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Hmong Times

Mayor Coleman Meets with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations

Coleman seeks response from Thai Government on Hmong grave desecration in Thailand

(United Nations)- Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman met on October 19, 2006 with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples, Mr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, to express his concern about the desecrations of Hmong graves at Wat Tham Krabok in Saraburi, Thailand.

In fall 2005, more than 900 Hmong graves were disinterred at Wat Tham Krabok, a Buddhist monastery that served for more than a decade as home to thousands of Hmong families fleeing persecution after the communist takeover of Laos in 1975. Hmong graves were exhumed by teams of workers who are shown on videotape dismembering the bodies, removing the bones and throwing the remains into open graves. The Thai government has responded to inquiries from U.S. officials and others, claiming that the bodies are being disinterred because of water quality complaints and that the bodies are being treated with respect and properly cremated according to Thai tradition. The families of the deceased have not received any information from the Thai government concerning the whereabouts of the remains, or the possibility of any further digging at Wat Tham Krabok.

The meeting between the Mayor and the UN official took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. Mr. Stavenhagen was appointed Special Rapporteur in 2001 to gather information from all relevant sources on violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples. Mr. Stavenhagen agreed to look further into the grave desecrations at Wat Tham Krabok. As Special Rapporteur, Mr. Stavenhagen can communicate directly with governments about indigenous concerns and can request a site visit to investigate pending cases. See:
<http://www.unhchr.ch/indigenous/rapporteur.htm>.

Mayor Coleman has been involved with the issue of the Hmong grave desecrations since the exhumations were reported in late 2005. Many of the families affected by the exhumations are now residents of St. Paul.

"To date, we have not had an adequate response from the Thai government, through the UN or the State Department, about what actions they will take to return the remains of the disinterred bodies to families in St. Paul," Mayor Chris Coleman said. "The desecration of Hmong graves in Thailand is a violation of fundamental rights of the Hmong people of St. Paul and it must be accounted for."

In April 2006, Mayor Coleman proposed a resolution, which was adopted unanimously by the Saint Paul City Council supporting the Hmong community and urging Minnesota's congressional delegation to work with the State Department to pursue all appropriate actions to work with the Government of Thailand to halt any further exhumations and return the exhumed remains to family members.

More information is available at: http://hrp.cla.umn.edu/Graves_desecration.html.