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Laos

European Parliament resolution on the arrest of a group of journalists and their American interpreter and Laotian escorts

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions of 15 February 2001 on the human rights situation in the Lao People's Democratic Republic¹, and of 15 November 2001 on the arbitrary arrests and the political situation in Laos²,
- having regard to the EC-Laos Framework Cooperation Agreement of 29 April 1997,
- having regard to the EU Presidency Declaration on Laos of 22 December 2000,
- having regard to the EC-Laos Strategy Paper 2002-2006,
- A. having regard to the arrest and detention, since 4 June 2003, of the European journalists Vincent Reynaud and Thierry Falise, an interpreter, Naw Karl Mua, and their Laotian escorts,
- B. whereas this team was in process of producing a report on the Hmong, who were allied to the US during the Vietnam war and have a long history of resistance and aspirations to independence vis-à-vis the Laotian government,
- C. whereas the journalists and the interpreter have not been allowed any visits of diplomats for more than ten days and have been held in an undisclosed location for more than a week,
- D. deeply concerned over the physical and mental wellbeing of the detained journalists, the interpreter and the four Lao nationals, whose names and whereabouts have not been made public,
- E. having regard to their sentencing to fifteen years in prison on Monday, 30 June 2003, in a trial which failed to respect the defendants' rights, on charges of 'obstructing an official in the performance of his duties',
- F. deeply concerned at the general political, human rights and social situation in Laos under the ruling single party, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), and at the plight of the Laotian population, whose civil and political rights are not respected,
- G. welcoming the Commission's statement to the effect that, should the situation of political rights and human rights in Laos degenerate to the point where the Community's

¹ OJ C 276, 1.10.2001, p.281.

² OJ C 140 E, 13.6.2002, p.577.

permanent cooperation with that country would be endangered, it would be willing to take the necessary action with a view to reaching an agreement on the ad hoc measures to be adopted,

1. Calls for the immediate release of the European journalists and their escorts;
2. Calls on the Council and the Member State governments to use all means at their disposal to secure the release of these journalists who have been imprisoned without cause;
3. Calls on the authorities of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to put an immediate end to the violations of the civil, political and human rights of the Laotian people and to act immediately to introduce root-and-branch reforms to guarantee the fundamental freedoms and rights of all the citizens of Laos, in a spirit of tolerance and national reconciliation;
4. Calls on the Laotian government to undertake the changes necessary for a move towards democracy and to allow the expression of political dissent;
5. Calls on the government of Laos to respect press freedom and freedom of expression and to allow independent journalists to work freely in the country;
6. Calls on the permanent representatives of the EU in Vientiane to press for democracy and an improvement of the human rights situation in Laos;
7. Calls on the Laotian authorities to ensure respect for the Constitution of Laos, which guarantees freedom for and of religion;
8. Calls on the Laotian authorities to put an immediate end to all persecution and repression of the Hmong people, as well as the other minorities in Laos and the country's Christian communities;
9. Calls on the Laotian authorities to give all groups of Hmong fighters access to UN specialist agencies and others to provide them with desperately needed medical attention and sufficient food and other basic services in line with Laos's obligations under international humanitarian law;
10. Calls on the Laotian authorities to authorise the Red Cross to visit the political prisoners in order to ensure that their physical integrity is being respected;
11. Believes that the Commission should examine the issue of continued permanent cooperation with the Laotian authorities and report on the matter to Parliament;
12. Calls for the arrest of the journalists to be included on the agenda of the next ASEAN/ANASE meeting should they have not been freed by then;
13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Government of Laos and all the ASEAN member states.