

H. Res. 402

In the House of Representatives, U.S.,

May 6, 2004.

Whereas, in 1975, the Kingdom of Laos, a constitutional monarchy and important ally of the United States during the Vietnam War, was overthrown by the Marxist Lao People's Revolutionary Party with the assistance of the People's Army of North Vietnam;

Whereas the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established as a one-party regime in 1975 following the communist takeover;

Whereas tens of thousands of Laotian and Hmong people, a prominent highland minority group, were killed or died at the hands of communist forces while attempting to flee the Lao communist regime, and many others perished in reeducation and labor camps;

Whereas tens of thousands of Laotian and Hmong became refugees, eventually resettling in the United States where they now reside as American citizens and lead constructive lives as members of their communities;

Whereas the only political party allowed by law in Laos is the communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party;

Whereas, in 1989, Laos held its first elections since the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, but only candidates who were approved by the communist

Lao People's Revolutionary Party were allowed to seek public office;

Whereas, in 1991, Laos adopted its first constitution which purports to guarantee the people of Laos a wide range of freedoms, including the freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion;

Whereas the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Congress meets every five years and controls or influences the organs of the state in Laos, including the armed forces, the security services, and the National Assembly;

Whereas the Lao People's Revolutionary Party promulgates the five-year state plans that control the economy and do not need to receive the approval of the National Assembly;

Whereas, in 1999, peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations held by Laotian students in the capital of Vientiane calling for political and economic reforms were suppressed by force by the Lao government, which arrested many of the students;

Whereas Amnesty International reports that many Laotian student leaders from the 1999 pro-democracy demonstrations continue to be held by the Lao government and languish in the Lao prison system or remain unaccounted for;

Whereas, in 2001, Olivier Dupuis, a Member of the European Parliament, was arrested and jailed in Laos along with a group of pro-democracy activists after peacefully protesting for the release of the Lao students and for democratic and human rights reforms in Laos;

Whereas international election monitors are currently not permitted to enter Laos to monitor elections;

Whereas Laos remains a one-party communist state that continues to prohibit the organizing of opposition political parties to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party;

Whereas, in 2002, elections for the Lao People's Democratic National Assembly were held nearly a year earlier than scheduled and excluded all candidates from political parties other than the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, as well as all overseas Laotians;

Whereas Amnesty International and other independent human rights organizations are not permitted to enter Laos to monitor or investigate the human rights situation or reports of alleged human rights violations;

Whereas, in 2003, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom issued a country report on religious persecution in Laos, recommending that the President designate Laos as a "country of particular concern";

Whereas the Department of State reported in its most recent Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Laos that Laos restricts its citizens from enjoying the freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion, and from undertaking activities to change their government;

Whereas, in 2003, the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination stated that the Lao government had failed to honor its obligations, and the Committee expressed its grave concerns at the information it had received of serious and repeated human rights violations in Laos;

Whereas, in October 2003, Amnesty International issued a statement detailing its concern about the use of starvation by the Lao government as a weapon of war against

civilians in Laos and the deteriorating situation facing thousands of family members of ethnic minority groups, predominantly the Hmong;

Whereas, in 2003, Amnesty International's International Secretariat, in a statement further detailing its concerns about Laos, condemned in the strongest terms the use of starvation as a weapon of war against civilians and cited it as a clear and serious violation of the Geneva Conventions that Laos has ratified;

Whereas because many Laotians and Hmong, including those in the overseas communities, are not members of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, they do not meet with its approval as political candidates, but they are nevertheless successful businessmen, technocrats, and community and religious leaders with democratic aspirations and concern for the people of Laos; and

Whereas the United States has a vital interest in the worldwide promotion of democratic principles and respect for human rights, and supports democratic reforms in Laos: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives strongly supports the following points and urges the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the United Nations, the European Union, and the Association of South East Asian Nations—

(1) to work to provide unrestricted access to Laos by international election monitors for upcoming presidential and National Assembly elections;

(2) to work to provide unrestricted access to Laos, including special closed military zones and closed provinces, by international human rights organizations, the United Nations, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and humanitarian aid organizations;

(3) to work to ensure that opposition political parties and their candidates are allowed to run for public office in multi-party elections without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, economic standing, or political affiliation, and that all adult citizens of Laos, including overseas Laotian citizens, are permitted to vote and run for public office;

(4) to allow the citizens of Laos to assemble and peacefully protest against the Government of Laos, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, and individual public officials, and to freely organize opposition groups and independent political parties;

(5) to heed the call by the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination for the Lao People's Revolutionary Party to halt immediately all acts of violence against the Hmong population and provide them with humanitarian assistance;

(6) to work to gain the immediate release of those students and their family members arrested and jailed in

connection with the 1999 pro-democracy demonstrations, as well as all other political prisoners, prisoners of conscience, and those jailed for their religious beliefs or ethnicity; and

(7) to work to implement the recommendations of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom with respect to promoting religious freedom in Laos.

Attest:

Clerk.