Among its more than 40 members, are the Hmong in Laos, represented in the UNPO by the Congress of World Hmong Peoples (CWHP). Founded in 1991, UNPO has contributed regularly to the UPR process by submitting reports in collaboration with its members. This fact sheet is prepared on the occasion of the 49th session of the UPR, which will take place in May 2025.

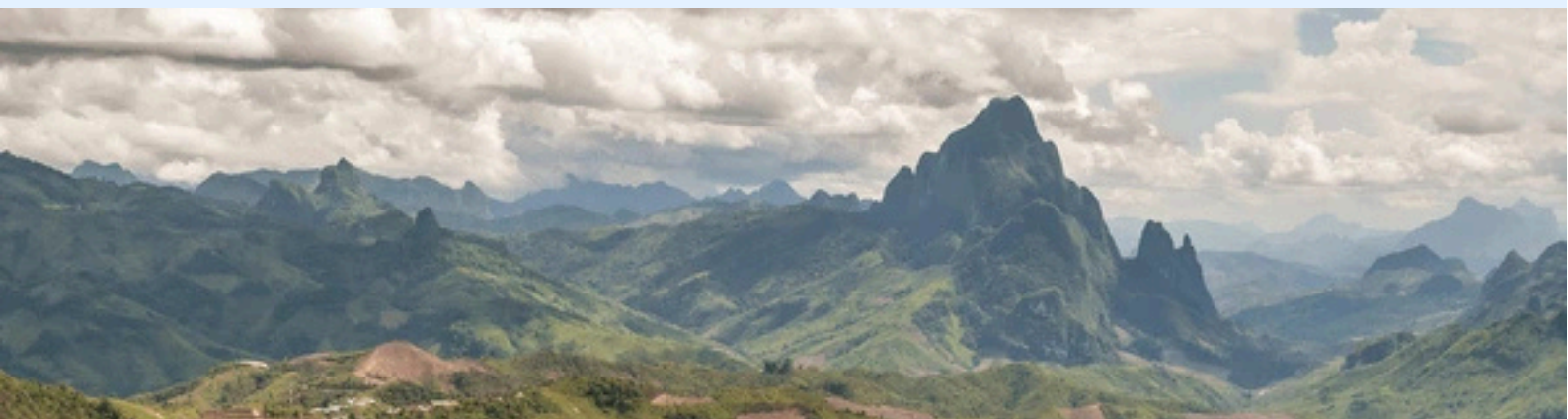
The **Hmong** are an indigenous people with a distinct ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. In Laos, approximately 600,000 Hmong reside primarily in the northern region, with a significant concentration in Xaisomboun Province, where the local Hmong community is known as the ChaoFa Hmong. The Hmong have been denied indigenous status by the Lao government, and face systemic discrimination and human rights abuses country-wide.

For decades, the Hmong have faced widespread human rights abuses, including forced isolation, land grabbing practices, enforced relocation to military-controlled camps and villages, military persecution, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and reprisals by the Lao government.

In view of the next coming UPR of Lao PDR, the UNPO and the Congress of World Hmong People (CWHP) would like to raise attention to the following issues affecting the Hmong community:

Military Violence and Forceful Isolation in the Xaisomboun Province (Phou Bia region)

The intensity of the multi-decade campaign worsens every year. From 2013, the intensity of the campaign shifted as the Lao People's Army increased military bases and soldier presence. Tanks, helicopters and heavy artillery are used on ChaoFa Hmong, including women and children, who are strategically targeted when searching for food. Killings, abuses, injury and disappearances have been recorded and are increasing. From March 2021, the area has been closed to all but military personnel, isolating the population and denying aid. Groups constantly relocate to evade military attacks and capture.



Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and reprisals

Despite difficult access due to isolation, The UNPO has documented several cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings since last UPR review. Documented cases include the following: on 10 March 2020 an 80 y/o and 19 y/o, accompanied by 2 girls, disappeared at the Thai border after attempting to flee from the violence. 18 days later their vehicle was found containing the two bodies of the drivers with torture marks. As an act of reprisal and intimidation, after the case was raised by UN Special Rapporteurs and the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, a 63 y/o relative of the girls was killed by the military whilst searching for food in 8 March 2021 and photos of the soldiers with the man's body was distributed to the Hmong's social media channels. Both cases, among others, were submitted by UN Special Rapporteurs and the Working Group to the Lao Government (JAL [AL LAO 3/2020](#) and JAL [UA LAO 3/2021](#)).



Forced relocation and living conditions in military controlled villages and camps

In order to facilitate economic development projects in the region, the Hmong population are evicted from their lands. Those displaced, along with surrenderers to military incursions, are placed in military-controlled villages and camps, where living conditions are hypercritical. Deprived of access to basic necessities, and subjected to psychological stress, interrogation and physical abuse, women and children face particularly heightened risks.

Repression of Human Rights Defenders

Targeting of Hmong HRDs is high in Laos and abroad. There are reported cases of activists that have disappeared into police custody or have been killed. While in these instances the perpetrators are still unknown, concerns have been raised about the escalating crackdown to silence dissidence. These occurrences were cited in the US State Department's 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for Laos.

Food security and healthcare

Hmong in the jungle endure abject poverty, food insecurity, undernutrition, and a lack of access to basic services. This is worsened by the constant need to relocate, causing food insecurity and health deterioration. Army raids confiscate food and cooking equipment. Artillery has polluted the environment, causing illness and death of infants. Furthermore, no safe drinking water leads to high disease and infection, and death.



Hmong women

ChaoFa women in the jungle face heightened vulnerability due to their role in searching for food: injury, adverse conditions, encountering illegal activities, their strategic murder by the military. ChaoFa women in military controlled camps/villages face heightened vulnerability. They are subjected to slavery-like treatment, torture and ill-treatment, including rape by law enforcement officers. Many women and children are separated from their families, trafficked into sex-slavery or house chores, or threatened with forced marriage. The dire living conditions Hmong women face also results in high maternal mortality rates in the Xaisomboun Province.

It is important to underline that Since 2020, the following UN mechanisms have recognised the severe repression the Hmong face:

- January 2020: UPR Recommendation on Hmong enforced disappearances and torture, including of women and children;
- August 2020: 10 Special Rapporteurs and the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances (WGED) sent a JAL on the ChaoFa Hmong in Xiasomboun ([AL LAO 3/2020](#)) raising concerns about indiscriminate attacks against the Hmong community, enforced disappearances and the denial of their right to access to food, water, housing and healthcare;
- April 2021: WGED and 7 Special Rapporteurs again sent a JAL on the ChaoFa Hmong in Xiasomboun ([UA LAO 3/2021](#)) raising concerns about acts of reprisals, extrajudicial killings, torture and an escalating pattern of violence against Hmong individuals and communities;
- 2021 and 2022: UN Secretary General report on reprisals on Chao Fa Hmong;
- 2023: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) List of Issues on ChaoFa Hmong;
- 2024: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Follow-up on ChaoFa Hmong systemic discrimination;
- 2024: Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights on the absence of cultural rights and indigenous recognition in Laos.

UNPO Key Recommendations:

- Put an immediate end to the military violence and abuses against the Hmong ChaoFa communities who have been forced into hiding in the jungle of Northern Laos;
- Recognize the indigenous status of the Hmong in Lao and develop the necessary legal frameworks to protect indigenous peoples in Lao PDR, using the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a guiding framework;
- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;
- Protect indigenous communities from land grabbing practices and forced relocations;
- To allow international observers to freely access international access to the Xaisomboun Province to conduct investigation on the allegations of ongoing human rights violations;
- Allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to the region to provide the basic necessities and healthcare for the Hmong population.