



UNREPRESENTED
NATIONS & PEOPLES
ORGANIZATION

STATEMENT

UPR Pre-Session on Lao Peoples Democratic Republic Geneva, 19th February 2025

Delivered by: Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)

1. Presentation of the Organization

This statement is delivered on behalf of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, speaking in representation of the Hmong. UNPO is an international, nonviolent and democratic membership organization committed to amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, safeguarding their fundamental rights.

2. Drafting of the report

The forceful isolation of the Hmong population, the constant state of terror that the Hmong population in Lao live under, and the high risk of reprisals against those who share information, remain a persistent challenge.

Despite the Lao government's continued denial of access to international observers and organizations, as well as significant challenges in documenting gross human rights violations, concerns about the indigenous peoples in Lao and the Hmong in particular have been repeatedly raised by numerous UN Special Rapporteurs and the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances.

3. Plan of the Statement

Today, and due to time constraints, our statement addresses the following issues: (1) Persecution and targeted human rights abuses against the Hmong (2) Land grabbing and forced relocations of indigenous peoples (3) Forceful isolation of the Hmong in the Xaisomboun Province

Part 4

i. Persecution and targeting of the Hmong people

A. Follow-up to the first review

In the 3rd cycle of the UPR, Portugal recommended (115.81) that Lao prevent and combat arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, in particular against members of the Hmong community.



To this day, the Hmong continue to be both persecuted by the Lao government and denied indigenous status, leaving indigenous peoples without the legal protections this status would entail and fostering the further denial of the gross human rights violations committed against them.

Despite concerns raised by the UN, the ratification of the ICPPED, recommended by Portugal and over 10 countries, has also not been implemented by Lao, resulting in the sustained persecution of the Hmong.

B. New developments since the first review

Preliminary observations made by the Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights on her visit to Lao in November 2024 highlighted the country's highly restricted civic space and emphasized that indigenous communities are denied self-identification despite meeting international legal criteria.

Furthermore, numerous incidents of violence against the Hmong have been documented, including the 2020 case of enforced disappearances of 2 children, one young woman and their 80 year old grandfather, raised by the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearance and Special Rapporteurs in 2020 (AL LAO 3/2020), which remains unaddressed by the Lao government.

When trying to flee the military persecution and the extreme living conditions in the Phou Bia region, the group disappeared on 12 March 2020 after being stopped at a checkpoint in Paksan. On March 28 2020, a video posted online showed the vehicle that was transporting the group being pulled back onto the road, with the bodies of the two drivers inside, bearing marks of torture. Despite UN enquiries, the whereabouts of the 3 girls and the elderly man remain unknown.

As an act of reprisal and intimidation following the publication of the Joint Allegation Letter, a photo taken by Lao government agents with a relative of the missing girls decapitated by the military was spread across social media channels of the Hmong community. The act of reprisals was brought to Lao's attention by a second UN Joint Allegation Letter in 2021 (UA LAO 3/2021), raising concerns over reprisals against the girls' relatives and Hmong individuals who had engaged with UN human rights mechanisms.

C. Recommendations

In order to address these issues, UNPO recommends Lao to:

- a. Put an immediate end to the military violence against the Hmong ChaoFa communities who have been forced into hiding in the jungle of Northern Lao;



- b. Recognize the indigenous status of the Hmong and develop the necessary legal frameworks to protect indigenous peoples;
- c. Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;

ii. Land grabbing and forced relocations

A. Follow-up to the first review

In the previous UPR cycle, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Germany (115.51, 115.52, 115.53) underlined the need to improve the planning of development and investment projects to avoid forced displacement and comply with international human rights standards. While these recommendations were supported by the Lao government, they have not been implemented for the Hmong population since.

Land grabbing and forced displacement with the purpose of evicting Hmong population from their lands to facilitate economic development projects remains one of the greatest concerns of indigenous peoples in Lao.

B. New developments since the first review

Members of the Hmong community are being displaced from their ancestral lands without compensation and in some cases placed in military-controlled villages. To avoid military attacks and capture, Hmong populations living in the jungle of Phou Bia are forced into a cycle of perpetual relocation and displacement, plunging them into extreme poverty, food insecurity, and rapidly declining health. Interviews and fact finding missions conducted by UNPO and journalists have revealed that Hmong families are forced to live in improvised shacks and have to face constant surveillance by Laotian military guards, having severe psychological effects on community members.

C. Recommendations

UNPO recommends Lao to:

- a. Protect indigenous communities from land grabbing practices and forced relocations;
- b. Re-evaluate policies on natural resource industries and assess their human rights impacts, considering indigenous communities' dependency on land and resources.

iii. Forceful Isolation of the Hmong in the Xaisomboun Province

A. Follow-up to the first review



The Xaisomboun Province, home to a significant Hmong population, has been closed to any international observer for decades. Even if no mention was made in the last UPR Cycle on the issue, concerns about the enforced isolation of the Hmong that have taken refuge in the Phou Bia region were raised by the Allegation Letters mentioned above.

To date, the Lao government has failed to respond.

B. New developments since the first review

In addition to reports of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture, the Hmong face dire living conditions as a result of the enforced isolation enabled by a government decree in 2021, with limited access to basic necessities and exposed to heightened security risks.

Furthermore, the Lao government has consistently denied independent access to the region, which has prevented the Hmong population from receiving international aid or assistance and has also fostered further perpetration of grave human rights violations. These include the deliberate starvation of the population, including women and children, as well as abuse, rape, and military persecution.

The military operations in Phou Bia have severely restricted indigenous communities' access to their crops, forcing them to relocate under army control and to rely on scarce resources. According to UN's JAL from 2021, villages and crops have reportedly been burned or destroyed, leaving villagers in dire conditions.

It should be noted that the UN Working Group and Special Rapporteurs reiterated their concern about the deliberate spread of fear among the Hmong to purposely isolate the community to sever links with community members, and the outside world, including UN human rights protection mechanisms.

C. Recommendations

In this sense, UNPO puts forward the following recommendations to the Lao government:

- a. Allow international observers access to the Xaisomboun Province to conduct investigation on the allegations of ongoing human rights violations;
- b. Allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to the region to provide basic necessities and healthcare for the Hmong.

Thank you for your attention. We remain available to provide further information throughout today's pre-sessions.