

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2432/03

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to the Commission

Subject: Human rights situation in Laos

On Thursday, 3 July 2003, the European Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the immediate release of the Belgian journalist, Thierry Falise, the French journalist Vincent Reynaud, the American pastor of Hmong origin, Naw-Karl Mua, arrested in Laos and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, and their Laotian escorts. This resolution was a follow-up to those of 15 February¹ and 15 November 2001² in which Parliament had already called on the authorities in Vientiane to begin democratic reform in the country and observe human rights and freedoms. However, it is evident that the Laotian government is deaf to these appeals and that there has been no improvement in the human rights situation. Although the release of the three Western citizens on Wednesday, 9 July may be reassuring, there are grave concerns as to the safety and future of their four Laotian escorts. Furthermore, there is still no news of the five leaders of the student Movement of 26 October 1999 who had organised a peaceful demonstration in support of democracy.

Can the Commission confirm that any proposal to consolidate the partnership between the EU and the Lao People's Democratic Republic will be preceded by a detailed and thorough evaluation of the progress made in the human rights sphere, beginning with the release of the five leaders of the Movement of 26 October 1999 and the four Laotian citizens arrested with Thierry Falise, Vincent Reynaud and Naw-Karl Mua?

Can the Commission say exactly how much Community aid has been granted under the cooperation agreement since 1997 and where it was allocated, with particular reference to the 25 ongoing Community projects?

Finally, is the Commission considering taking 'appropriate measures' under Article 19 of the cooperation agreement of April 1997? In other words, does it intend to notify the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic that it will invoke its right to suspend all or part of the bilateral agreement?

¹ OJ C 276, 1.10.2001, p. 281.

² OJ C 140 E, 13.6.2002, p. 577.