



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BANGKOK

March 7, 2007

THE AMBASSADOR

Christopher B. Coleman
Mayor, City of Saint Paul
100 City Hall
15 West Kellogg Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55102

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MAYOR'S OFFICE

Dear Mayor Coleman:

Thank you for your February 5, 2007 letter, received by our office on February 17, 2007. We understand and regret that the exhumations of the graves at Wat Thamkrabok caused tremendous suffering to the Hmong community in the US.

Per your request, we have made inquiries into the requirements for shipping the disinterred remains of these 211 individuals to the United States. However, we have found that several issues outlined below would require special attention:

First, for human remains that are not cremated, both the Thai government as well as the U.S. Customs Office would require death certificates, embalming certificates and transit permits for each of the bodies. Airlines would also most likely require these documents.

Second, the Buddha Dharma 31 Nakhon Ratchasima Foundation, where the 211 bodies are currently located, confirmed that since these remains are unidentified, there are no death certificates available. They stated that the remains exhumed were all from unmarked graves and thus there is no way to identify them. Also, they stated that in order to release these remains to the Hmong community in the United States, they would need to have proof that the various remains are from relatives of individuals among the Hmong-American community, since some of these individuals may have local Hmong relatives in Thailand who could oppose removal of the remains to the States without their consent. The Foundation would also wish to settle various expenses related to these remains.

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Third, the shipping cost for each set of remains is estimated to range from USD 2,000 - 3,000. Although the remains are most likely in the form of bones, procedures would still require that they be stored in coffins. According to Teckhong Funeral Home, the only funeral home in Thailand familiar with the necessary procedures for sending human remains to the United States, not only would both the sending and receiving countries of these remains require those certificates outlined in point one, the total shipping cost, including fees and other expenses, would be altogether "some millions of Thai baht" (one million baht is slightly under \$30,000 at the current Baht/Dollar exchange rate).

For these reasons, we suggest that perhaps the Hmong-American community in the United States consider either sending or appointing a local representative to handle these difficult issues. Since these are not the remains of American citizens, we have no legal grounds to arrange for the transport and shipment of these remains.

Given the many difficulties in arranging the transportation of these remains to the U.S., the Hmong community may also wish to consider identifying a location within Thailand where these remains could be reburied with proper Hmong burial rites, perhaps at an existing Hmong burial site.

Please be assured that we understand the importance of this issue to the Hmong-American community, and will try to provide assistance to help resolve this difficult problem.

Sincerely,



Ralph L. Boyce