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Hmong Times

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## **Urgent Town Hall Meeting Regarding Hmong Graves at Wat Thamkrabok**

The right to a culturally appropriate burial and assurance that the grave will not be disturbed in any way is fundamental not only to individuals but society and culture as a whole. Yet this right is often overlooked and blatantly ignored.



For families who left loved ones behind at Wat Thamkrabok the thought of those loved ones bodies being disturbed and either reburied, cremated or desecrated is painfully disturbing. A graphic video showing just such an action circulating in the community adds to the fury. Barbara Frey, director of the Human Rights Program at the University of Minnesota commented that while this type of action is not new, in this case it is "far more invasive and gruesome." Frey went on to say that it is really important to look at this from a Human Rights standpoint, "Thailand failed to protect the most sacred Right of the Hmong people."

On Thursday, March 2 from 6:00-9:30 p.m. a letter writing campaign organized by University of Minnesota students participating in the Human Rights Internship class and supported by the offices of Sen. Mee Moua and Rep. Cy Thao was held at Lao family. Over 200 people gathered. Some had family directly affected by the grave disruptions, others were just concerned citizens wanting to know how they could help. Yee Chang, representing Mee Moua, acted as translator and introduced guest speakers.

In an act of solidarity Charles Fast Horse of the American Indian Community shared similar experiences of his people, "I honor you, respect you and look at all of you as my brothers." The people gathered murmured in approval at the similarities between Fast Horse's story and their current situation.

Individuals were invited to share their personal stories. A form letter was compiled listing the specific grievances of the issue, according to international law. This large volume of letters surrounding one issue will then be sent to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, particularly the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance and the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of Racism. "We think this will have a big impact on the United Nations." Frey stated. Frey is also compiling an institutional letter from the Human Rights Program that will accompany the individual letters.

Students from the U of M and other universities as well as local Boy Scouts who volunteered to translate, met with individuals one on one. Citizens were asked to bring, "any documents such as grave lot receipts or land title and other documents regarding the burial of your deceased family member. Photos and other evidence regarding your deceased family members such as birth or death certificates from Thai authorities."

While many letters were collected the campaign is not over. If you are interested in adding your experiences contact the Human Rights Program at the University of Minnesota.