

## **United Nations Special Rapporteur to hear testimony on grave desecrations in Thailand**

On Wednesday, Dec. 10, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, Professor James Anaya, will visit Minnesota to hear testimony concerning the desecration of Hmong graves at Wat Tham Krabok in Saraburi, Thailand. The hearing will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Dec. 10 at Coffman Memorial Union Theater on the campus of the University of Minnesota.

In October and November 2005, more than 900 Hmong graves were disinterred at Wat Tham Krabok, a Buddhist monastery in Thailand that served for more than a decade as home to thousands of Hmong families fleeing persecution after the communist takeover of Laos in 1975. About 15,000 of those refugees were resettled in the United States in 2004, many of them in Minnesota.

While most of the graves were on monastery grounds, many were located on plots of land purchased by the refugees, and the exhumations were carried out without the notice, consent or involvement of the relatives of the deceased. Two religious organizations, sanctioned by the Thai government claimed responsibility for the disinterment of the graves.

In September 2007, an official fact finding delegation led by the city of St. Paul traveled to Thailand and met with Thai government officials and leaders of the two religious organizations. A subsequent report was submitted to the St. Paul City Council and a community debriefing meeting was held in the Hmong-American community. The fact finding delegation included Minnesota Senate Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller, Sen. Mee Moua, St. Paul Mayor's Policy Associate Va-Megn Thoj, and community activist Yee Chang.

“Given the large Hmong-American community in Minnesota and the leadership of local elected officials, legislators and our congressional delegation who have taken an interest in this issue, I am grateful the United Nations has created this opportunity to hear directly from the families affected by the grave desecrations,” said State Sen. Mee Moua, DFL-St. Paul. “I am also grateful for Professor Barbara Frey and the University of Minnesota for their dedication to the affected families and their efforts to bring the United Nations to Minnesota.”

The United Nations Special Rapporteur hearing will feature testimony from family members directly affected by this issue, experts on Hmong religion and culture, university students who have been working on the graves desecration issue, and Sen. Mee Moua. The Hmong-American community will also petition the Special Rapporteur to use his authority to formulate recommendations to prevent further desecration of indigenous grave sites and to remedy the violations against the Hmong community.

“The Hmong-American community has been searching for a way to come to terms with these violations for the last three years,” said Sen. Moua. “My hope is that this visit by the Special Rapporteur will result in action from the United Nations that will give families of the deceased some relief and closure.”

Sen. Moua encourages anyone concerned about the situation, especially families and members of the Hmong-American community in Minnesota to attend the event. For more information please contact Sen. Moua's office at 651-296-5285 or [sen.mee.moua@senate.mn](mailto:sen.mee.moua@senate.mn).