

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3915/03

by Marco Pannella (NI), Maurizio Turco (NI), Marco Cappato (NI), Gianfranco Dell'Alba (NI), Benedetto Della Vedova (NI) and Olivier Dupuis (NI)
to the Commission

Subject: Forced repatriation to Vietnam of Montagnard refugees by the Cambodian government and the repeated violation of the UN Convention on Refugees

According to a report by Radio Free Asia, in mid-November 2003 the Cambodian authorities forcibly repatriated the last eleven of sixty Montagnard refugees in Cambodia, handing them over to the Vietnamese authorities when they left the malaria-infected forest last July after Cambodian fishermen were forced to reveal their whereabouts to the Cambodian authorities.

All sixty Montagnards belong to the Jarai tribe and the provincial police in Ratanakiri have confirmed their deportation although they have not said exactly when this took place and the inhabitants of the village of O Lvea have confirmed that the last refugees were rounded up and arrested by the police in the forest in Koh Nhek district between Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri provinces. No information concerning the fate of the sixty refugees has been provided either by the Cambodian authorities or by the Vietnamese authorities and reports from the local population confirm that all sixty had contracted malaria after living for months on a diet of tubers and bamboo, as the police had prevented local fishermen from providing them with any assistance since October. The Cambodian police authorities have issued contradictory statements concerning the presence of Montagnard refugees on their territory, failing to provide them with any assistance but handing them over to the Vietnamese authorities in exchange for food and money, as recently documented by various independent sources.

Son Chhay, a Cambodian Member of Parliament from the Sam Rainsy party, and even the King of Cambodia have pointed out in recent months that the government of Cambodia is repeatedly violating the Refugee Convention, under which it has a duty to provide assistance to refugees on its territory.

Cambodian NGOs have repeatedly condemned the impossibility of obtaining information from the government on the situation of the Montagnard refugees and providing them with humanitarian aid; the office of the UNHCR in Cambodia has supported the Cambodian Government's actions in an unacceptable way, suspending all assistance and support for the Montagnard refugees in the provinces bordering Vietnam despite knowing about the arrests, forced repatriation and brutality, as well as the illnesses contracted by hundreds of Montagnard refugees during the past year and a half;

What action, if any, will the Commission take to verify and ensure that the Cambodian government observes the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, putting an end to arrests and the forced repatriation of Montagnard refugees who are fleeing political and religious oppression by the Vietnamese authorities, as condemned by the European Parliament in the resolution adopted in November 2003?

What pressure does the Commission intend to put on the UNHCR, both in Geneva and in Cambodia, to guarantee that the Montagnard refugees hiding in the jungle on the border will not be arrested and sold by the Cambodian police to the Vietnamese police who are patrolling the area and frequently crossing the border into Cambodia?

Does the Commission not consider that, unless the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments cease this action immediately, the cooperation agreements with them should be suspended as the Commission is effectively financing policies which violate human rights rather than ensuring that they are observed?