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OF THE
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WRITTEN COMMENTS

ON

**EXTENSION OF PERMANENT NOR-
MAL TRADE RELATIONS STATUS
TO ARMENIA, MOLDOVA, AND LAOS**



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ADVISORY

FROM THE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRADE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 05, 2003
No. TR-1

CONTACT: (202) 225-6649

Crane Announces Request for Written Comments on the Extension of Permanent Normal Trade Relations Status to Armenia, Moldova, and Laos

Congressman Philip M. Crane (R-IL), Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, today announced that the Subcommittee is requesting written public comments for the record from all parties interested in the extension of permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) treatment to products from Armenia and Moldova and normal trade relations (NTR) status to the products of Laos.

BACKGROUND:

Armenia and Moldova

Armenia and Moldova are subject to the Jackson-Vanik provisions in Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-618), which govern the extension of NTR to non-market economy countries ineligible for such status as of the enactment of the Trade Act. Armenia and Moldova were first extended NTR in 1992 under a waiver from the freedom of emigration requirements in the statute. In 1997, the President found Armenia and Moldova to be in full compliance with the emigration criteria, and the trade status of both countries remains subject to semi-annual Jackson-Vanik compliance determinations by the President, which are vulnerable to a resolution of disapproval by Congress. To date, no Member has introduced such a resolution concerning Armenia or Moldova.

Section 122 of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act (P.L. 103-465) requires Congressional consultation prior to any country's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The United States Trade Representative transmitted detailed materials to the Committee on Ways and Means on the accessions of Moldova and Armenia to the WTO on March 9, 2001 and December 4, 2002, respectively. Moldova acceded to the WTO on July 26, 2001, and Armenia joined the body on February 5, 2003. Because the United States has not extended PNTR status to Moldova or Armenia, due to the continued application of the Jackson-Vanik provisions to both countries, the United States has invoked the non-application clause of the WTO (Article XIII). Until PNTR is extended to Armenia and Moldova, the WTO Agreements and the terms of their accessions will not be formally applied between each country and the United States, and U.S. trade relations with each country will continue to be governed by bilateral trade agreements.

On February 4, 2003, Representatives Joe Knollenberg (R-MI) and Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), co-Chairmen of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, introduced H.R. 528, a bill to authorize the extension of nondiscriminatory treatment (permanent normal trade relations) to the products of Armenia. Chairman Crane plans to introduce similar legislation for Moldova. If these bills become law, the United States would be able to extend PNTR to Armenia and Moldova, and all rights and obligations under the WTO agreed to by the two countries would apply to the United States.

Laos

Laos does not currently receive NTR status because it is included in the Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) of the United States in General Note 3(b) on the list of countries whose products are subject to column 2 (non-NTR) tariff rates. Jackson-Vanik provisions in the Trade Act of 1974 do not apply to Laos because the country was not a "non-market economy" when the Trade Act was passed on January 3, 1975.

The Lao Government has been introducing economic reforms since 1986 and is slowly becoming integrated with its neighbors in the Southeast Asian region. Laos joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1997, and Laos is in the early stages of negotiations to become a member of the WTO. In 1997, the United States and the Lao People's Democratic Republic concluded a bilateral trade agreement which calls for a reciprocal extension of NTR. That agreement has not yet entered into force. The agreement will obligate Laos to open its markets to U.S. goods and services and to protect U.S. intellectual property rights. The agreement will represent an important step toward economic reform and openness, key U.S. priorities in Laos.

The only action required to grant permanent NTR status to Laos and to enact the 1997 bilateral trade agreement is for Congress to enact legislation amending the HTS to strike Laos permanently from General Note 3(b). On February 24, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell and United States Trade Representative Robert Zoellick sent a joint letter to Congress expressing the Administration's support for extending NTR status to Laos and for bringing into force the 1997 agreement.

DETAILS FOR SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN COMMENTS:

Please Note: Due to the change in House mail policy, any person or organization wishing to submit a written statement for the printed record of the hearing should send it electronically to hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov, along with a fax copy to (202) 225-2610, by the close of business, Monday, April 21, 2003. The U.S. Capitol Police will refuse sealed-packaged deliveries to all House Office Buildings.

FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS:

Each statement presented for printing to the Committee by a witness, any written statement or exhibit submitted for the printed record or any written comments in response to a request for written comments must conform to the guidelines listed below. Any statement or exhibit not in compliance with these guidelines will not be printed, but will be maintained in the Committee files for review and use by the Committee.

1. Due to the change in House mail policy, all statements and any accompanying exhibits for printing must be submitted electronically to hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov, along with a fax copy to (202) 225-2610, in WordPerfect or MS Word format and **MUST NOT** exceed a total of 10 pages including attachments. Witnesses are advised that the Committee will rely on electronic submissions for printing the official hearing record.

2. Copies of whole documents submitted as exhibit material will not be accepted for printing. Instead, exhibit material should be referenced and quoted or paraphrased. All exhibit material not meeting these specifications will be maintained in the Committee files for review and use by the Committee.

3. Any statements must include a list of all clients, persons, or organizations on whose behalf the witness appears. A supplemental sheet must accompany each statement listing the name, company, address, telephone and fax numbers of each witness.

Note: All Committee advisories and news releases are available on the World Wide Web at <http://waysandmeans.house.gov>.

Aid to Artisans
Hartford, Connecticut 06114
April 2, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing to voice our support for Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos, one of the world's least developed countries. We ask that the legislature pass the necessary legislation to extend NTR to Laos and bring into force the bilateral trade agreements concluded in 1997. NTR will benefit both the US and Laos. Increased trade between our two countries will lead to greater economic opportunities and

swifter economic development in Laos. The lifting of the tariffs will directly improve the living standards of hundreds of weavers, silversmiths, and basket-makers whose way of life, which is such an important part of the economy and so undemanding of the environment, is severely penalized by the current tariffs. We feel it would be wise in this time of war to be able to make a simple peaceable improvement in the lives of hard-working people, such as these artisans. Laos is a member of ASEAN, an organization with which the US is working to strengthen regional stability. As such, Laos deserves the same benefit of NTR as its fellow ASEAN members.

Thank you for your consideration,

Clare Brett Smith
President

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

From: A group of Lao community in Nordic countries and UK

To: Honorable Members of Subcommittee of Trade, USA House of Representatives

Granting NTR to LaoPDR is a right way that American Congressmen choose and make two countries close partners in the trade.

Honorable Members of House of Representatives

We, undersigned, believe that a currently emerging support from American people and Congressmen to approve the NTR agreement for the LaoPDR is a supremacy of foreign policy of the USA towards the developing countries. This tendency paves the way for opening the prospects of ASEAN-American free trade area and to promote the investment. The ASEAN-American free trade area will be a good model for the other regions.

In realising this goal, the NTR must be given to the LaoPDR. Laos is the only remaining country in southeast Asia without NTR. Laos is rated one of the poorest developing countries in the world but due to the discriminatory tariffs barriers with the United States they are subject to the highest average tariffs.

Looking at the Lao-American relations, our two countries have always maintained the unbroken diplomatic relations since its 1955 year establishment. Both countries have cooperated each other in different fields, such as POW/MIA, drug programmes and counter-terrorism. These activities have been implemented successfully in the LaoPDR. The American delegations at different level while visiting Laos appreciate the POW/MIA programmes and the Opening Market Economic Policy in the country. They are also satisfied with the changes in the political and economic fields in Laos, where the first constitution in 1991 and from that the number of laws have been adopted by the National Assembly.

The Lao government has attached great importance to improving the living standard of the people in the whole country. In the National Assembly and the government there are more women taking the high positions. There is not a big gap between men and women in the political, economic and social administration. The equality gender has been improved. The ethnic minorities or tribes enjoy their full rights to carry out their engagement to work for the prosperity of the country.

Unfortunately, the financial and economic crisis in the Asia in the 1997 has affected LaoPDR so far, the Lao government seeks the ways to integrate the country into the World Economies and to create the conditions for becoming a member of WTO in the future. But, Laos lacks the NTR from the USA which is a fundamental instrument in order to attract more investors from the USA.

The sound and safe economies of LaoPDR rests with the NTR granting, as the US market is big and reliable partner for ASEAN countries. Lao and American business people need to cooperate each other in the field of trade and investment.

We are convinced that granting NTR to Laos can bring only mutual benefit to our both countries. It will also contribute to improving the living standard of the Laos people and to reduce the poverty and create the conditions for WTO membership in the future.

Finally, the LaoPDR will be left out underdevelopment in 2020. Granting the NTR will also develop the small and medium business sectors in the LaoPDR and pave the ways for investors from the USA to Laos.

We would like honorable members to consider the normalization of trading relations between the USA and LaoPDR and urge the Congressmen to adopt the NTR agreement. The adoption of the NTR for LaoPDR will strengthen the bilateral trade and economic cooperation.

Stockholm, 16 April 2003

Respectfully yours,
 Kaykeo Akkhamountry, Oslo, Norway, Bounlom Keobouahom, Bergen, Norway,
 Sitthiroth Rasphone, Norwich, U.K., Xayadeth Phouyavong, Ange, Sweden,
 Silavanh Sawathvong, Umeå, Sweden, Vilachith Phommasack, Uppsala, Sweden,
 Phonephet Chounlamountry, Täby, Sweden, Khambou Hagberg, Skarpnäck,
 Sweden, Vanthong Phengvichith, Uppsala, Sweden, Vanvilay Phalamixay,
 Vällingby, Sweden, Amphone Souvannasy, Jokkmok, Sweden, Viengphet
 Vanthanouvong, Uppsala, Sweden

Aloun Farms
 Kapolei, Hawaii 96709

Honorable Philip M Crane,
 Chairman Subcommittee on Trade,
 Committee on Ways and Means
 House of Representatives,
 United States Congress

Honorable Edward Case,
 Congressman (Hawaii)
 House of Representatives,
 United States Congress

Dear Congressmen Crane and Case:

My family and I are Hawaii-based Laotian American and owned and operate Aloun Farm, Inc. one of Hawaii State larger grower of vegetables, melons, and corn that operates 3,200 acres and employs over 200 workers in Central Oahu. I am writing in support of the Bush Administration's recommendation to grant permanent NTR to Laos (Lao People's Democratic Republic). In accord with my fellow colleague of Laotian-American community leaders/professionals in Hawaii and those across the U.S. Mainland, I respectfully urge your full review of our joint statements, and take favorable action by your esteemed Committee. The said statement outlines the socio-political, and humanitarian reasons for granting the NTR to Laos.

Laos is geo-politically located in a critical place and holds a tremendous social and economic potential value not only to its ASEAN neighboring countries, but can be a rich agriculture trading region with the U.S. in the years ahead. In recent years, I had the privilege to travel throughout Asia and have started a few businesses in Thailand and Southern China in the agriculture trade. I see Laos to have the idea resources and climate to grow fruits and vegetables during the winter months that the greater north Asia cannot. Allowing US-NTR status to Laos will pave the way with such agricultural and economic growth that will pave the foundation for a stability region.

Sincerely,

Alec Sou
 General Manager/Owner

Dear Friends and Relatives: Please write a few lines (copy the Statement attached to my later) and send it out. Ask as many of your friends who are U.S. citizens to write to both Crane and their own congressman (for Hawaii residence copy Congressman Neil Abercrombie, email as shown below; or Ed Case ed.case@mail.house.gov). you can also fax or both fax and email. Your letter counts. Deadline is 21 April. Rush! PP

From: Puongpun
 To: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
 Cc: neil.abercrombie@mail.house.gov

Sent: Saturday, April 12, 2003 08:14
 Subject: Support for Granting U.S Normal Trade Relation (NTR) to Laos
 April 11, 2003, Honolulu, Hawaii

Honorable Philip M Crane, Chairman,
 Subcommittee on Trade,
 Committee on Ways and Means'
 House of Representatives,
 United States Congress.

Honorable Neil Abercrombie,
 Congressman (Hawaii)
 House of Representatives,
 United States Congress

Dear Congressmen Crane and Abercrombie:

I am a Hawaii-based Laotian American and President and CEO of Pacific Management Resources (PacMar Inc.), a well-established international consulting company that has been providing professional and business advisory services throughout the Asia Pacific region for the past two decades.

I am writing in support of the Bush Administration's recommendation to grant permanent NTR to Laos (Lao People's Democratic Republic).

For this purpose, I have attached a statement which was jointly drafted and adopted by key Laotian-American community leaders/professionals in Hawaii and those across the U.S. Mainland. The said statement, in my view, reflects very accurately the opinions of the vast majority of the 4,000 Laotian-Americans in Hawaii, and over half million other Laotian-Americans across the United States, on this issue. I respectfully urge your full review of this statement, and favorable action by your esteemed Committee. The said statement outlines the socio-political, and humanitarian reasons for granting the NTR to Laos. I would like to add the following additional economic and strategic reasons for granting the NTR to Laos:

We support granting the NTR for Laos not only because it reflects the collective sentiments of the vast majority of the Laotian-American communities in Hawaii and across the U.S.; but, more importantly, granting the NTR to Laos will serve the best long-term economic and strategic interests of the United States of America in the greater ASEAN region.

Laos is a member of ASEAN. The country is strategically located right in the heart of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS), which is home to over 250 million ethnically diverse populace with some of the fastest-growing markets and most dynamic economies, including those of China, Vietnam, Thailand, as well as the newly emerging but fast-changing economies of Cambodia, and Burma.

Major multi-lateral funding agencies (e.g. the ADB, Worldbank), bilateral donors, and leading private U.S. and other multi-national companies are committing massive aid and investment resources into the GMS. They view the GMS as one large, and increasingly integrated market, and highly promising new investment "frontiers," of which Laos is an inseparable part.

Major multi-modal infrastructural networks (new trans-national road networks, railroads, civil aviation and telecommunication systems) are being planned and developed at rapid pace for this GMS region, most of them connecting to and/or traversing various parts of Laos (which shares common boarders with all other five GMS nations).

Laos—being richly endowed with diverse forestry/mineral resources, and vast exportable hydro-power potential—is poised to be one of the key "hubs" for cross-boarder trade, and economic exchanges, and lucrative market links among the six GMS nations. The U.S. is currently among the leading economic "stakeholders" in the GMS. Continued refusal to grant NTR to Laos is detrimental to the current and long-term U.S. national interest in this dynamic and fast-growing region.

The significance of Laos to the U.S. regional economic and security interests must be viewed in this broader ASEAN and GMS context. It is in the light of these broader U.S.-ASEAN regional economic and security interests that I urge your esteemed Committee to recommend the granting of the much overdue US-NTR to Laos.

Sincerely yours,

Puongpun Sananikone
President and CEO, PacMar Inc.
 (address: 3615 Harding Avenue, Suites 408-409, Honolulu, HI 96816.
 Tel: 808-7328731)

Attachment:

**Statement of Support From Laotian-Americans in Hawaii
For
The Bush Administration's Trade Initiative
To extend Normal Trade Relations to Laos**

We, Laotian-Americans in Hawaii, believe that:

Widespread and rapidly growing unemployment among youth in Laos has driven tens of thousands of them to flee to Thailand and other neighboring countries where they fall prey to exploitative and inhumane treatment by their employers and criminals; while the land-locked Laotian economy continues to weaken due to decline in foreign investment and its weak capability to compete with its neighbors in the export markets. The situation is further aggravated by the continued denial of US NTR to Laos while such privilege is enjoyed by its stronger immediate neighbors, including Vietnam and Cambodia.

US NTR for Laos is not a panacea for its social economic problems, but it will put Laos on a level playing field with its neighboring countries on which to compete for a share of the U.S. markets. This in turn will stimulate domestic and foreign investment in Laos and give the country a fair chance to provide decent jobs for its youth and thereby help reverse the current ill treatment and suffering they have had to endure, both in Laos and in neighboring countries.

We realize that Laotian communities across the U.S. are not unanimous in their views about the current Laotian Government and its policies, and that the majority of Laotian Americans still wish to see more political reforms and changes. But we believe that a stronger Laotian economy will improve living conditions of the Laotian people who, in turn, will then become real stakeholders and, eventually catalysts for change. Experience in Asia has amply demonstrated that the democratization process has been economically driven.

While understanding and respecting the views of those opposing the granting of US NTR for Laos, we ask that they also understand and respect our views and positions on this important matter. As American citizens, we have the obligation to respect each other's rights and freedom to express our views in accordance with our belief and conscience.

The majority of Laotian Americans have reconnected with their homeland. Most of them have returned to Laos for visits and have relatives who are still there and wish to see that they be given a fair chance for a better living. Most Laotian Americans believe that promoting economic development is the best way to promote peaceful and sustainable change in Laos.

We wholeheartedly applaud and share the position taken by the Bush Administration on the issue of US NTR for Laos. Ambassador Hartwick is trying to encourage discussion and favorable consideration of this initiative.

Laotian Americans and friends of the Laotians who share our views should exercise their right of freedom of speech by voicing their views to their respective Congressional representatives, especially members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The opposition to the US NTR to date seeks to isolate and impoverish Laos for their own ambiguous political agenda. They have organized and financed aggressive lobby efforts to prevent hearings on this matter. Some of them continue to believe that poverty will force change in Laos. Recent history in Asia shows otherwise. People in isolated and poor North Korea have no means to ask for change, they starve in silence; while in relatively rich South Korea and other parts of Asia (Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines etc.) growing affluence of the peoples have created economically strong and well educated middle class who in turn have proven to be the real incubators and guardians of the growing democratization process.

A constructive engagement approach is a better alternative for the U.S. to promote change in Laos; and that promoting change through peaceful socio-economic development is far more effective and humane than deliberate impoverishment of our fellow Laotians in Laos. The granting of NTR to Laos will open up U.S. market to tens of thousands of Laotian entrepreneurs and workers. This will ultimately lead to greater economic empowerment of Laotians, making them stakeholders in their own society and, thereby, creating genuine impetus towards democratization and the rule of law.

For more information and assistance, please contact: The US-Lao NTR Coalition; 120 Broadway, Suite 4; Richmond, CA 94804; (510) 235-5005, (510) 235-5065; Website: Laotianlink.com; Email: Laotianlink@USA.com

Hawaii Contact: Email: puongpun@pacmarinc.com; telephone: 808-735-2602, 732-8731; fax: 808-734-2315; Mail: 3615 Harding Avenue, Suites 408-409, Honolulu, HI 96816

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Vientiane, Lao PDR
April 21, 2003

I have been working professionally in agricultural and rural development and living in the Lao PDR for over 13 years now. As a fluent speaker of the Lao language and having worked in 13 of the nation's 17 provinces, I feel that I have some knowledge concerning the country and its current situation.

I am quite concerned about the debates within the US about NTR for the Lao PDR. I feel that information given to the Congress in the past has sometimes been skewed by the narrow interests presented by a small group of Lao-Americans, especially a minority group of ethnically Hmong. Thus, this statement is to present another side, which I feel is more realistic, even for the ethnically Hmong living in the Lao PDR.

As you know, the Lao PDR has been progressively more integrated into markets since the establishment of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986. As with many changes here this NEM really never started to have an impact until about 1990. While market institutions and mechanisms are still in their fledgling stages they are beginning to work with the assistance of various donors. So the country is not only no longer considered as a non-market economy as when the Trade Act was passed in January 1975, but it's well on its way into entering into the community of nations as a partner. It joined Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997 and is working on meeting the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) requirements by 2008. This should be a great boost to the nation's economic development.

As a less developed country in still in its early stages of development, the nascent markets for agriculture, forestry and small- and medium scale industry are important dimension of the economic development of the country. However, it is also important and urgent that Laos also have trade good trade relations with larger countries such as the US and the EU countries. Of course, it helps tremendously to have access to markets at favorable tariffs.

The country has a number of products already which could benefit from NTR with the US. There is a burgeoning garment industry; considerable non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for the health foods and products niche markets; timber products, e.g., furniture, sawn wood, etc.; and coffee. There is yet an unreached potential for numerous agricultural products, such as, fruits and vegetables, various meat products, domesticated NTFPs, e.g., cardamon, eaglewood oil, etc. The Lao have tremendous skills in intricate silk and cotton weaving, which could be readily transferred to various types of complicated assembly work in the electronics and communications industries.

Of course, there is still much to be accomplished in the commercialization of agriculture and in the appropriate industrialization of the country. But a necessary condition for economic development will be the opening of markets for its products. NTR with the US should provide a substantial boost to the nation's growth and development. Both the Government of the Lao PDR (GOL) and the general population are ready for such an improvement in US-Lao relations.

Actually the GOL's relationship with the Hmong community has steadily improved in the past decade. This can be attested by the recent visit of Dr. Vang Dao of the University of Minnesota, a prominent Hmong leader within the US. I have personally worked with many fine Hmong people in villages and in the GOL, and there is very little tension between them and the Government for which there is some misinformation in the US by only a few of the more vocal members of the Hmong community.

Charles Alton, Ph. D.

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

*American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore
Singapore 228208
April 16, 2003*

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

The American Chamber of Commerce of Singapore (AmCham) and its 1400 members actively expand US business throughout Asia and the Pacific, and therefore wish to support your and the Administration's initiative to normalise US trade relations with Laos. The submission of the 1997 US-Laos Bilateral Trade Agreement to the 108th Congress we hope will result in the final ratification of this BTA, the extension of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status to Laos, and thus the opening of new windows of opportunity for the surge in trade and investment that has benefited all parties after the passage of such BTAs with Cambodia and with Vietnam.

Constructive engagement is a US policy that has proven to deliver positive results with Laos' neighbours in Indochina. Laos is unique in that region to have enjoyed continuous diplomatic relations with the US. It is also unique among the six countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion and all lesser developed countries world-wide to remain without NTR status. The Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative, announced at APEC in 2002, will engage and assist countries such as Laos to make the reforms necessary for WTO accession in the long term. In the short term, however, the extension of NTR status now would enable the US business community to play a positive role by constructively engaging in trade and investment in Laos to facilitate its economy opening to the mutual benefits of US trade and services and business norms.

The granting of NTR status would create positive change for Laos on domestic, bilateral, regional and global levels. For the six million people of Laos who are among the most impoverished in the world, the opportunity to access the world's largest market at a tariff rate on par with their neighbours' level of access to the US (rather than the current 45.3% as found by Ed Gresser of the Progressive Policy Institute) such as the average 3% tariff on Vietnamese goods following the ratification of their BTA with the US, is essential. By allowing Laotian exports to be more competitive, this should encourage Laotians to diversify their agricultural base such as to produce more silk, increase their sales of handicrafts, textiles and hydroelectricity, and expand their manufacturing sector.

On a bilateral level, the US business community in the Asia Pacific region will be at the forefront of exploring business opportunities in Laos as soon as one of the costs of doing business in Laos is removed by implementing the BTA and by granting NTR status. With the prospect of change, our members have renewed interest in pursuing business in Laos and in the GMS, and therefore have recently established an Amcham Sub Committee on the GMS.

On a regional level, NTR status will help Laos be a more productive member of the Greater Mekong Subregion and of ASEAN which it joined in 1997. American companies can strengthen regional economic integration in the GMS—a strategy of the ADB and the World Bank of which the US is a member—by more fully engaging in the multilateral donor funded projects that are knitting together the region's infrastructure. This utilisation of US technology and know-how will benefit Laos and will increase sales of American goods and services. On a global level, the commercialisation of the Laotian economy and increase of business in Laos will foster the growth of the private sector and policy reforms across all sectors of the economy which will enable Laos to meet its goal of joining the WTO and profiting from the global economy.

We commend the work of you and your Committee on this issue, and hope that it is the final step to create the foundation for the normalisation of US-Laos bilateral relations. We look forward to working with you in this and in fostering the long term growth of US-Laos economic relations.

Sincerely yours,

Kristin E. Paulson
Chair

American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand
 Bangkok, Thailand, 10330
April 10, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways and Means
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

On behalf of the American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand (AMCHAM) and its 550 member companies doing business in Thailand, we would like to express our support for the extension of Normal Trade Relations to Laos. AMCHAM supports free trade and the benefits it provides to our trading partners, particularly developing nations.

We support the slow but significant steps that the Lao Government has been undertaking since 1986 in introducing economic reforms in Laos. Laos has joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (1997), and is in the early stages of negotiations to become a member of the WTO. We agree with the Committee Advisory's March 5, 2003 statement soliciting comments that ratification of the agreement "will represent an important step toward economic reform and openness, which are key U.S. priorities in Laos."

The United States and the Lao People's Democratic Republic concluded a bilateral trade agreement in 1997 which calls for a reciprocal extension of NTR, although that agreement has not yet entered into force. This agreement will obligate Laos to open its markets to U.S. goods and services and to protect U.S. intellectual property rights. We support granting permanent NTR status to Laos and to enact the 1997 bilateral trade agreement by Congress enacting legislation amending the HTS to strike Laos permanently from General Note 3(b). We understand that on February 24, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell and United States Trade Representative Robert Zoellick sent a joint letter to Congress expressing the Administration's support for extending NTR status to Laos and for bringing into force the 1997 agreement.

Granting NTR to Laos would also be a step forward in achieving the goals set out by President George Bush during the October 2002 APEC meeting in Los Cabos, Mexico where he announced the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI). President Bush also pledged to work with countries like Laos in their quest to meet the requirements for WTO accession.

As American companies doing business in Thailand and in the IndoChina region, the security and political stability of the region is often reflected in the economic conditions. With Laos being one of the poorest countries in the world, the ability to participate in normal trade relations with the U.S. will hopefully provide economic benefit to its people. For American companies in Thailand and abroad this would provide an opportunity to pursue successful trade and investment.

We commend you and the Committee for considering taking this important step to normalize economic relations between the United States and Laos. We look forward to working with you to achieve this. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Devlin
AMCHAM President
Country Manager
Nike, Inc.

cc The Hon. Robert Zoellick, Office of the US Trade Representative
 The Hon. Douglas Hartwick, US Embassy—Vientianne

American Friends Service Committee
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives/Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

I am writing to voice my strong support for the extension of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to Laos. It is rather astounding that Laos, a country which is poor and extremely weak militarily should be one of only seven countries in the world without normal trade relations with the US.

I have visited Laos on behalf of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) once or twice a year, almost every year since 1973. The AFSC and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) were the only two international non governmental organizations that were able to stay in Laos during the 1975 transition to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and both remain active in Laos today. We watched the massive exodus of Laotians to Thailand, especially from 1976 to 1978, as a result of harsh and inept policies of the new government. The status of the AFSC in Laos was initially uncertain but it improved gradually over the years. The government preferred to test out a working relationship with the AFSC in practice for some years before confirming it in writing in memoranda of understanding.

AFSC staff have traveled over much of the country. Currently they carry out rural development projects in four provinces, in close collaboration with local officials and major participation by the villager-beneficiaries. AFSC staff are well aware of the many problems of Lao society. They are equally aware that the only course to improvement is through the practical experience of Lao and external aid personnel working together cooperatively as partners. Taking an accusatory or critical approach to local failings has been demonstrably counterproductive.

Many of the Lao who fled the country in the 1970s and now live in the US are locked into a bitter memory of their harsh experiences of that time. Some are pushing actively for formal recognition and approval of their actions thirty years ago on behalf of the United States. Until that happens they may fear that normal relations may cause people to forget their sacrifice, which was very real. The voices of the old leaders of Lao-Americans in opposition to better US-Lao relations are often very loud in Congress but their arguments are counter productive to the goal of a better life for people in Laos that they claim to be seeking.

Many Lao-Americans now make regular trips back to Laos. A number of them report that they would seriously like to invest in their former homeland on behalf of themselves, their relatives still in Laos and a more promising future for everyone. The passage of NTR would be a critical element in making such a future possible.

The AFSC experience, which encompasses the entire history of the Lao PDR, is very clear. Productive cooperation between Americans and Laotians has advanced US-Lao relations and improved daily living conditions for people in Laos. The exchange of mutual recriminations has made life for people in Laos only worse. The lack of NTR may appeal to the anger of those looking back to the past, but it will only retard real improvement in the future quality of life of people in Laos.

It is long past time that the anachronism of the lack of normal trade relations with Laos be removed. On behalf of the welfare of people in Laos it is urgent that NTR be extended to Laos as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

David Elder
Regional Director for Asia

Armenian Assembly of America
Washington, D.C. 20001
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
1104 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

The Armenian Assembly of America strongly supports the extension of permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) treatment to products of Armenia.

Armenia's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, democratic stability, entrepreneurial spirit and western value system make Armenia an increasingly important partner for the United States in the Caucasus region. Armenia is poised to play a pivotal role as a commercial hub and has established a positive legal, regulatory and tax climate for foreign investment, reflecting the country's commitment to open and free trade.

Since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia has vigorously pursued free-market reforms within a democratic framework. The overwhelming majority of state enterprises have been privatized or are in the privatization process. To further promote and facilitate direct foreign investment, Armenia's Ministry of Trade and Industry created the Investment and Export Policy Directorate. In addition, the Armenian government established the Armenian Development Agency (ADA) to provide "one stop shopping" services for potential investors.

As a result, a number of multinational corporations have undertaken projects in Armenia, including: Coca-Cola, Phillip Morris, Huntsman Armenia Concrete Corporation, Federal Express, Northwest Airlines/KLM, International Legal Consulting and Sexess Petroleum Corporation, to name a few. Last year, U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, John Ordway, took note of Armenia's economic reforms and financial incentives, stating that "One of the best indices of economic development of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member-countries belongs to Armenia."

Armenia views the United States as a strategic partner and friend. It has demonstrated a strong desire to build a friendly and cooperative relationship with the United States, and has concluded many bilateral treaties and agreements with our nation.

As you are aware, Armenia is still subject to the Jackson-Vanik provisions in Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974, which govern the extension of normal trade relations (NTR) to non-market economy nations ineligible for such status as of the enactment of the Trade Act. Armenia was first granted NTR in 1992 under a waiver from the freedom of emigration requirements of the statute. The President has consistently found Armenia to be in full compliance, as President Bush recently certified to Congress on January 29, 2003.

Furthermore, on February 5, 2003, Armenia was acceded to the WTO. The Director-General of the WTO, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi said about Armenia's accession, "Since achieving independence, Armenia embarked on a comprehensive process of liberalization and market reform in which membership of the WTO is a decisive milestone."

Armenia's recent accession to the WTO further supports its noted progress. However, neither Armenia nor the United States will be able to avail itself of full WTO benefits until permanent normal trading relations are granted. Representative Joseph Knollenberg has introduced H.R. 528, which would extend PNTR with Armenia. This important bipartisan measure will help strengthen U.S.-Armenia relations and allow for greater trade benefits between the United States and Armenia.

Increased U.S.-Armenia trade and investment not only advances U.S. foreign policy by further strengthening Armenia's free-market economic development and integration into the world economy, but also helps to offset the damaging impact of Turkey's and Azerbaijan's blockades, estimated by the World Bank at up to \$720 million a year. These blockades have cut off the transport of food, fuel, medicine and all other commodities via traditional transport to and from the states of the Former Soviet Union. They also precipitated a humanitarian crisis requiring the United States to send emergency assistance to Armenia. By obstructing the delivery of gas, the blockades created unbearable conditions during winters when the Armenian population was forced to live without heat, Armenian children went without schooling, and hospitals were unable to care for the sick. In addition, a disproportionate share of U.S. assistance was required for humanitarian needs as opposed to short- and medium-term economic development projects. According to the World Bank, lifting the blockades could reduce Armenia's transportation costs by 30 to 50 percent, increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by over 30 percent and double exports.

In spite of the dual blockades, Armenia's economic reform measures are progressing. Armenia earned a high rating in the *Wall Street Journal* and Heritage Foundation's "2003 Index of Economic Freedom." The index, which measured how 161 countries scored on a list 50 independent variables divided into ten broad economic factors, including: trade and monetary policy, government intervention in the economy, banking and property rights, rated Armenia 44th. According to the study, Armenia remains the most economically free nation in the region, including all nations in the CIS.

In addition, Armenia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased 12.9 percent last year—the highest among the former Soviet republics. The growth remains strong this year, as Armenia's GDP reached 7.5 percent on the first two months of this year. The International Monetary Fund representative in Yerevan, James McHugh, qualifies Armenia's macroeconomic situation as "very favorable." Last year, Armenia's exports increased by over 48 percent with Belgium, Israel, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States registering as the top trading partners. In 2002, total U.S.-Armenia bilateral trade amounted to more than \$134 million.

The United States can and should continue to heighten its activities in promoting and facilitating U.S. direct foreign investment, trade and economic development in Armenia. Extending permanent normal trade relations to Armenia will not only enhance trade and investment between the United States and Armenia, but will also strengthen a strong relationship between our two nations.

For these reasons, the Armenian Assembly strongly supports the extension of PNTR treatment to the products of Armenia. We offer these comments solely on behalf of the Armenian Assembly of America and no other client, person, or organization.

Sincerely,

Hirair Hovnanian
Chairman, Board of Trustees

Peter Vosbikian
Chairman, Board of Directors

Armenian National Committee of America
Glendale, California 91206
March 18, 2003

The Honorable Phil Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. Crane,

On behalf of our nation's one and a half million citizens of Armenian heritage, the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) appreciates this opportunity to share with the members of the Trade Subcommittee of the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee our support for granting Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status to Armenia. Our organization and community have expressed support for legislation on this matter, H.R. 528, introduced by Congressmen Joseph Knollenberg and Frank Pallone and cosponsored by over thirty of their U.S. House colleagues.

As members of this esteemed panel are aware, Armenia formally joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) this February. The specific circumstances of Armenia's accession were outlined in the "2003 Trade Policy Agenda and 2002 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program," prepared by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and submitted to the Congress pursuant to Section 163 of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (19 U.S.C. 2213). In this report, the USTR explained that:

Armenia, the fourth of the Republics of the former Soviet Union and the twelfth transforming economy to complete accession negotiations under Article XII of the WTO Agreement, was also able to complete legislative work in 2002. At the time its accession package was approved by the General Council in December 2002, Armenia affirmed that it would not take any direct or indirect action that would impede or slow down the accession process of Azerbaijan to the WTO, nor block the decision-making process concerning the accession of Azerbaijan to the WTO. Prior to General Council approval of the accession package, the United States invoked the non-application provisions of the WTO Agreement contained in Article XIII with respect to Armenia. This was necessary because the United States must retain the right to withdraw "normal trade relations" (NTR) (called "most-favored-nation" treatment in the WTO) for WTO Members that receive NTR with the United States subject to the provisions of the "Jackson-Vanik" clause and the other requirements of Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974. In such cases, the United States and the other country do not have "WTO relations" which, among other things, prevents the United States from bringing a WTO dispute based on a violation by the other country of the WTO or the commitments in its accession package. This brings to six the number of times

since the establishment of the WTO in 1995 that the United States as invoked non-application.

As noted in this report, in its accession package, Armenia agreed to comply with all WTO rules and agreements and made tariff concessions on a most-favored nation (MFN) basis. Armenia's accession represents its commitment to market-oriented economic reform, trade liberalization, and foreign investment. However, as a former member of the Soviet Union, Armenia is subject to the Jackson-Vanik provisions of the 1974 Trade Act and receives MFN treatment from the United States on a conditional basis. As a result, the U.S. invoked its right of non-application at the WTO prior to Armenia's accession, with the result that the WTO agreements do not apply between the U.S. and Armenia until the U.S. grants Armenia PNTR and revokes non-application. Because of this, American businesses cannot take advantage of any of Armenia's WTO concessions or initiate a WTO dispute on any potential violation by Armenia of the WTO rules or its accession commitments.

In order for Armenia's economic growth to continue and for its benefits to reach more people, Armenia needs to increase investment and trade. Armenia is dedicated to expanding its economic relationship with the United States, but, without PNTR, Armenia loses its ability to attract viable export markets in and investment from the United States. At the same time, without PNTR, American entrepreneurs who see Armenia as an emerging economy with potential for investment and trade hesitate to establish ventures that cannot be protected by WTO rules or to import Armenian goods at higher, non-MFN tariff rates.

We believe that it is important that the United States establish PNTR and formalize their WTO relationship with Armenia, a strong friend and ally of the American people. Despite long-standing economic blockades by its neighbors, Armenia has managed to sustain strong levels of economic growth and a commitment to open markets and free trade. Examples of this include the United States—Armenia Agreement on Bilateral Trade Relations in 1992 and Bilateral Investment Treaty in 1996. Last year bilateral trade between the United States and Armenia amounted to more than \$134,200,000. It is our hope in the coming months to build upon the progress we have already made by encouraging even greater economic cooperation through the negotiation of a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, a Bilateral Tax Treaty, and a Social Security Agreement, among others.

In closing, we want to share with you the importance we attach to the role the United States has played as the driving force and champion of the rules-based trading system of the WTO. It is our hope that the United States will continue in this proud tradition by extending PNTR to Armenia, and, accordingly, we respectfully encourage the Congress to approve PNTR for Armenia at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

Aram S. Hamparian
Executive Director

Woodbridge, Virginia 22193
March 20, 2003

To: Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United States Senate.

Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives.

E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov

Fax: (202) 225-2610

Date: March 20, 2003

Honorable:

As American citizen, I am asking for your support for granting normal trade relations status (NTR) to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

This small, landlocked country of Laos was never at war with the United States, but was heavily bombed because it was next to Vietnam. Diplomatic relations between the United States and Laos were never severed, unlike other nations in the region. Truly, Laos is a bit player in this South East Asian economic show, but why make it even more difficult for them to develop market economy.

I'm not the type of person who believes that we owe Laos something. Granting of the NTR costs us nothing. This isn't a monetary gift; it's a chance for them to attract US business and investment. NTR will help improving standard of living for one of the poorest countries in the world.

I therefore, support the joint proposal of Honorable Colin Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert Zoellick of the USTR, for granting NTR to Laos.

It is my sincere hope that you will support the said proposal and help granting NTR to Laos.

Sincerely,

Mark Armstrong

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Association Boun enfants des rizières
13012 Marseille, France

To: Honourable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, House of representatives

Honourable Philip M. Crane,

The members of our association formed by lao expatriats from France, "Boun enfant des rizières", a humatarian non governmental organisation, we would like to support the approval of of the bilateral agreement between the Lao's people democratic republic and the United states of America on trade relations with NTR.

Mme Boun Siyavong
présidente

Charlotte, Vermont 05445

Dear Congressman Crane,

I am writing to support normal trade relations (NTR) with the Lao Democratic People's Republic, Laos.

I am just completing a two-week stay in northern and central Laos, a country to which I was attracted by its rich cultures and its remoteness. But there is not romance in stark poverty. We spent the night in a Khmu village, a half day's walk from the nearest town. A few solar lights and a gas-powered rice thresher are its only concessions to the modern world. A health care worker visits monthly. Villages grow vegetables and rice and raise cows, pigs, and chicken. The rise at dawn to fetch water, bathe and do laundry in the river—where they also fish. There is no sanitation of any kind in the village of 135. In Laos, one in five children dies before age five.

Land-locked and surrounded by fast-growing economies in China, Vietnam, Thailand, and even the weaker Cambodia and Myanmar—all of which enjoy NTR, Laos has virtually no serious economy. With no revenue, the government cannot provide even the most basic services: education, healthcare, roads, electricity, safe drinking water.

The Lao government is cooperating with the United States on its POW/MIA accounting even as tons of unexploded ordnance dropped by American bombers continue to injure scores of Lao each year. Laos is one of only two countries in the world—joined only by Cuba and North Korea, without NTR, a situation impossible to justify. In February, 2003, Us Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and Secretary of State Colin Powell summarized, "The Administration believes that extending NTR to Laos will create a more cooperative atmosphere and opportunities that will help open the society and leverage our efforts to improve human rights, religious freedom and rule of law in Laos.

I strongly encourage you to approve NTR for Laos.

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth Bassett

Washington, D.C. 20009

The Honorable Philip Roth, Chair of Sub-Committee on Trade
The House Committee on Ways and Means

Dear Chairman Roth:

It is important for the United States and Laos to enjoy normal trade relations. It is the wish of the Administration and would fulfill the 1997 bi-lateral trade agreement between our two nations.

My family and I have enjoyed traveling in Laos. We know many people, including Lao-American friends, who wish the U.S. to have a stronger relationship with Laos. It is a beautiful country with gracious people. Normal trade relations would allow opportunities for business and greater cultural exchange with Laos.

Diplomatic ties have never been broken between the United States and Laos. Laos is a member of ASEAN. Lack of normal trade relations now seems an oversight that must be remedied.

Thank you for your attention to our interest in NTR status for Laos.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Benson

Ti M. Beri
Falls Church, Virginia 22043
April 6, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane

Re: Extension of Normal Trading Relations Status to Laos

Dear Congressman Crane:

I write to you to express my support for the extension of Normal Trading Relations ("NTR") with the Lao People's Democratic Republic ("Laos"). I was dismayed to learn recently that Laos remains one of only three countries subject to column 2 (non-NTR) tariff rates in the Harmonized Tariff Schedule. Laos suffered heavily during the difficult years of the Vietnam War, having earned the dubious distinction of being one of the most heavily bombed nations in the world. The United States government was not blameless for the difficulties that Laos faced both during that conflict and following American withdrawal from the region.

While Laos remains one of the world's poorest countries, the Laotian government has taken halting steps to both repair its image and integrate the country into the world's trading networks. In 1997 Laos joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ("ASEAN") and has already begun negotiations to join the World Trade Organization ("WTO"). Extending NTR status to Laos would encourage these efforts by providing an olive branch in support of the government's reform efforts, providing incentives to further shift the country from the command economy it has known in the past. In addition this modest extension on the part of the United States would fulfill the promise of the 1997 bilateral trading agreement negotiated between the United States and Laos.

Extending NTR status would be in the interests of both the United States and Laos. By opening much needed trade between the two countries, the United States would be closing the book on a difficult chapter in American history, in particular the tumultuous period of the 1960s-1970s in which Laos became a battleground for forces larger than itself. Increased trade would stimulate the Laotian economy that has already seen tremendous growth since the country joined ASEAN. Laos would quickly become a more attractive place for U.S. investment, a development that could help tap much of the nation's potential resources. In addition, increased trade would provide legitimate sources of income to a population that all too often must turn to the illicit trade in both human trafficking and narcotics to make a living.

In the past some commentators have argued that the extension of NTR status would exacerbate the human rights situation in Laos. In reality, the extension of NTR status, coupled with American support for Laos's further integration into multilateral organizations such as the WTO and ASEAN will provide incentives to the Laotian government to improve its human rights record as it faces greater scrutiny under the lens of its trading partners. In addition, lest this government forget, the United States is hardly blameless for the treatment received by the Hmong following American withdrawal from Southeast Asia in the late 1970s (one of the largest outstanding human rights issues facing Laos). By extending NTR status, the United States will be providing a much needed signal that the U.S. is willing to work with the government of Laos to address concerns and build a bridge underpinned with mutual respect and understanding. By promoting trade between the two nations, increased cultural exchange will inevitably take place. It is this exchange that will help the Hmong-American community reconnect and advocate directly with the Laotian government. In addition, as one of the hundreds of thousands of Laotian-Americans living in the United States, I know personally that

there exists a large desire among the Laotian-American community to see increased ties between the U.S. and Laos in order to promote and enhance significant reform within Laos. I am hopeful that increased economic ties will bring increased understanding that will help address human rights issues, poverty, and the attendant social problems that stem from Laos's economic situation.

Should this Congress see fit to extend NTR status, it will see a number of individuals, particularly among the Laotian-American community willing to go about the work of ensuring that the new economic ties benefit both countries. Products of Laos would soon find their place alongside products of Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore on American store shelves. In addition, the large infrastructure needs of Laos would become attractive investments for American enterprise that could benefit from the ability to export products to Laos and re-export products manufactured in Laos to the U.S.

For these reasons, I urge this Congress to approve NTR status for Laos, an endeavor that is long overdue. Both nations will benefit by increasing their economic ties, and extending American trading relations into the Southeast Asian region.

Respectfully submitted,

Ti M. Beri

Long Island City, New York 11109

I am writing to voice my support for Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos, one of the world's least developed countries. I ask that the legislature pass the necessary legislation to extend NTR to Laos and bring into force the bilateral trade agreements concluded in 1997.

NTR will benefit both the US and Laos. Increased trade between our two countries will lead to greater economic opportunities and swifter economic development in Laos, directly improving people's lives and living standards and also reinforcing the alternative economic development opportunities in anti-narcotics efforts. Greater cultural and human cooperation will encourage more openness, which I believe will accelerate the positive changes achieved over the past few years.

Laos is a member of ASEAN, an organization with which the US is working to strengthen regional stability as part of the ASEAN Initiative. As such, Laos should have the benefit of NTR as does its neighbors and fellow ASEAN members. And normalized trade relations with the US will be a big first step to further integrate Laos into the world trade system.

Thank you.

Marvin Berk

Belleville, Michigan 48111
April 8, 2003

To: Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United States Senate.

Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means.
Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee

E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov

Fax: (202) 225-2610

Honorable,

As an American Citizen, I wholeheartedly support the joint proposal of Honorable Colin L. Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert B. Zoellick, US Trade Representative, for granting the Permanent Normal Trade Relations to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Lao PDR is the only country in the area that hasn't got such facility yet although its Politico-Social situations are far better than others.

I should appreciate if you could take the said proposal and my noble wish in consideration and render to Laos the fairness and real touch of the US generosity.

Once again I thank you for your kind cooperation

Sincerely yours,

Gary Lee Bledowski

Fresno, California 93727
 3April 16, 2003

The Honorable Chairman Williams Thomas
 And Congressional members of the Ways and Means Committee
 2208 Rayburn HOB
 Washington, D.C. 20515-0522
 Re: Granting of Normal Trade Relations to Laos

Dear Chairman Thomas,

My name is Sam Thowsao Bliatout, a private US citizen who came to this country from Laos via refugee camp of Thailand in 1976. Graduated with Ph. D. in business administration in 1987, and currently owned a shopping center in Fresno, California, taking initiative and serve as chairman for economic development project on Southeast Fresno/Southeast Asian, funded by the city of Fresno, Vice-President of API Republican Coalition for the State of California. Also, in collaboration with the international business team I had made frequent flying to Southeast Asia for the last 12 years to do business consulting, specifically for Thailand and Laos and therefore I am writing this letter to request that NTR be granted to Laos for future sake of the poor Laotian citizens. Please do not allow this matter be interfered by conditions set by few small group of Laotian overseas political organizations as will cripple millions of their own citizen back home rather than do any good.

We realize that problems such as human rights and democracy are existed, but not only Laos. As such, we should not take a small claim made by few small factions into consideration and penalize Laos for what they have been working hard to improve it. Within the Laotian's educational background and management capacities they have tried their best to adapt to the world by adjusting much of their rules and regulations for economic revitalization while improving human rights activities on the other hand. As an economic consultant in the region for over ten years I am confident enough that human rights and democracy will definitely follow when sufficient education and health care are properly provided, and by granting NTR to Laos I believe will be a major step toward achieving it.

Despite the many negative issues voiced out by some political factions I have seen that Laos had been improving tremendously for the last ten years such as new construction can be seen almost every corner of the country, pave road and other communication systems are well connected, banking and business development gradually spread throughout the nation. With NTR in place, economic development in Laos will undoubtedly catching up with its neighboring countries, such as Vietnam, China and Thailand. Lastly, I believe that it is part of this country's responsibility as the superpower nation to ensure equal access and services offer to our friends who are trying hard toward reaching our goals of promoting democracy and equality. I pledge that you vote "YES" to NTR for Laos at the United States Congress. If I can be of assistance to this matter, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

Sam T. Bliatout, Ph.D.

Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104

Granting Normal Trade Relation to Lao P.D.R. is a Moral Obligation

The Honorable
 Charles B. Rangel
 Committee on Ways and Means,
 House of Representatives

Dear Congressman Rangel:

On April 21, 2003, the Lao-American community seeks your support for extending normal trade relations (NTR) status to Laos. This will bring into force the comprehensive bilateral trade agreement that the United States concluded with Laos in 1997.

Laos has been unfairly denied NTR status in the past due to the legacy of the Indochina War. Those who oppose NTR for Laos are mostly former military officials who oppose anything that would strengthen the tie between Laos and the US. They are claiming genocide and ethnic cleansing in the country. On the contrary, according to Ambassador Wartwick, there is no evidence to support these claim. Their accusation is motivated by their bitterness that they can't let go due to the legacy of

the Indochina War. Most of Lao-Americans, especially the younger generation, would rather to move on and see that the two countries strengthen their ties.

I have traveled to Laos five times in the last five years and visited extensively thorough out the country. Laos has suffered tremendously because of the Indochina War. Hundreds and thousand of men, women and children still die each year due to the unexploded cluster bombs that the US dropped between 1964 and 1973. Lao people have suffered enough, however, they are every humble, generous and willing to move on. They deserve US economic involvement. The US has a moral obligation to improve tie with Laos and provide assistance to its development.

Unlike Vietnam and Cambodia, Laos is the only Indochina country that has maintained unbroken ties with the US through the Indochina War and its aftermath. Laos has been providing a tremendous support to the US on the issues of POW search and narcotic control. Laos has also become a great support on counter-terrorism after the September 11, 2001 incident. And yet, Laos is the only Indochina country that US has not granted NTR. This is morally wrong. Please vote for NTR for Laos. It is the only right thing to do.

Sonelay Boualouang
Lao-American Community

Dallas, Texas 75206
April 21, 2003

To: Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee,
E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
Fax: (202) 225-2610

Honorable Crane:

This letter is in strong support of granting normal traderelation status (NTR) to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos). After more than twenty years in their new country, many Laotian-Americans still have a need for goods and services that used to be part of their daily lives back in their motherland. These goods, which include arts and crafts, agricultural products and canned food items, are unavailable to Laotian-Americans here in the United States. Many Laotian-American entrepreneurs see this as a promising job and business opportunity. Granting NTR status to Laos will allow these entrepreneurs to pursue their ideas.

American businesses will also benefit from granting of NTR. Currently, US have a very small business establishment in Laos, compares to China, Thailand, and Japan. NTR will encourage and allow a greater presence of US companies in this country. Laos has established itself to become an important market for US goods and services when it joined the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) in 1997. The United States Government should help American companies grab a bigger share of this market by granting NTR status.

NTR status will help strengthen good understanding between the governments and peoples of the United States and Laos. Cooperation on POW/MIA, narcotics control and terrorist issues indicate that Laos is committed to building a better relationship with the United States. Granting NTR status will demonstrate that the United States is also committed.

I appreciate very much a joint proposal of Honorable Colin Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert Zoellick of the USTR, for granting NTR to Laos.

I should appreciate if you could kindly support the proposal in granting NTR to Laos.

Sincerely,

Prasith Sid Bounsouaysana

Arlington, VA 22204

Congressman Philip M. Crane
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Fax: 202-225-2610

Re: Granting Laos NTR

Dear Congressman Crane:

As a concerned Lao-American, I am compelled to help my country build a competitive economy and I believe granting Laos normalized trade relations (NTR) is one of them. Laos had suffered tremendously and it will get worse without the immediate lending hands of the U.S. Currently, almost half of the population live under poverty while the rest of the world is developing at a great rate. We cannot blindly turn our backs against them and let them die because I truly believe we can save them, however big or small. The US is the most compassionate and generous nation on this earth and by giving Laos a chance, it will be able to stand up on its own one day. Without NTR, Laos will not only collapse economically, but socially and politically as well.

If you don't believe me, please go to Laos and see the reality of life with your own eyes. You'll see how sick and starving the people have become. They desperately need to be rescued and fed. By granting Laos NTR, the US will help the country and the people build better lives. It's indispensable that this action be taken now before it's too late.

Thank you immensely for your attention and I look forward to seeing you granting Laos NTR in the near future.

Regards,

Anola Boutah
Personnel Analyst

South Riping, Virginia 20152
April 5, 2003

To: Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United States Senate.

Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means.
Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee,

E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
Fax: (202) 225-2610

Honorable:

This letter is in strong support of granting normal trade relation status (NTR) to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos).

After more than twenty years in their new country, many Laotian-Americans still have a need for goods and services that used to be part of their daily lives back in their motherland. These goods, which include arts and crafts, agricultural products and canned food items, are unavailable to Laotian-Americans here in the United States. Many Laotian-American entrepreneurs see this as a promising job and business opportunity. Granting NTR status to Laos will allow these entrepreneurs to pursue their ideas.

American businesses will also benefit from granting of NTR. Currently, US have a very small business establishment in Laos, compares to China, Thailand, and Japan. NTR will encourage and allow a greater presence of US companies in this country. Laos has established itself to become an important market for US goods and services when it joined the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) in 1997. The United States Government should help American companies grab a bigger share of this market by granting NTR status.

NTR status will help strengthen good understanding between the governments and peoples of the United States and Laos. Cooperation on POW/MIA, narcotics control and terrorist issues indicate that Laos is committed to building a better relationship with the United States. Granting NTR status will demonstrate that the United States is also committed.

I appreciate very much a joint proposal of Honorable Colin Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert Zoellick of the USTR, for granting NTR to Laos.

I should appreciate if you could kindly support the proposal in granting NTR to Laos.

Sincerely,

Caristan Braun

California-Asia Business Council (Cal-Asia)
Alameda, California 94501
April 17, 2003

Letter in support of Normal Trade Relations with Laos:
To the Chairman
House Ways and Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC
Electronically to: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
By fax to: (202) 225-2610

Sir:

The California-Asia Business Council has steadfastly supported commerce between California and Asian nations throughout its 32-year history.

At this time, we ask the House of Representatives to favorably consider granting Normal Trade Relations to the People's Democratic Republic of Laos. We understand that US Trade Representative Zoellick and Secretary of State Powell have written to the House Ways and Means Committee in support of Lao NTR.

Normal trade relations with Laos will positively affect economic development in Laos and thus benefit the people of Laos. The relative size of the two economies means that the reduction of tariffs implicit in NTR will hardly be felt by the U.S. However, the message NTR sends to the world could not be more relevant. Namely, trade brings peoples of the world together and we wish our relationships with every legitimate nation to be one of mutual respect.

Our continuing liberalization of trade relations with Vietnam serves to illustrate the importance of such action.

Jeremy W. Potash,
Executive Director,
California-Asia Business Council

Big Lake, Minnesota 55309
April 20, 2003

To:
United States Congress
House of Representatives
Ways and Means Committee
Subject: Establishment of Normal Trade Relations with the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR)

Dear Sirs:

We are writing in support of the legislation the will acted upon shortly concerning the establishment of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with the LPDR. We support this action.

As stated recently by the United States ambassador to Laos, this country is one of only four that do not benefit by NTR status. Based on statements by our ambassador we see no reason to continue to exclude LPDR from trade with the United States.

The United States has many people from Laos living within its borders. Better trade relations would allow them to buy items from their homeland at an affordable rate. Many of these people once assisted our government during its conflict in Southeast Asia. For various reasons they had to leave their homeland and it only seems fair that they be able to have contact with their culture by having realistic access to products from Laos.

Laos is a poor country. Yearly income for many of its people is measured in hundreds of dollars. Establishing better trade relations would improve the economic future of the people of Laos.

Critics of the NTR point to human rights violations by the LPDR. While this should be a concern, it should not be a reason to deny NTR status to the LPDR. The United States has trade relations with many counties that have abysmal human rights records. One needs only to look at the Middle East for these examples of abuse.

Critics want to deny NTR because the government of Laos is communist. During the cold war we engaged in trade with many communist governments, including our great nemesis the Soviet Union. We currently trade with many communist coun-

tries, including China, Vietnam and Cambodia. The cold war is over, its time to treat Laos as we would any other country.

Good trade relations can go a long way towards improving the lives of the people of Laos. To this end we urge you to support the establishment of Normal Trade Relations with the LPDR.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

Mark and Janice Carroll

Caterpillar Asia
Singapore 627968

The Honorable Phillip Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
House Ways & Means Committee

Dear Chairman Crane:

On behalf of Caterpillar Asia, I would like to urge you to move forward to pass Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos.

We are well aware that NTR with Laos has been strongly endorsed by Secretary of State Powell and U.S. Trade Representative Zoellick. Laos NTR is important to our company for the following reasons:

– Laos is a member of the ten country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) group—ASEAN is America's third largest overseas market; our trade with ASEAN contributes nearly 800,000 high paying U.S. export jobs; and, American companies have tremendous equity in the region as its top investor.

– Passing NTR for Laos is a key step to building the foundation for moving forward with the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI) which was announced by President Bush on October 26, 2003 at APEC in Los Cabos, Mexico. Engaging ASEAN through the EAI is an important step for U.S. competitiveness in this key market. As you know, China is moving forward with negotiations for a China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and Japan and Europe are also beginning to implement similar frameworks with ASEAN.

– The Administration and U.S. Embassy in Vientiane report that Laos is showing signs of moving forward on key areas of past concern as we enhance engagement with the country. These areas, including religious freedom, human rights and economic reform are highlighted in the Administration's letter to you recommending moving forward on Laos NTR.

– This legislation will allow U.S. companies to have enhanced protection for trademarks and investment in Laos and ASEAN.

For all these reasons, I hope that the House Subcommittee on Trade will move forward with NTR for Laos as soon as possible. This would be considered a positive step forward for U.S. leadership on trade in Asia, and particularly in the ASEAN region.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Mark Schoeneman
General Manager/Director
Caterpillar Asia

CFCO International
Washington, D.C. 20006
April 21, 2003

The Hon Phil Crane
Chairman
US House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Trade
Washington DC 20515

Dear Congressman Crane:

Congressional authorization of Normal Trade Relations for Laos is doing the right thing, because it is the right thing to do!

The official US conflict in Indo-China is long over, as is the American Secret War in Laos.

Vietnam, China, Burma and Cambodia, each have secured NTR agreements with the United States; while for many years Laos has been systematically used as a political football by a few US Representatives and Senators, and right wing factions in our country.

In brief, the American legacy in Laos is shameful and indefensible. Its recurring negative impact on some of the world's most impoverished people is still relatively unknown, e.g. thousands of children and adults have been killed or maimed through UXO contact in over 40% of the landmass of Laos; Agent Orange and other killer herbicides/pesticides have contaminated huge areas of the country; until September 11, 2001, there were systematic terrorist activities, encouraged by Lao-American extremists, directed at destabilizing civil society and replacing the sovereign Lao PDR government.

Your Congressional colleagues and you have a real opportunity to help right an American geopolitical wrong, through prompt legislative action on the amendment of the Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) to strike Laos from General Note 3(B) and grant NTR status to this ASEAN nation.

In doing so, you will be striking a blow for freedom for 5.5 million Laotians whose lives will be enriched through a strengthening of the US-Lao bilateral relationship and promotion of a US foreign policy of constructive engagement that builds bridges, not walls, and encourages long term democratic, humanitarian and economic reforms.

President Bush, Secretary Powell, Ambassador Zoellick and the Administration are on record as supporting NTR, and also World Trade Organization membership, for Laos. It will send a powerful positive signal to Americans, and the international community, to have decisive Congressional action on the granting of NTR status for Lao PDR.

CFCO is the American representative for the Nam Theun 2 Electricity Consortium that is developing the \$1.1 billion NT2 hydroelectric project in Laos. The US partner on this international private public partnership project is MWH Global Inc., whose Chicago subsidiary is Harza Engineering. The US contract and fees component of NT2 is approximately \$250 million and has job ramifications for the company's operations in Illinois. The project is contingent upon a World Bank partial risk guarantee and financing and will have a major impact on poverty alleviation, environmental/social safeguards, civil society, fiscal transparency and long term democratic reforms in Laos. For further information, please access the NT2 website at www.namtheun2.com

CFCO has a good working relationship with the Lao PDR and Thai Ambassadors to the US, Ambassador Doug Hartwick, US Ambassador to Laos, Bush Administration, Congressional, NGO, public policy and Laotian American sources supportive of NTR for Laos. We have helped mobilize a private, public and voluntary sector lobby to encourage Congressional passage of NTR for Laos and many of our contacts have submitted written statements for the record.

Attached is a May 23, 2002 speech given in the US House of Representatives on, "The relationship of sustainable economic development to poverty alleviation, social/civil reforms, reconciliation and environmental protection, in Laos" at a National Laotian-American Symposium on United States-Laos relations. It underscores the importance of the potential that NTR has to positively impact the lives of many Laotians, encourage free enterprise and expanded two way trade between the US and Lao PDR.

Thank you for your leadership on this important legislative action.

With every good wish for continued success.

Sincerely,

Tony R. Culley-Foster
President

Tony R. Culley-Foster, BA, ACP, TD, MA
President, CFCO International
Washington, DC

International business consultant and lobbyist on behalf of European-American multinational companies with investment, trade, manufacturing, or service industry interests in the United States.

Involved with EU-US senior executives in business management, government relations and corporate communications strategic matters related to international commercial priorities in North America.

Management advice and support services on business development, regulatory, legislative, lobby, contract bid, sales, economic development, public relations and communications priorities in national, State and municipal markets.

Development and implementation of EU–US strategic and tactical business plans, involving representatives of the White House, Cabinet agencies, Congress of the United States, States, municipalities, World Bank, Overseas Private Investment Corporation, trade associations, European-American corporations and US media.

Utilization of extensive business, government and voluntary sector contacts throughout Europe and North America to advance joint venture, strategic alliances, technology transfer, economic development, trade and investment priorities.

Former Founding Director and Chief Executive of the Congressional Award, Washington DC; the American counterpart of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Reported to the leadership of the Congress of the United States and a 33 person Board of Directors composed of distinguished American corporate, labor, government, education and civic leaders.

Former Personal Assistant to W. Clement Stone, Chairman and Founder of Combined Insurance Company of America (now AON Corporation, a \$10 Billion Chicago-based, multinational financial services company).

Founding Chairman, Northern Ireland Partnership—USA and the Northern Ireland—United States Chamber of Commerce Inc. Involved with US-EU private, public and voluntary sector leaders on peace, economic development, trade, investment, education and cultural projects involving Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Professional profiles in Who's Who in: The World; America; Leaders in Finance & Industry; and Emerging Leaders in the United States.

Numerous commendations from government, business and civic leaders in the United States, Ireland and the United Kingdom for voluntary service, private sector initiatives and corporate social responsibility leadership.

Born in Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

Educated in the United Kingdom, Ireland and the United States.

NATIONAL LAOTIAN-AMERICAN SYMPOSIUM

ON

UNITED STATES-LAOS RELATIONS

Panel presentation on

“THE RELATIONSHIP OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION, SOCIAL/CIVIL REFORMS, RECONCILIATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, IN LAOS.”

The Gold Room, Rayburn House Office Building

United States House of Representatives

Thursday May 23, 2002

12:00 pm–1:00 pm

Comments by:

Tony R. Culley-Foster

President, CFCO International &

Nam Theun 2 Electricity Consortium

US Representative

Thanks for the opportunity to share some perspectives on the relationship of sustainable economic development to poverty alleviation, social/civil reforms, reconciliation and environmental protection in Laos.

During the past 13 months, **CFCO International** has been privileged to be the **United States representative for the Nam Theun 2 Electricity Consortium (NT2)**.

The proposed \$1.1 billion infrastructure investment in Laos is being developed by a **French-American-Thai-Laotian international private public partnership**, whose goal is to build, own, operate and transfer (to Government of Lao ownership) an international best practice hydroelectric dam (see NT2 power project attach-

ment). The project has the support of the President of Lao PDR, the Prime Minister of Thailand and the President of France.

Sustainable Economic Development

Laos is one of the world's poorest developing nations and the only member of ASEAN that does not have Normal Trade Relations with the United States. As a landlinked nation, it has focused on strengthening its bilateral relationships with Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, China, and others in the international community; plus development of its two principal natural resources, **timber and hydropower. Controlled exploitation of these commercial resources is the only viable economic development alternative for Lao PDR and a means to earn much-needed foreign currency.** The GOL has wisely chosen sustainable long-term hydroelectric export production, over massive unsustainable logging of some of the most pristine and biodiversity-rich rainforest in SE Asia.

Poverty Alleviation

During 2001, the GOL, IMF and World Bank developed a comprehensive **Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility** program that was originally linked to NT2. It was deemed so important to the nation, and its overall development program, that the PRGF will be implemented regardless of the NT2 outcome. However, in conjunction with NT2, the poverty fund impact will be much more significant, pervasive and long-term for the people of Laos.

Unless Laos has a stronger, self-sustaining economy, it will be unable to fund, support or maintain long-term poverty alleviation and improved social/civil society reform programs. The substantial hydroelectric export revenues that will result from NT2, over the next 30 years, constitute a sizeable percentage of Lao's GDP and will be efficiently managed; due to the stringent provision of the GOL Financial Management conditionality. The enforcement mechanism ensures that funds can ONLY be allocated to specific sustainable development priorities.

Social/Civil Reforms

A 25/30 year project of the magnitude of NT2 is recognized by the Lao PDR, international community, and multilateral agencies, as providing economic growth and national stability that will be the foundation for long-term social and civil reforms in Lao PDR. NT2 can be the financial catalyst for a progressive reform movement as the project development process and GOL negotiations with the World Bank, IMF and NTEC have resulted in increased fiscal conditionality, governmental oversight and societal transparency provisions.

Reconciliation

Laos has 67 ethnic groups represented in its national population of 5.2 million, of whom 500,000, or approximately 10%, are Hmong.

The Cold War and Indo-China conflict are long over. Lao PDR is a sovereign nation with full recognition and representation in ASEAN and the United Nations. Vietnam, Cambodia and China have reconciled past differences with the US; Laos needs the politics of inclusion, not exclusion; foreign policy bridges not walls, and dams not damnation, to assist its transition to a more representative democratic nation.

Since September 11, that ethos has become even more compelling, with the movement toward stronger bilateral relations between the United States and its allies in the international war on terrorism. **Laos is one of those allies** and since September 13 has had a new American Ambassador to facilitate 'bridge building' between the two countries. Reconciliation between the leaders of the American-Hmong community and the Lao PDR government will be facilitated by economic stability, related social/civil reforms, poverty alleviation and environmental protection from sustainable development projects like NT2. It will happen when each of the groups takes **'real risks for reconciliation'** and there is a **stronger US-Lao PDR bilateral relationship.**

Environmental Protection

NT2 meets or exceeds the social safeguards and environmental protection standards advocated by the World Commission on Dams. It has established an **international best practice benchmark of excellence for a hydroelectric project** that other development groups will attempt to emulate, globally. The net social and environmental offsets of NT2 substantially outweigh the inevitable impact of siting a major dam anywhere in the world.

(Please note the **attached March 2002 "Interim Report of the International Environmental and Social Panel of Experts"** for further details on the NT2 social and environmental priorities).

Summary

In April 2002, the Inaugural Session of the Vth Legislature of the Lao PDR National Assembly noted in Resolution #6 that:

“The session deliberated and endorsed the Theun II Hydropower Project Plan proposed by the Government. The session concluded the shared view that the project plan is the Government’s priority program and is of high socio-economic efficiency meeting the national strategic plan to poverty reduction of pluri-ethnic people, providing solid foundation in turning the country to industrialization and modernization, responding to actual needs of people inhabited in the project area.”

During this past year, I have had the privilege of meeting Lao PDR leadership representatives and many Laotians in Laos and the United States. I have also spent time in Vientiane and on the Nakai Plateau, especially with the people whose lives and land would be most impacted by the development of NT2. It has been a profoundly moving experience and has deepened my desire to increase international private, public and voluntary (NGO) support for NT2 as a sustainable economic development project to benefit all the people of Laos and strengthen the US-Laos bilateral relationship.

I appreciate the opportunity to be part of this inaugural Symposium and will be pleased to answer any questions on the **Nam Theun 2 Electricity Consortium** advocacy for establishment of the NT2 hydroelectric dam in Laos.

Warrensburg, Missouri 64093
April 21, 2003

Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade
Ways and Means Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Fax: 202-225-2610

Dear Chairman Crane,

We support Normal Trade Relations (NTR) between the U.S. and the Lao PDR and urge your subcommittee and the 108th Congress to approve and bring into force the Bilateral Trade Agreements concluded in 1997.

Each of us base the following comments on over 25 years of professional experience in socio-economic development and democratic governance in the Lao PDR. In particular, since 1978, we have lived and worked in the Lao PDR, either full time or part time, working with numerous international, bilateral and NGO assistance organizations. We have followed Lao-U.S. relations closely. On one occasion, we provided expert testimony on the MIA-POW situation in the Lao PDR at the request of the Senate MIA-POW Sub-committee. We have worked on development projects or done research in all provinces of the country. Much of our work has focused on remote districts, which continue to face the post-war consequences of unexploded weapons and chemical and biological weapons and socio-economic disruptions. We have performed research and have written extensively on the issues of rural socio-economic development, minority rights, ethnic sensitivity, gender equity, the status of children and families, democratic rights, good governance and participatory development.

From our extensive work, we maintain that the Lao PDR has made significant progress since 1990 in the following areas:

1) The Lao Government has **steadily improved bilateral cooperation with the U.S. government**, especially on POW-MIA investigations and the drug eradication. Therefore, we agree with the recent positive assessments of our Defense and State Departments on these points.

2) The Lao Government has **joined ASEAN in 1997 and is now preparing to integrate its economy into the world trade system**. The regional and international experience is positively exposing Lao officials to practical lessons on establishing democratic governance and open trade processes.

3) The Lao Government is **gradually improving its policies and practices on several critical human rights issues** including religious rights, gender equity issues, and intensifying assistance to the poorest segments of society. We would agree with the State Department’s assessment that, at this time, there is no evidence of genocide or ethnic cleansing of any non Tai-Lao ethnic people. Many of the current inadequacies on human rights (low education levels, poor enforcement and

incarceration processes, for example), can be attributed to the general under-development of the nation as whole, rather than to purposeful negative policies. Therefore, the Lao PDR's low levels of institutional and human resource development would benefit greatly from exposure to international experiences, training and support from country such as the United States.

4) The Lao Government, according to international development reports, is making **progress on many socio-economic development issues**. The Asian Development Bank, for example, contends that over the past ten years, the Lao PDR has progressed well on its targets for reaching the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015.

- The country has a favorable chance of reducing by half of its 1990 level the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day. The poverty incidence has dropped from 45% in 1992/92 to 39% in 1997/98.
- Net primary enrollment is gradually increasing (62% in 1990 to 78% in 2001). "Full primary enrollment should be possible by 2011. Less certain is the MDG that all girls and boys will complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. Girls make up 45% of primary school enrollment, making it possible to reach gender equality by 2015.
- The infant mortality goal of a two-thirds reduction can be achieved as the rate has already dropped from 110 per 1,000 in 1990 to 75 per 1,000 in 2000.
- Likewise, child mortality has decreased by more than half, 170 per 1,000 in 1990 to 97 in 2000.
- Reducing by one-half the number of people without safe drinking water can be met as access to clean water has gone from 39% in 1990 to 58% in 2000.

5) The Lao Government is making step-by-step **progress in addressing issues related to Good Governance and Participatory Development**. On these subjects, we have recently conducted research, commissioned by Sida, the Swedish government's foreign assistance cooperation agency. As the 90-page study on Good Governance and Participatory Development has just been finalized in mid-April 2003, we submit the conclusion for your consideration. (See next page.)

Submitted by

Jacquelyn Chagnon
Independent Development Consultant

Reverend Roger Rumpf
Consultant on Peace and Post-War Reconstruction

Excerpt from:

Back to See Forward; Consultations about Good Governance and Participatory Development in the Lao PDR (Sida, Vientiane, April 2003) by Jacquelyn Chagnon, Dirk Van Gansberghe, Roger Rumpf, and Binh Vongphasouk.

(Each member of the study team (three internationals, including ourselves, and one Lao) has between 12 and 25 years of experience on development in the Lao PDR. The study team investigated these topics through participatory small group consultations and interviews with over 250 citizens and officials in five provinces. The team also reviewed and summarized dozens of reports of the United Nations, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and NGOs.)

In Conclusion

During the last decade, the Lao PDR has established and developed rudimentary institutions for Good Governance and Participatory Development: the Constitution, legal codes, the National Assembly, the judicial branch, research institutes, the national auditing system, tax collection, and enforcement bodies. Citizens are being exposed to participatory development projects, increased media, IT access, and some elements of civil society. The one-party centralized government system clearly has shown its political will on starting the long-term process of Decentralization. Overall, the Study Team determined that **the Lao PDR has taken significant steps forward in establishing new institutions for Good Governance and Participatory Development**.

However, citizen awareness about how these new institutions of governance and development function remains far too low. Few understand how these institutions interlink and interact with each other. Terms such as *Decentralization, democratic elections, the separation of powers, government, accountability, civil service reforms and public information access, and civil society* are rather new to the country's limited number of educated professionals and not well understood yet. For the vast majority of rural people, such concepts have scant meaning yet. To learn about these

concepts of Good Governance and put them into systematic practice within the Lao context will be the challenge of the next few decades.

Here, the growth of Participatory Development practices, which blend naturally into the general socio-cultural framework, appears to be fostering aspects of Good Governance. Within many development projects at all levels, participatory approaches are exposing a growing number of Lao citizens to forms of public consultations and dialogues on planning and implementation, group decision-making, aspects of informed choice, models of good management, and accountability and transparency measures.

There is no question that the government and people face many serious growth challenges during the next decade. Some key issues reviewed in this Study were civil service reforms, enforcement of laws and regulations, equitable service outreach, equitable revenue collection, realistic planning, budgeting and expenditure implementation, improvement to district and village administrations, and enlargement of the civil society framework. As national human and financial resources are limited for addressing many of these issues, international support and opportunities for further learning remain critical.

In the opinion of the Study Team, if the government and people can continue to address these challenges, the Lao PDR has a reasonable chance of strengthening its legs of Good Governance and Participatory Development and moving forward on the path of Democratic Governance.

Alexandria, Virginia 22312
April 15, 2003

To: Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United States Senate.

Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means.
Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee,

E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov

Fax: (202) 225-2610

Honorable:

As American citizen, I am asking for your support for granting normal trade relations status (NTR) to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

This small landlocked country of Laos was never at war with the United States, but was heavily bombed because it was next to Vietnam. Diplomatic relations between the United States and Laos were never severed, unlike other nations in the region. Truly, Laos is a big player in this South East Asian economic show, but why make it even more difficult for them to develop market economy.

I'm not the type of person who believes that we owe Laos something. Granting of the NTR costs us nothing. This isn't a monetary gift; it's a chance for them to attract US business and investment. NTR will help improving standard of living for one of the poorest countries in the world.

I therefore, support the joint proposal of Honorable Colin Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert Zoellick of the USTR, for granting NTR to Laos.

It is my sincere hope that you will support the said proposal and help granting NTR to Laos.

Sincerely,

Vilay Chaleunrath

Jersey City, New Jersey 07302
April 3, 2003

Dear Members of Congress:

I am an American of Laotian descent writing to you from Jersey City of Hudson County, New Jersey 07302.

I am writing to you today in support of this basic humanitarian effort to grant Laos Normal Trade Relations, which similar nations in the region such as Vietnam and Cambodia currently enjoys with the U.S. Laos as you know is the only country in Southeast Asia and member of ASEAN that currently does not have NTR.

The U.S. has afforded my family and I the opportunity to enjoy the freedom and abundant resources of this great nation since our arrival in 1980 as refugees from the Vietnam War and the U.S. Secret War in Laos.

I have learned from history, since my father does not talk about the "WAR", nor have I ever confronted him much about this topic, that my father and Laos fought with the support of the U.S. military in the war against communism waged in Laos and Vietnam.

I ask that you and members of Congress exercise understanding to grant Laos Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with the U.S. giving Laos the same opportunities, privileges, and access to the U.S. markets just like it's neighbors, Vietnam and Cambodia. Without NTR, tariff as high as 80% on Laos goods and services would make it impossible and unprofitable for Laotians entrepreneur and businesses in Laos to export to the U.S.

Laos' current population of 6 million faces many challenges and is one of the poorest countries in the world. The U.S. bombardment of Laos has earned Laos the title of the Most Bombed Nation on Earth. Till this day, some 30 years since the Vietnam War, unexploded ordinance lie infested in the soil across Laos, and innocent children and civilians face death or injuries in the double digits each month. These Bombies (UXO) lying dormant until accidentally triggered presents danger, but also deterring development, investments, and impedes growth in a country that desperately needs it the most.

U.S. Ambassador to Laos, Douglas Hartwick has clearly expressed his public support for NTR for Laos, which would aid Laos to adopt and conform to world standards and rules of engagements in the international market place. Also Laos has expressed their interest in the Market Economy much like how China has embrace the very same idea.

For over 50 years Laos has maintained diplomatic relations with the U.S., however it's neighboring countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia cannot say the same, yet they enjoy normal trade relations with the U.S.

I urge you and members of Congress to grant Laos NTR, the same basic privileges that over 95% of countries in the world presently shares with the U.S.

President Bush has included NTR for Laos as one of his 2003 Initiatives. Congress will have the opportunity to finally ratify the 1997 U.S.-Lao NTR Proposal into law this coming year.

What NTR will mean to the Laotian people are jobs, food, shelter, and improvements in the standard of living. This will create new-found opportunities, potential, and less dependency on neighboring countries.

NTR for Laos would benefit both the U.S. and Laos short and long-term. History supports and indicates that the road towards democracy is enhanced with economic developments.

I believe I speak for the hearts of many of the six hundred thousand or so Lao-tian-Americans, whose voices may have not yet reached your ears. Please focus on the importance of NTR and it's benefits to the PEOPLE of LAOS, Laotian-Americans, and the U.S.

Again, please bless the people of Laos with your generosity and understanding of this very crucial matter they may not all fully understand but would all benefit from the decisions you make here in the U.S. Congress. Thank so much for your time and understanding.

Sincerely,

"Sirch" Sourichanh Chanthyasack

Fact Sheet on US-Lao Relations

March 2002

- The US has had **diplomatic relations** with the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) since its founding in 1975. These relations were not interrupted as in the cases of Vietnam and Cambodia. The current US Ambassador, Douglas Hartwick, arrived in Vientiane in September 2001.
- According to the State Department, international donors and NGOs, the Lao government is cooperating fully on the **search for MIA remains** from the Vietnam War and a **campaign to eradicate narcotics** production and trade in northern Laos. Since September 11, Laos has also aided the US in **counterterrorism** efforts.
- The US currently funds approximately \$10 million per year in MIA recovery, clearance of and education about unexploded ordnance (UXO), and counter-narcotics programs in Laos. The Lao government has also expressed willingness to

cooperate on **HIV-AIDS** and **trafficking of women and children** from Laos to neighboring countries. In FY 2002 Congress appropriated \$2 million for health and economic assistance to Laos, including a silk-production project.

- A US-Lao **bilateral trade agreement** was initialed in 1998 but never signed by the Administration nor ratified by Congress. President Bush has not yet submitted the agreement to Congress for ratification, although it is included in the President's 2001 trade agenda. Unlike its neighbors China and Vietnam, Laos is not subject to Jackson-Vanik waiver requirements.
- Laos is **the only country in Southeast Asia without normal trade relations (NTR)** with the US. The only other countries in the world without NTR are Afghanistan, Cuba, North Korea, and Yugoslavia, none of which has normal diplomatic relations with the US.
- Analysis by Ed Gresser of the Progressive Policy Institute has found that Lao exports to the US face the **highest average tariff rates in the world**: 45.3% in 2001, compared with a global average of 2.4%. Lao exports to the US have declined from \$16.4 million in 1996 to \$3.7 million last year, while Cambodian exports have risen from \$4 million to nearly \$1 billion over the same period due to NTR and a textile agreement.
- The Lao PDR is a **multiethnic state** with a bare majority of ethnic Lao and more than 40 minority groups, the largest being Kam Mou (11%), Phou Thay (10%) and Hmong (7%). Although income and education gaps among regions and ethnic groups can be great, there is no legal discrimination against specific minority groups. Ethnic minorities are represented at all levels of government. More than 80 international development organizations in Laos, including 11 American NGOs, are encouraged to work with all ethnic groups and have access to all parts of the country.
- The US fought a **secret war in Laos** from 1964–1973, the extent of which is still relatively unknown. The legacy of the war includes “bombies” and other UXO as well as herbicides such as Agent Orange. These effects are concentrated in the poorest and most remote areas of the country.
- Approximately **500,000 people of Lao and Hmong descent live in the US** (compared with a total Lao population of 5 million). The Laotian-American community includes a range of views on trade and engagement with Laos. An increasing number of Laotian-Americans are interested in visiting their country of origin and can potentially play a major role in trade, development and reconciliation between the US and Laos.
- Laos continues to have **human rights problems**, like many of its Asian neighbors. International human rights groups do not have access inside Laos. However, some progress has been made in the area of religious freedom through quiet diplomacy. A delegation from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom visited Laos in February, and Ambassador Hartwick has also raised the issue with the Lao government.
- In April 1999, **two Hmong-Americans, Michael Vang and Houa Ly, disappeared** along the northwestern Thai-Lao border. They may have been attempting to enter Laos illegally and were reportedly carrying large amounts of cash, in excess of \$80,000, and connected with insurgency activities. **Two FBI delegations have visited Laos** to investigate the case; the Lao government claims to have no record of the two men entering the country.

We recommend that US policy towards Laos include the following points:

1. The US-Lao Bilateral Trade Agreement should be submitted to Congress and approved as soon as feasible.
2. Americans of Lao and Hmong descent should be able to travel and do business freely with their country of origin.
3. The US should continue dialogue and cooperation with Laos on human rights, including war legacy issues, religious freedom and labor conditions. The US can contribute to solutions through greater engagement, not isolation. Improvements will come with a focus on specific issues and cases, rather than by linking human rights to trade.
4. US-Lao relations should not be held hostage to the unresolved 1999 disappearances case. Resolution of this case is a consular matter with no bearing on trade status. Regardless of what activities Ly and Vang were involved in when they disappeared, however, the US and Laos should continue to investigate the case.

Arguments for Lao NTR

February 2002

1. Fairness. All of Laos's neighbors, including Vietnam, China, Cambodia and Burma, have NTR. There is no reason to single Laos out. Only 6 countries do not have NTR (Afghanistan, Cuba, Libya, Laos, Iraq and North Korea). The other 5 are all on the State Department's list of countries involved in international terrorism. Laos is not.

2. Historical responsibility. The US fought a secret war in Laos from 1964–1973, the extent of which is still relatively unknown. The legacy of the war includes “bombies” and other UXO as well as Agent Orange and other herbicides. Laos deserves at least normal treatment from the US on this basis.

3. Economics. Laos is a poor developing country that needs more contact with the outside world to stay afloat. A more prosperous Laos is in the US interest.

4. Counternarcotics. Passage of the trade agreement is the most cost-effective way to fight opium poppy production, by enabling Lao farmers to produce silk and other products for the US market.

5. Lao-American cultural and business contacts. Americans of Lao descent should be able to travel and do business freely with their country of origin. American veterans are also interested in these opportunities.

Responses to opposing arguments

1. Human rights and religious freedom. Laos does have problems in these areas, as do many of its neighbors. These are legitimate issues for discussion and dialogue with the Lao government. The US can contribute to solutions through greater engagement, not isolation. Improvements will come with cooperation on specific issues and cases, rather than linking human rights to trade.

2. Ly-Vang disappearance case (April 1999). Resolution of this case is a consular matter that should have no bearing on trade status. American citizens go missing all over the world for many reasons. Regardless of what activities Ly and Vang were involved in when they disappeared, the US and Laos should continue to investigate the case.

3. Alleged discrimination towards the Hmong and other ethnic groups. While income and education gaps among regions and ethnicities in Laos can be great, there is no legal discrimination against specific minority groups. The so-called “Hmong lobby” in the US includes remnants of the CIA-backed Hmong insurgency during the war who seek to overthrow the current Lao government or create a separate Hmong state. They do not speak for all Lao and Hmong in the US and routinely intimidate and harass their opponents. Some members may be involved in funding terrorist activities inside Laos.

The fact sheet and argument list were prepared by Andrew Wells-Dang, Washington Representative of the Fund for Reconciliation and Development. Andrew can be reached at washington@ffrd.org.

Americans from
Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam
Statistics
Produced by the
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
(SEARAC)

www.searac.org

January 27, 2003

Southeast Asian American Populations
Individuals Who Reported One or More Ethnic/Racial Designation
(2000 Census Data)

State	Cambodian	Hmong	Laotian	Vietnamese	Total
Alabama	593	11	1,023	5,242	6,869
Alaska	178	321	1,515	1,050	3,064
Arizona	1,406	36	1,243	14,533	17,218
Arkansas	36	33	3,256	4,392	7,717
California	84,559	71,741	65,058	484,023	705,381
Colorado	1,839	3,351	2,543	17,108	24,841
Connecticut	2,790	163	3,267	8,271	14,491
Delaware	36	1	130	893	1,060
DC	47	6	62	2,035	2,150
Florida	3,040	163	4,126	37,086	44,415
Georgia	3,405	1,615	5,220	31,092	41,332
Hawaii	330	22	2,437	10,040	12,829
Idaho	86	45	597	1,511	2,239
Illinois	3,516	604	5,973	21,212	31,305
Indiana	695	172	1,138	5,540	7,545
Iowa	803	303	4,778	7,803	13,687
Kansas	896	1,118	3,926	12,616	18,556
Kentucky	369	17	378	4,019	4,783
Louisiana	450	23	1,511	25,601	27,585
Maine	1,298	3	109	1,571	2,981
Maryland	2,239	15	772	18,086	21,112
Massachusetts	22,886	1,303	4,449	36,685	65,323
Michigan	1,602	5,998	3,846	15,232	26,678

Southeast Asian American Populations—Continued
 Individuals Who Reported One or More Ethnic/Racial Designation
 (2000 Census Data)

State	Cambodian	Hmong	Laotian	Vietnamese	Total
Minnesota	6,533	45,443	11,516	20,570	84,062
Mississippi	78	9	111	5,729	5,927
Missouri	880	26	840	11,654	13,400
Montana	12	229	85	293	619
Nebraska	142	108	1,078	6,755	8,083
Nevada	631	117	1,421	5,428	7,597
New Hampshire	375	21	513	1,900	2,809
New Jersey	868	27	629	16,707	18,231
New Mexico	71	15	457	3,637	4,180
New York	3,740	281	3,715	27,105	34,841
North Carolina	2,681	7,982	6,282	17,142	34,087
North Dakota	50	4	27	560	641
Ohio	3,161	407	3,277	11,219	18,064
Oklahoma	330	579	1,216	13,673	15,798
Oregon	3,173	2,298	5,176	20,709	31,356
Pennsylvania	10,207	844	2,536	33,204	46,791
Rhode Island	5,290	1,112	3,507	1,134	11,043
South Carolina	644	570	1,040	4,758	7,012
South Dakota	84	42	295	708	1,129
Tennessee	1,304	164	4,761	7,739	13,968
Texas	8,225	422	11,626	143,352	163,625
Utah	1,663	190	2,715	6,742	11,310
Vermont	107	5	99	1,080	1,291
Virginia	5,180	55	3,076	40,500	48,811
Washington	16,630	1,485	9,382	50,697	78,194
West Virginia	15	2	40	467	524
Wisconsin	856	36,809	5,405	4,505	47,575
Wyoming	23	0	21	128	172
Totals	206,052	186,310	198,203	1,223,736	1,814,301

Immigrants (Excluding Refugees and Asylees)
Admitted to the U.S. from Southeast Asia,
Fiscal Years 1952 through 2001

Fiscal Years	Cambodia	Laos	Vietnam	Total
1951–1970	96	227	4,675	4,998
1971	21	24	2,038	2,083
1972	39	35	3,412	3,486
1973	66	46	4,569	4,681
1974	40	61	3,192	3,293
1975	98	96	3,039	3,233
1976	126	163	4,230	4,519
1977	126	237	4,629	4,992
1978	*	*	2,892	2,892
1979	*	*	2,065	2,065
1980	148	179	4,510	4,837
1981	113	78	2,238	2,429
1982	129	130	3,030	3,289
1983	163	159	3,275	3,597
1984	193	185	5,203	5,581
1985	198	212	5,120	5,530
1986	9,013	4,239	15,256	28,508
1987	8,494	3,557	11,489	23,540
1988	7,098	6,037	14,231	27,366
1989	4,425	6,973	25,957	37,355
1990	3,577	6,364	37,773	47,714
1991	2,564	5,792	43,939	52,295
1992	878	670	45,580	47,128
1993	831	738	29,365	30,934
1994	847	607	14,027	15,481
1995	1,224	572	13,157	14,953
1996	1,358	692	12,367	14,417
1997	1,475	572	16,222	18,269
1998	1,377	502	12,728	14,607
1999	1,361	471	15,890	17,722

Immigrants (Excluding Refugees and Asylees)—Continued
Admitted to the U.S. from Southeast Asia,
Fiscal Years 1952 through 2001

Fiscal Years	Cambodia	Laos	Vietnam	Total
2000	2,106	672	21,171	23,949
2001	2,398	896	25,180	28,474
Totals	50,582	41,186	412,449	504,217

NOTE: All figures in this table are from the Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, fiscal years 1980 through 2000, except the following: (1) figures for fiscal year 2001 are from the INS website (www.ins.gov); (2) figures for 1978 and 1979 are from Rumbaut (2000: 182). Reliable figures for Cambodia and Vietnam for 1978 and 1979 are unavailable. These figures include Amerasians. Figures for fiscal years 1980 through 2001 have been adjusted to reflect the fact that “immigrant arrival” statistics record the number of people granted “immigrant” (or “permanent resident alien”) status for the given year, and do not represent only new arrivals to the U.S. Figures in this table for the years 1980 through 2001 were derived by subtracting INS “refugee and asylee adjustment” numbers from the “immigrant” numbers.

Sources:

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). 1981–2001. Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (fiscal years 1980–2000). Washington, DC: Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Department of Justice.

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) website: www.ins.gov.

Rumbaut, Rubén G. 2000. Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian Americans. In *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*. Edited by Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood. New York, NY: New York University Press. Pp. 175–206.

Refugee Arrivals to the U.S. From Southeast Asia,

Fiscal Years 1975–2000

Fiscal Year	Cambodia	Laos	Vietnam	Total
1975	4,600	800	125,000	130,400
1976	1,100	10,200	3,200	14,500
1977	300	400	1,900	2,600
1978	1,300	8,000	11,100	20,400
1979	6,000	30,200	44,500	80,700
1980	16,000	55,500	95,200	166,700
1981	38,194	19,777	65,279	123,250
1982	6,246	3,616	27,396	37,258
1983	13,041	2,907	22,819	38,767
1984	19,727	7,218	24,856	51,801
1985	19,175	5,195	25,222	49,592
1986	9,845	12,313	21,700	43,858
1987	1,786	13,394	19,656	34,836
1988	2,897	14,597	17,571	35,065

Refugee Arrivals to the U.S. From Southeast Asia,—Continued

Fiscal Years 1975–2000

Fiscal Year	Cambodia	Laos	Vietnam	Total
1989	2,162	12,560	21,924	36,646
1990	2,329	8,715	27,797	38,841
1991	179	9,232	28,396	37,807
1992	163	7,285	26,795	34,243
1993	63	6,944	31,401	38,408
1994	15	6,211	34,110	40,336
1995	6	3,682	32,250	35,938
1996	5	2,203	16,107	18,315
1997	9	915	6,612	7,536
1998	7	9	10,266	10,282
1999	0	19	9,622	9,641
2000	0	64	2,839	2,903
Totals	145,149	241,956	753,518	1,140,623

Sources:

Office of Refugee Resettlement. 1982–2001. Annual Reports to Congress (fiscal years 1981–2000). Washington, DC: Office of Refugee Resettlement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Refugee arrival statistics for FY 1975–1980 are from Rumbaut (2000: 182).

People from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam

Naturalized as U.S. Citizens, Fiscal Years 1987–2001

Fiscal Year	Cambodia	Laos	Vietnam	Total
1987	2,816	3,159	25,469	31,444
1988	3,132	3,480	21,636	28,248
1989	3,234	3,463	19,357	26,054
1990	3,525	3,329	22,027	28,881
1991	4,851	3,887	30,078	38,816
1992	2,713	3,080	18,422	24,215
1993	3,102	3,994	22,520	29,616
1994	4,132	5,630	29,555	39,317
1995	3,319	4,315	31,728	39,362
1996	5,202	10,621	51,910	67,733
1997	5,180	8,630	36,178	49,988
1998	5,348	7,734	30,185	43,267

People from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—Continued

Naturalized as U.S. Citizens, Fiscal Years 1987–2001

Fiscal Year	Cambodia	Laos	Vietnam	Total
1999	7,140	9,188	53,316	69,644
2000	5,292	7,163	55,934	68,389
2001	3,489	6,507	41,596	51,592
Totals	62,475	84,180	489,911	636,566

Source:

Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (fiscal years 1986–2001) and www.ins.gov.

Flat Rock, North Carolina 28731
April 14, 2003

Representative Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
Via fax: 202–225–2610

Mr. Chairman:

This letter is in response to a request for comments concerning normal trade relations (NTR) with Laos.

I served as President Reagan's Director of Political/Military, then Asian Affairs on the National Security Council staff from 1981–89. In that capacity, I led or participated in all policy-level negotiations with Laos in New York, Washington and Vientiane, many at the politburo and ministerial level. Subsequent to leaving government, I established a U.S. consulting firm aiding U.S. businesses interested in the ASEAN region and remained deeply involved in Lao-related issues.

I have seen Laos respond positively and in a significant way over the years to our institutional concerns on POW/MIA accounting and narcotics. In addition, they have increased their responsiveness to U.S. Government concerns on human rights and religious persecution, as well as to NGO's focusing on these issues. In my opinion, it is clearly time for the U.S. to grant NTR to Laos.

Landlocked and buffeted by economic forces beyond their control, and surrounded by the dominant economies and populations of the PRC, Thailand and Vietnam, NTR can help Laos develop some economic autonomy. NTR will greatly benefit the people of Laos, many of whom remain mired in rural poverty. The reduction of poverty and concurrent economic development will strengthen and increase the Lao position in ASEAN and other multilateral bodies. This will, in turn, reduce the vulnerability of the Lao Government to internal and external threats to stability, reduce their dependence on others for security and increase official exposure to positive models of economic and political development.

I returned from another visit to Laos in late February as the policy adviser to the delegation of the National League of POW/MIA Families. During our visit, I had discussions on this subject with Lao officials, our representatives on the ground and other foreign officials. All felt strongly that this is the time to move forward despite the likelihood, as in the past, that some elements opposed may attempt another dramatic accusation to derail the effort. I believe those now disaffected have some legitimate grievances, but their extreme and often inaccurate charges discredit their cause. Importantly, I believe there is a greater chance to resolve these concerns through granting of NTR.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Richard T. Childress

Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815
 Providence, Rhode Island 02818
April 21, 2003

Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman
 Subcommittee on Trade
 Ways and Means Committee
 House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515
 Fax: 202-225-2610
 RE: US-Laos Trade

Dear Chairman Crane,

Please submit the US-Laos Bilateral Trade Agreement to the 108th Congress for prompt consideration and passage. Both the United States and Laos will substantially benefit from the normal trade relations (NTR) establishment.

At the moment, there is no rational justification why the current high trade barriers between Laos and US should subsist. Laos is the only country in Southeast Asia without normal trade relations (NTR) with the US. Other countries in the world without NTR are Afghanistan, Cuba, North Korea, and Yugoslavia, none of which has normal diplomatic relations with the US. And despite interruptions of disengaged relations in the past, Cambodia and Vietnam have been granted NTR. On the other hand, the US and Laos has continued diplomatic relationship since 1975 with no interruptions.

Furthermore, the Lao government is cooperating fully on the search for MIA remains from the Vietnam War and a campaign to eradicate narcotics production and trade in northern Laos. Moreover, the US currently funds about \$10 million per year in MIA recovery, clearance of and education about unexploded ordnance (UXO), and counter-narcotics programs in Laos. The Lao government has extended efforts to help the international community to control HIV-AIDS and trafficking of women and children from Laos to neighboring countries. Meanwhile, Congress has appropriated funds to assist Laos with its healthcare and economic development, including a silk-production project.

Without NTR for Laos, there are also some welfare loss for American consumers: Lao products are simply not competitive enough to enter the US market, and/or American consumers end up paying much higher for Lao imports. As American consumers, we would like to purchase Lao products (e.g., silk, wood, and food products) and to purchase them at the lower internationally competitive price. So please grant NTR to Laos.

Equally important, most economic development and international trade economists have published papers citing evidence of how increase in trade promotes economic growth, especially for an under-developed country such as Laos (see, e.g., Frankel J.A. and D. Romer, 1999. "Does Trade Cause Growth?" *American Economic Review* 89:3, 379-399). Economic growth increases income for the Lao people (one of the poorest group of people in the world), enabling them to increase their standard of living, to pursue higher education, and to work towards a democratic society. The US-Laos NTR will give the people of Laos a means to not only improve their economic status, but it will give them a voice to endeavor for their rights. Hence, the US-Laos NTR is essential for the economic, social, and political development and stability of Laos and her people.

Laos cannot simply be left isolated; NTR will integrate her into the international community with respect to not only trade/economic relations but with respect to social, political, and human rights improvement. Restructuring Laos' economy to fit the international standards by granting her NTR will inadvertently put more pressure on Laos to further open up economically, socially, and politically.

Thus, we ask that you please submit the US-Laos Bilateral Trade Agreement to the 108th Congress for prompt consideration and passage. Thank you very much.

With hope for the passage of US-Laos NTR,

Souphala Chomsisengphet, Ph.D.,
Economist

Sumit Agarwal, Ph.D.,
Financial Economist



Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
 Washington, D.C. 20515
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways and Means
 1104 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for offering us the opportunity to submit comments to the subcommittee regarding the extension of normal trade relations to the Republic of Armenia. In our view, Armenia is in compliance with the freedom of emigration requirements under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment of the Trade Act of 1974, as it applies to the successor states of the Soviet Union.

However, the underlying intent of the Jackson-Vanik language is to foster democratization and protect human rights. As NTR is being deliberated, there must be a clear message that further political reforms are expected in Armenia, which committed itself to specific democratic principles when it joined OSCE over a decade ago. As members of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, we wish to raise some specific concerns.

The conduct of the February-March presidential election was quite disappointing, perpetuating a pattern we hoped had ended. Unfortunately, as in previous elections, domestic opposition parties have rejected the official tallies and the OSCE characterized the election as not having met international standards. Particularly disturbing was the statement by Defense Minister [and President Kocharian's campaign manager] Serzh Sarkissian: "People who have grown up and lived in Europe cannot understand our mentality. They have their rules and views on democracy, and we have ours." It is essential for Armenia's democratic prospects and the overcoming of polarization in society that the upcoming May 25 parliamentary election demonstrate significant improvements.

In addition, Jehovah's Witnesses continue to be imprisoned as conscientious objectors, despite the government's pledge to the Council of Europe to adopt within three years a law allowing for alternative service and, in the meantime, to free all conscientious objectors from prison. Since the beginning of this year, seven Jehovah's Witnesses have received long prison sentences for refusing to perform compulsory military service, bringing the total number of Witnesses currently imprisoned to eighteen.

We raise these concerns in the spirit of constructive engagement with Armenia.

Sincerely,

Benjamin L. Cardin
Commission Member

Christopher H. Smith
Co-Chairman

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
 Washington, D.C. 20515
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways and Means
 1104 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for offering us the opportunity to submit comments to the subcommittee regarding the extension of normal trade relations to the Republic of Moldova. As members of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, we wish to raise some specific areas of concern.

In keeping with the spirit of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment of the Trade Act of 1974 which is meant to protect and promote human rights, we believe the United States must continue to make human rights a key component of the bilateral relationship with Moldova. With respect to the freedom of emigration requirements under Jackson-Vanik, Moldova has adopted statutory and administrative procedures that generally accord its citizens the right to depart and return to the country freely. However, the Moldovan Government should be encouraged to amend their law

which maintains certain restrictions for potential emigrants upon whom close relatives are materially dependent.

Moldova continues to be a major source country for trafficked women to Europe. The Moldovan Government, concerned NGOs and international organizations are working to eradicate this plague, but such efforts must be vigorously pursued and be given a very high priority. In addition, a proposed draft law on “freedom of speech and religious organizations” would limit religious freedom for minority faith communities in Moldova by denying registration unless a burdensome threshold concerning the length of time in existence and the number of participants in the religious group is met.

Finally, we note recent reports prepared by the European Roma Rights Center concerning discriminatory policies and practices by Moldovan authorities toward the Romani minority. The Moldovan Government should be encouraged to ensure that all its citizens are treated equally before the law.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate the opportunity to raise these issues with you and request that these comments be taken into consideration, as well as additional progress by Moldova on these issues, as you consider the extension of normal trade relations to the Republic of Moldova.

With best wishes, we remain
Sincerely,

Benjamin L. Cardin
Commission Member
Christopher H. Smith
Co-Chairman

Concern Worldwide
Vientiane, Lao PDR
21 April 2003

Ways and Means Committee
House of Representatives

To whom it may concern,

PERSONAL STATEMENT ON THE EXTENSION OF NTR TO THE LAO PDR FROM STUART
HIGHTON, COUNTRY DIRECTOR, CONCERN LAOS

I have been living and working in the Lao PDR over the past 4 years in the capacity of Country Director of Concern Worldwide, an Irish Non Governmental Organisation (NGO). I would like to add my voice to those calling for the extension of permanent Normal Trade Relations status to the Lao PDR.

Concern's mandate throughout the world is to work with and for the benefit of the poorest—and in Laos that often means with ethnic minorities. Over the last ten years Concern has worked freely and unhindered (in partnership with local authorities) carrying out community development work with ethnic minority communities including H'mong, Mien, Khmou, Lamet and Katang peoples in five different provinces. Although we have some concerns regarding certain government strategies affecting ethnic minorities—for example those associated with efforts to stabilise slash and burn cultivation or to eliminate opium production—because of the impact these strategies may have on fragile livelihoods, in my experience there is certainly no systematic repression of ethnic minorities. Indeed ethnic minorities are represented in all levels of government, and I would contend that compared to some other countries in the region, which do have NTR status, minorities in the Lao PDR are treated well.

My personal experience is that the Lao government has opened up considerably in its relations with the development community during the last four years and now welcomes representatives of civil society from other countries (such as Concern) to work with all the multi-ethnic peoples of Laos, and contribute to the genuine poverty alleviation efforts of the government. As a result of the increasing economic openness of the government, the country's economy is gradually becoming more dynamic and market oriented. Small producers, particularly of ethnic minority handicrafts, are improving the quality of their work; some of them with the assistance of international NGOs such as Concern. What these poor people need and deserve is a level playing field to compete with their neighbours in marketing their produce. It is my personal sincere belief that by opening up trade between the USA and the Lao PDR through granting NTR to Laos, Congress would be removing an anachronistic impediment to the development of the Lao people of all ethnicity, and would

be contributing significantly to the poverty reduction efforts of the Lao government and their development partners here in the country. I would urge you to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Highton

San Diego, California 92105
April 6, 2003

To: Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United States Senate.

Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means.
Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee,

E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
Fax: (202) 225-2610

Honorable:

This letter is to strongly support of granting normal trade relations status (NTR) to Laos. Laos is the only country in Southeast Asia that has not got NTR. Currently, US have a very small business establishment in Laos, comparing to China, Thailand, and Japan. Laos has established itself to become an important market for US goods and services when it joined the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) in 1997. The United States Government should help American companies grab a bigger share of this market by granting NTR status.

The Lao government is sincerely cooperate with the United States in the fields of POW/MIA, narcotics control and supports the United States and the World community to fight against the international terrorism. Therefore, granting NTR status will demonstrate that the United States is also committed.

I appreciate very much a joint proposal of Honorable Colin Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert Zoellick of the USTR, for granting NTR to Laos.

Your Honorable kind support the proposal and help granting NTR to Laos will be highly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jack Congsa

Consortium of World Education and World Learning
Boston, Massachusetts 02210
April 21, 2003

Rep. Philip M. Crane
Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade,
House Ways and Means Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. Crane:

On behalf of the Consortium of World Education and World Learning, I commend you and the members of the Ways and Means Committee for your decision to move ahead with legislation establishing normal trade relations with the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). This is a process that we wholeheartedly support.

World Education is a not-for-profit organization based in Boston. World Learning is a not-for-profit organization based in Washington. The Consortium has worked in Laos since 1992, first assisting Lao refugees returning to Laos from refugee camps in Thailand and now assisting in the areas of health, vocational training, education, agriculture, and economic development. The Consortium implements these programs in seven different provinces, Huaphan, Xieng Khouang, Vientiane, Sayabouli, Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, and Salavane. The Consortium staff works and lives in both the provincial capitals and in the rural areas.

The Consortium strongly supports the decision to establish normal trade relations with the Lao PDR. It is long overdue. Laos is one of the poorest countries in Asia. The people who would benefit from the US funded programs that the Consortium implements would also benefit from the establishment of normal trade relations. One program in particular, the USAID-funded Lao Economic Acceleration Program in the Silk Sector (LEAPSS), requires the availability of an open international mar-

ket in order to succeed. The farmers, weavers, and merchants involved in this program need the normal trade relations in order to export their handicrafts.

Other direct beneficiaries of normal trade will be Laotians in the private sector and American investors, who will be able to export not only Laotian handicrafts, foodstuffs and other products directly to the United States without going through a third country or paying prohibitive duty. Laotian-Americans, who know Laotian cultures and languages and have family and friends in the country, will have particularly strong opportunities. Normal trade relations with the Lao PDR will not cost American taxpayers a cent, since the decline in tariff rates will be more than offset by an increase in the volume of trade.

Legitimate human rights concerns, including access to health care and education, and protection from risk of unexploded wartime bombs, as well as civil and political liberties should and do form a part of US policy towards the Lao PDR, as with other countries. However, ongoing human rights issues do not prevent the United States from engaging in normal trade with other countries in ASEAN or elsewhere in the world that pose no threat to US interests. There is no logical basis for arguing that denying freedom to trade improves human rights. What will lead to improvements is a policy of engagement and respect towards the Lao PDR that enables the US to play a positive role. Some of the possibilities in this approach have already been demonstrated in the areas of development cooperation and religious freedom.

Since his arrival in Vientiane in 2001, Ambassador Douglas Hartwick has sought, fairly and honestly, to resolve problems and increase communication in US-Lao PDR relations. His broad-minded diplomacy in US national interests deserves your encouragement. By approving NTR, the Congress will send a signal that the United States supports reformers and internationalists in the Lao PDR government, and that it is committed to ensuring the continuity and success of the domestic reform process.

If you have any questions regarding the Consortium programs in Laos or would like a further comment on any of the above please do not hesitate to contact me at 802-254-8611.

Sincerely yours,

Connie Woodberry
*Senior Program Officer of World Education
Director of the Consortium*

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Council of Lao Representatives Abroad—Oceanic Region
NSW 2177 Australia
April 21, 2003

**The Council of Lao Representatives Abroad (Oceanic)—Laos Reforms 2003
Report**

Submission to US Congressional Forum

Washington D.C.

The Council of Lao Representatives Abroad (Oceanic) hereby formally submits this report to be tabled at the US Congressional Forum in Washington DC on the 21st of April 2003. Concurrently, we submit this report to other international bodies that have an expressed interest in the ongoing development of issues relevant not only to Laos but to the region as a whole. The issues include, but are not limited to; foreign investment, legal governance, foreign aid, human rights and religious freedoms.

The first important statement that the Council of Lao Representatives Abroad wishes to make clear is its desire to promote open dialogue between itself, the Lao Government and the international community in an effort to bring forth constructive debate with an aim of identifying positive solutions to current issues of concern.

The second important statement that the Council of Lao Representatives Abroad wishes to make clear is its desire to see the proper implementation of the articles of the Laos constitution as adopted by the 6th Session of the People's Supreme Assembly (2nd Legislature) Vientiane, 13—15 August 1991. The constitution sets out clear guidelines by which the country should be governed in order to fulfil the objec-

tive of building Laos into a country of peace, independence, democracy, unity and prosperity.

The Laos constitution reiterates the fundamental principles of the freedom and democratic rights of the people, which the Lao Government states openly, "cannot be violated by anyone". Clearly, there are still shortfalls within the system that prevent the effectiveness of the Laos constitution. We hope the Lao government will make itself more accessible to respected organisations like the Council of Lao Representatives Abroad, the United Nations, Amnesty International, foreign governments and alike, who remain committed to promoting positive solutions to support the development of Laos, in all respects.

The third important statement that the Council of Lao Representatives Abroad wishes to make clear is its support of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights as Laos so joined the United Nations in 1955. This agreement remains the basis on which our freedoms, dignity and rights are clearly defined. They are endowed with reason and conscience in teaching humans how they should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. It is important for Laos to secure its universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of world and among the peoples of its jurisdiction.

We would like to see the Lao Government begin to seriously commit to the promotion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations as they agreed to promote when becoming a member of the United Nations in 1955. Particularly, we would like to see the Laos Government enforce article 5 of the agreement whereby "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

According to various eye-witness reports submitted as recent at 2003 to Amnesty International, which include; reports from the US State Department, the US Commission for International Religious Freedoms and other Independent Human Rights organisations, the reports strongly indicate that some departments within the Lao Government have clearly violated not only article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations but subsequently, a number of articles contained therein.

In this decade, world opinion has branded the Laos Government as a one-party authoritarian state that suppresses the human rights and political rights of its citizens and foreigners alike. Unfortunately, the Laos Government has been unable to change that opinion and so, finds itself in the company of rogue states, such as Cuba, Burma and Vietnam. The Lao Government fails to rule most effectively, mainly because of its inability to follow the international agreements it commits to in principle, to upholding. This has contributed to the serious underdevelopment of the country, which sees Laos as one of the poorest countries in the world. Access to even very basic health and education services is limited.

Calls for reform are paramount to the successful development of Laos in all respects. But clearly, the Government continues to show an unwillingness to even debate the issues in the world arena.

Isolated examples of breeches to Domestic and International agreements;

1. Violations of articles 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 29, 30, 31, 37, & 38 of the Laos constitution adopted by the 6th Session of the People's Supreme Assembly (2nd Legislature) Vientiane, 13—15 August 1991 (see more detailed information as attached).
2. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in accordance with the UN Declaration of Human Rights describes the fundamental right that; those deprived of their liberty shall have the right to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time, the right to prepare a defence and to be assisted by a lawyer, and the right not to be ill-treated or tortured in detention. The Laos Government signed on 7 December 2000, in agreement to the ICCPR that the Laos Government would uphold the agreement in accordance with International law and not to do anything, which would defeat the object and purpose of the ICCPR.
3. The Lao Law concerning Criminal Case proceedings (1989) detail the procedures which should be followed in arrest, detention, and criminal prosecutions, but it is clearly and currently evident that there are many major breeches in this law, which further shows a lack of willingness or capability of the Laos Government to implement and follow their own laws.
4. UN Standard of minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Rule 33. Clearly evidence submitted to various International authorities (Amnesty International July 2002 Report) shows that the Laos Government does not uphold the principles of this article.

5. The Basic Principles for Treatment of Prisoners (1990) refers to medical care and that provides the basis on which prisoners are to be provided with medical aid. Clearly the Laos Government does not uphold the principles of this article as widespread reports continue to show violations of this principle. The International Committee for Red Cross has made numerous attempts to provide support to the prisons in Laos, but these have consistently been rejected by the Lao Government.
6. United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 9 “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.” Article 10 states “Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and any criminal charge against him”.
7. In 1976 the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (ICCPR) entered into force. Relevantly, Article 9 of the ICCPR states “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.” Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of the arrest, of the reason for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him.
8. Various foreign investment laws have been documented as being subject to extreme prejudice and government interference.

Many examples clearly expose the ineffectiveness of the Laos Government that fail to uphold and honour the many international agreements they have signed.

On 7 December 2000, the Laos Government signed the ICCPR. In doing so, it embraced the principles espoused in the agreement and signalled to the international community its willingness and intention to implement the philosophy articulated in the ICCPR. In addition, it is submitted in Articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of human rights and Article 9 of the ICCPR form part of international customary law. The rights prescribed in those articles are fundamental human rights. Their recognition is a matter of settled international practice. States recognise those rights as obligatory by reason of their fundamental nature: see *Federal Republic of Germany v Denmark*; *FRG v The Netherlands* ICJ Rep 1969 3 at paragraph 77 and per Judge Lachs.

Despite these serious breaches of international agreements, foreign governments, aid agencies and the United Nations themselves, do very little to make accountable the Laos Government.

Reinforcement by US Government of violations

Ambassador Hartwick of the US Embassy in Vientiane Laos recently stated that the Laos Government “has treated many of its own people harshly, trampled on its citizens’ individual human rights, and denied many basic freedoms we Americans cherish.”

This statement further reinforces the view shared by many throughout the world that the Laos Government does not uphold the sanctity of human dignity. Many also believe that the Government cannot be relied upon to abide by agreements that are designed to protect the interests of both the national and international community. Ambassador Hartwick acknowledges that many Laotians living abroad, particularly America, have suffered as a result of the current Laos Government, he states “For almost all of you, or your parents, the journey from Laos to America has not been an easy one. Many of you suffered terribly, enduring years of hardship and bitterness living under communist rule, sometimes fighting against them, later facing further pain and uncertainty in refugee camps in Thailand. I am sure each of you has personal experiences that are beyond the understanding of most Americans because of the terrible things you lived through and witnessed. For those very personal reasons, many of you have deep suspicions and dislike of the current government in Laos.”

Is it reasonable for the US Government to expect Laotians to respect the Lao Government when clearly the government does not respect the people or the laws that are constituted to protect the people?

The US Embassy in Vientiane Laos has recently made known their intention to push for Normalized Trade Relations between Laos and the United States. The Council of Lao Representatives Abroad (CLRA) does not feel confident that the implementation of NTR will have a positive effect on Laos whilst the Laos government consistently refuses to uphold and abide by current policies, UN agreements and international laws. How can the present government be relied upon to honour any such new agreements? We feel that the Bush Administration would be more responsible in its approach in proposing NTR to Laos, if they were able to gain sufficient assurances from the Laos Government that current policies, UN agreements and

international laws would be upheld, and better promoted in the future. Subsequently; in failing to make notable progress, the Laos Government should be made accountable by agreeing to forfeit support from the International Community until such time that it complied with the principles of the said agreements.

Recommendations

The Council of Lao Representatives Abroad strongly recommends that governments engaging in violations of international agreements, should not gain easy access to further trade agreements unless, there is positive reassurance and accountability to protect the principles of such agreements. The Lao Government continues to be the subject of reports that show recent abuses of foreign investors who have been unlawfully and arbitrarily arrested, prolonged in detention. Subsequently, there have been reports on extreme violations of religious freedoms, expropriation of foreign investment assets and serious violations of trade agreements for businesses and joint venture memorandums.

Since the Lao Government perceives Western governments influential in the provision of international aid contributions for the development of Laos, there is an immediate opportunity by them to engage the government in a process of reform that would end the oppression and wide scale violations of human rights. Therefore, the Council of Lao Representatives Abroad makes the following key recommendations to Western governments who support NTR for Laos; that they;

1. Designate that Laos is “a country of particular concern” to make clear that severe violations of human rights exist in Laos;
2. To seek from the Laos Government to enforce appropriate legal processes that promote transparency of foreign investment practices, policies, monitoring and management;
3. To ensure the practical application of International law when dealing specifically with foreign investment;
4. To establish an independent board of enquiry or board of arbitration where foreign investors can raise urgent concerns that might have a long term effect on their investment; and that might suitably advise and implement international law when there has been a clear breach of their investment agreement; harassment or other violation that would jeopardize their foreign investment;
5. To establish practical solutions to protect the human rights of all persons in Laos and prevent arbitrary arrest and prolonged detainment;
6. To urge the Laos Government to take specific steps to rectify concerns raised by international human rights organisations with regard to human rights violations; and including, the establishment of an independent monitoring body to conduct random inspections to the foreigners prison ‘Phonthong Prison’ Vientiane, Laos.
7. To urge the Laos Government to uphold the United Nations Declaration for Human Rights.

Further considerations

When we consider the introduction of new policy, it is the responsibility of the international community, foreign aid donors and governments to investigate fully whether or not, current policies are being adhered too. This establishes the integrity of the applicant. The Laos Government continues to reveal their inability to function appropriately and more importantly, to function lawfully when dealing with foreign investors. For example: there are numerous reported abuses by Laos authorities to the various Laos Banking resolutions and foreign investment laws which are designed to protect investors and foreigners alike. For Laos to prove their integrity, and thus gain the confidence of the international community they must address their current commitment to current policies and make accountable those authorities that violate current laws and legislation.

The Australian government acknowledges that Human rights are an important element in any foreign policy because the dignity and freedom of individuals must be preserved and that all Governments should take effective steps to ensure the promotion of human rights, including through representations to promote those rights in its dealings with other countries.

Our nations were dubbed the ‘Coalition of the willing’ in the Iraq conflict, and yet it seems that in our willingness to engage NTR for Laos, we fail to make accountable a Regime that publicly and openly opposes the very principles of democracy that we represent. The promotion and protection of human rights is important to Lao’s National interests just as the promotion and protection of foreign investor rights underpin the country’s broader economic interests. The Laos Government unfortunately lacks the ability to embrace such important aspects of being part of a civilized global society. Likewise, western governments could do more to address the

Laos Government's inappropriateness but instead, seem to be shackled by diplomacy.

Until the present Laos government shows substantial willingness to adopt more closely those practices which make us all 'civilized' towards each other, then the Council of Lao Representatives Abroad cannot support the implementation of NTR in Laos, nor can it endorse the encouragement for greater foreign investment to Laos. Our organisation does not dispute that economic development is critical for improving the quality of life for people in developing countries. The stability of free and democratic societies can enrich and accelerate human development by providing standards and direction for social and economic growth. But let us not be confused about the society we are discussing. It is not one which is based on democracy that respects the human rights of citizens and foreigners alike, nor is it one that respects the rights of foreign investors who are continually subjected to harassment and illegal expropriation of their valued assets. Clearly, the Laos Government holds firmly to its communist, totalitarian regime practices.

The Western World must be realistic about the 'non-democratic' nature of the Laos Government. Similarly, Laos must be realistic in its current shortcomings if it is to realise its acceptance within the global community and in particular, the foreign investment community.

As we repeatedly mention in this document, it is vital for effective foreign policy of any sort to uphold current agreements. It creates confidence in investors and governments, and thus lends to the greater opportunity for investment and trade. The Laos Government has readily agreed to uphold the use of UN mandates as guided by the UN Commission on Human Rights, foreign investment agreements, as appropriated by legal entities through Joint Venture agreements but sadly, the Laos Government continues to fail to uphold the principles of these agreements.

In the year 2000, a number of foreign investments were illegally expropriated, unlawfully administered, inappropriately cancelled or found in breach, as a direct result of Laos Government and ministerial corruption. The international community namely, the World Bank, IMF and ADB, failed to rally any support to ensure these investors were granted their rights for protection through proper international processes which could effectively determine a lawful resolution to their problem. Similarly, US Ambassador Hartwick states "we believe that foreign investors, who demand fair treatment and decent courts to enforce contracts, have a real impact in advancing rule of law."

To the contrary, a number of former foreign investors have made statements to Amnesty International, the United Nations, US Congress, the World Court, and like minded organisations that; those investors who 'demanded fair treatment' were either thrown in jail or run out of town through a series of death threats. The Laos courts do not enforce contracts or agreements. On some occasions, they have been found to simply change their own laws to suit themselves. In one such court proceeding of the year 2001, involving a foreign investor, an Embassy official witnessed a senior Laos official of the Laos Taxation Department commit perjury to the court in order to bring about a conviction against the foreign investor.

There is no system in place to protect the agreements that are signed between foreign investors and the Laos government. It would be useful if such world organisations and foreign government representatives became more pro-active in addressing foreign investor concerns and indeed concerns from foreigners who have fallen victim to the corruption of government officials. The need for transparency is obvious but the World Bank, IMF and ADB seem either unwilling or unable to support foreign investment in Laos, thus stating that they are only interested in 'those projects that they administer'. How then, can these institutions hope to receive a positive return on the money 'on loan' to the Laos Government when clearly, foreign investment protection is vital to economic growth. What can foreign Governments and International aid agencies do to support foreign investment in Laos? They can demand transparency and accountability and to ensure foreign investors have access to a lawful authority, to redress complaints or make known any harassment they are subjected to, which if detected early, might prevent the unacceptable loss of their investment?

In principle, foreign investment is good for Laos but many foreign companies suffer a range of problems when investment laws are not enforced, labour laws are not enforced and anti-corruption decrees are not enforced. The practicalities of doing business in Laos are undermined daily.

Foreign Embassy's promote Bilateral Trade Agreements as a form of protection for investors but in reality, such agreements do not provide such protection. A clear example of this is the case of Kerry and Kay Danes of Australia. The Security Manager and his wife were unlawfully detained in prison for nearly one year. The Australian Government declared them 'unofficial hostages' in a major foreign invest-

ment expropriation wrought by the Lao Government. The bi-lateral trade agreement between the two countries did not deter the Lao Government from ill-treating the Australian couple, nor did it prevent their unlawful detainment for almost a year in sub-humane conditions, nor did it enable the couple to a fair hearing in a court, or the right to defend themselves through a proper legal process, or to seek redress in an International court following their departure from the country which would have resulted in the restoration of their name and reputation. As with the Danes case, there have been many other reports that suggest a serious problem with foreign investment in Laos. There is clearly an inability of foreign government agencies and donor organisations to provide any significant protection.

There is no denying that NTR would be a wonderful opportunity for Laos as would greater foreign investment be. Both would enable the local private sector businesses, entrepreneurs, and workers to benefit in the world market place, and consequently raise their standard of living. But the Laos Government has proved itself unreliable as has the international community in providing appropriate support to foreign investors. The issues that are of concern are not limited to foreign investment or human rights. Recently, the US Government promoted ideas that they have made 'uneven progress' in promoting democracy and human rights in Laos, and in particular, to religious freedoms. The report February 2003 released by the US Commission on International Religious Freedoms, however, calls for the US Government to designate Laos as a 'country of particular concern', and to make clear US Concerns over particularly severe violations of religious freedoms in Laos. All throughout the report, there is significant suggestion by the US Commission that Laos is no closer than they were twenty-eight years ago, to observing religious freedoms as defined in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA).

As with many agreements signed by the Laos Government, and those ending in dispute, the excuse is consistent. The Laos Government claims in most all cases, to have misinterpreted the English language and translation. Likewise, the analysis of the decree of the Administration and Protection of Religious Activities in Lao PDR, in its English translation reveals several troublesome aspects that may in fact lead to further violations of religious freedoms. This is one important example that also leads to concern for NTR and foreign investment in Laos. Many investment documents that are written in both languages, decree's and laws as set out by the Laos Government, the effective implementation of such unravels with the interpretation as set in the English language.

There are those like Ambassador Hartwick who speak eloquently about the US government's willingness to promote Human rights in Laos through the implementation of NTR. But the practical aspects of introducing NTR are still not clearly explained. Considering NTR is possible, what steps does the US Government propose to alleviate the increased departmental corruption which will result in the introduction of NTR? It is clear that with the proposed introduction of any new policy there must be strong consideration to accountability of that policy and the effectiveness of the government to properly administer the policy. All such trade agreements and human rights agreements must have protective provisions attached as a necessity to ensure the integrity, transparency and adherence to rule of law.

The Council of Lao Representatives Abroad do not feel that the Lao Government has the appropriate level of knowledge, experience, motivation or integrity to uphold yet another 'serious' agreement. As such, we recommend:

1. that this issue of NTR be further debated;
2. the issues of human rights be seriously enforced according to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights;
3. the US Government and like-minded governments and organisations provide clear recommendations and workable solutions to ensure the reliability of the applicants, in this case, the Laos government;
4. that the international community focus more on and strongly encourage such regimes to uphold the principles of the international agreements they sign, in accordance to International law;
5. that the international community call for reforms in all respects and that the Laos Government agree to establish an independent board of arbitration, as mentioned in this document, to protect the broader interests of all future foreign investors to Laos;
6. That the United Nations encourages greater reforms and accountability amongst countries that sign in agreement to their mandates.

Kat Dittavong
Deputy Secretary General
The Council of Lao Representatives Abroad—Oceanic Region

Attached;

Annex A

Violations of articles of the Laos constitution.

Annex A

The following are only limited examples of the violations of articles 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 29, 30, 31, 37, & 38 of the Laos constitution adopted by the 6th Session of the People's Supreme Assembly (2nd Legislature) Vientiane, 13–15 August 1991

Article 2. The state of the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a People's Democratic State. All powers are of the people, by the people and for the interests of the multi-ethnic people of all strata in society with the workers, farmers and intellectuals as key components.

Article 4. The National Assembly is the organisation of the people's representatives. The election of members of the National Assembly shall be carried out through the principles of universal, equal and direct suffrage, and secret balloting. Voters have the right to propose the dismissal of their own representatives if they are found to behave unfit to their honour and to lose the people's confidence.

Article 5. The National Assembly and all other state organisations are established and function in accordance with the principle of democratic centralism.

Article 6. The state protects the freedom and democratic rights of the people which cannot be violated by anyone. All state organisations and functionaries must popularise and propagate all policies, regulations and laws among the people and, together with the people, organise their implementations in order to guarantee the legitimate rights and interests of the people. All acts of bureaucratism and harassment that can be physically harmful to the people and detrimental to their honour, lives, consciences and property are prohibited.

Article 8. The state pursues the policy of promoting unity and equality among all ethnic groups. All ethnic groups have the rights to protect, preserve, and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation. All acts of creating division and discrimination among ethnic groups are prohibited. The state implements every measure to gradually develop and upgrade the levels of socio-economy of all ethnic groups.

Article 9. The state respects and protects all lawful activities of the Buddhists and of other religious followers mobilises and encourages the Buddhist monks and novices as well as the priests of other religions to participate in the activities which are beneficial to the country and people. All acts of creating division of religions and classes of people are prohibited.

Article 29. The right of Lao citizens in their bodies and houses are inviolable. Lao citizens cannot be arrested or searched without warrant or approval of the authorized organisations, except in the cases as prescribed by law.

Article 30. Lao citizens have the right and freedom to believe or not to believe in religions.

Article 31. Lao citizens have the right and freedom of speech, press and assembly; and have the right to set up associations and to stage demonstrations which are not contrary to the law.

Article 37. The aliens and persons having no nationality have the right to enjoy their rights and freedom protected by the provisions of laws of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. They have the right to lodge petitions with courts and other organisations concerned of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the obligations to respect the Constitution and laws of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Article 38. The Lao People's Democratic Republic grants asylum to foreigners who are persecuted for their struggle for freedom, justice, peace and scientific causes.



[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Montpellier, France,
 Rodez, France,
 Le Vigan, France,
 Montpellier, France,
 Mende, France

to: Honourable E. Grassley, Honourable Charles B. Rangel, Honourable Max Baucus, Honourable Philip M. Crane, Honourable John McCain, Honourable William M. Thomas,

Honourables,

We are a group of physicians of lao origine residing in France having learned with great satisfaction that Mr Collin Powell and Mr Robert Zoellict conjointly had send a letter to the Committee of Finance of the United states senate to request the approval of an agreement between the Lao's people democratic republic and the United states of America on trade relations with NTR. We would like to express our support to the approval of the bilateral agreement on trade relations.

Vongsouthi Cyrille, MD
 Souk-Aloun Jocelin, MD
 Souk-Aloun Phou, MD
 Amphonesinh Sengphet, MD
 Phothirath Khamsing, MD

Stamford, Connecticut 06902

Dear Congressman Philip M Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means:

I wholeheartedly support the initiative for the US NTR to Laos.
 Copy faxed to (202) 225-2610

Kristin Dacey

Washington, D.C. 20036
April 11, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman,
 Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways and Means
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Crane,

I am writing to express my strong support for extension of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) for Laos. My views are informed by my research on Laos as a Fellow at the Brookings Institution; my experience as The Asia Foundation Representative for Laos (1988-90); and my experience as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights (1993-97). I believe that extending NTR will benefit the people of Laos, US-Laotian relations, and broader US policy in Southeast Asia.

Laos is subject to unfortunate extremes. Half the population lives below the government's own defined poverty line. Laos has the lowest life expectancy in Southeast Asia, and the highest fertility rate. It has the highest adult illiteracy rate in the region, particularly among women. Laos holds another dubious record, of having more ordnance dropped on it by the United States during the "Secret War" of the 1960's and 1970's than were used on Germany and Japan combined in World War II. These woeful distinctions make it all the more inexplicable that the United States withholds NTR from Laos, as it does for only four countries. Worse, analysis released by the Progressive Policy Institute indicates that Laos faces the highest average tariffs in the world, at 45.3%, exceeding those of North Korea (35%). This makes no political, economic or geostrategic sense.

Under these circumstances, it is self-evident that extending NTR to Laos will increase two-way trade between the two countries and stimulate economic growth in Laos. However, I believe there are other benefits as well. First, NTR will be a significant factor in improving relations between the people of Laos and the Laotian-American community. In contrast to Vietnam and Cambodia, both of which benefit

from technical expertise and funds from their overseas communities, Laos has been less able to call upon its diaspora for crucial assistance in economic development and market reform. Second, NTR for Laos will help the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) move toward its longstanding goal of regional economic integration, an objective that has been made more difficult with the incorporation of the four new states (Laos, Burma, Vietnam and Cambodia) in the late 1990's. If ASEAN is able to harmonize its economies, it is less likely to suffer a dramatic downturn, such as the one it experienced in the 1997-98 Asian economic crisis.

Lastly, extending NTR to Laos will further the US goal of developing a "hub-and-spokes" system of free trade agreements with Southeast Asian nations, articulated in the President's announcement of the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative last October. In this laddered process, granting NTR for Laos will enable that country to step onto the first rung. Every Asian and Pacific power—including China, Japan and India—has offered ASEAN a free trade agreement of some kind. China has in fact included an "early harvest" clause in its agreement, to provide funds to the poorer ASEAN countries in the early years of implementation. NTR for Laos could provide an "early harvest" from the United States, helping to sustain Laos while it reforms its economic system to benefit from international trade regimes.

As a former USG human rights official, I am mindful that Laos' human rights record does not meet the standards of a liberal democracy at this time. In my estimation, however, human rights improvement in Laos is quite possible, but it is likely to follow the incremental path and pace of several other Asian countries. I have observed a cautious liberalization process over the past decade in Laos, with greater personal freedoms in comparison to the 1970's and early 1980's. The State Department's human rights report for Laos notes improvements in religious freedom, as did Assistant Secretary Craner in his March 31 press conference on the reports. While there is no established, iron-clad link between economic growth and political liberalization, there is growing evidence that progress on the economic side creates greater demand for openness in both societies and governments. I believe that will be the case in Laos as well. However, I can state with absolute certainty that withholding NTR from Laos will do nothing to improve human rights in the country.

Lastly, I would like to commend Secretary Powell and USTR Zoellick for their leadership in requesting that Congress grant NTR to Laos, and the Subcommittee for its call for public comment. In every sense, extension of Normal Trade Relations to Laos is long overdue. I hope that the Subcommittee and Congress will make every effort to correct this situation at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

Catharin E. Dalpino
Fellow,
Foreign Policy Studies
The Brookings Institution

Columbia, Maryland 21045
April 21, 2003

To: Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United States Senate.

Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means.

Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee,

E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov

Fax: (202) 225-2610

Honorable:

This letter is in strong support of granting normal trade relation status (NTR) to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos).

After more than twenty years in their new country, many Laotian-Americans still have a need for goods and services that used to be part of their daily lives back in their motherland. These goods, which include arts and crafts, agricultural products and canned food items, are unavailable to Laotian-Americans here in the United States. Many Laotian-American entrepreneurs see this as a promising job and business opportunity. Granting NTR status to Laos will allow these entrepreneurs to pursue their ideas.

American businesses will also benefit from granting of NTR. Currently, US have a very small business establishment in Laos, compares to China, Thailand, and Japan. NTR will encourage and allow a greater presence of US companies in this

country. Laos has established itself to become an important market for US goods and services when it joined the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) in 1997. The United States Government should help American companies grab a bigger share of this market by granting NTR status.

NTR status will help strengthen good understanding between the governments and peoples of the United States and Laos. Cooperation on POW/MIA, narcotics control and terrorist issues indicate that Laos is committed to building a better relationship with the United States. Granting NTR status will demonstrate that the United States is also committed.

I appreciate very much a joint proposal of Honorable Colin Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert Zoellick of the USTR, for granting NTR to Laos.

I should appreciate if you could kindly support the proposal in granting NTR to Laos.

Sincerely,

Bao Dang

Fort Worth, Texas 76179
March 24, 2003

To: Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United States Senate.

Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means.
 Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee,

E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
 Fax: (202) 225-2610

Honorable:

This letter is in strong support of granting normal trade relation status (NTR) to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos).

After more than twenty years in their new country, many Laotian-Americans still have a need for goods and services that used to be part of their daily lives back in their motherland. These goods, which include arts and crafts, agricultural products and canned food items, are unavailable to Laotian-Americans here in the United States. Many Laotian-American entrepreneurs see this as a promising job and business opportunity. Granting NTR status to Laos will allow these entrepreneurs to pursue their ideas.

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NTR status will help strengthen good understanding between the governments and peoples of the United States and Laos. Cooperation on POW/MIA, narcotics control and terrorist issues indicate that Laos is committed to building a better relationship with the United States. Granting NTR status will demonstrate that the United States is also committed.

I appreciate very much a joint proposal of Honorable Colin Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert Zoellick of the USTR, for granting NTR to Laos.

I should appreciate if you could kindly support the proposal in granting NTR to Laos.

Sincerely,

Chansamone Darapheth

Toledo, Ohio 43635

Dear Senator Grassley,

As the brother of America's longest held acknowledged (photographed in a Pathet Lao prison) civilian prisoner in Laos since 5 September 1963, I support the granting of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to Laos provided the following conditions are met: 1. The immediate release of my brother or a verifiable accounting of his current fate and whereabouts including the written dossier concerning my brother that the Lao

have in their possession, 2.continued improvement of relations concerning the finding and identification of ALL POWs/MIAs, 3. halting of human rights violations especially concerning the Hmong in their country, and 4. Continued improvement in narcotics control and fighting international terrorism. Laos, a very poor country, is a member of ASEAN. NTR would assist them in playing a larger role in worldwide affairs but the above issues still remain outstanding.

Thank you.

Jerry DeBruin, Ph.D.

Washington, D.C. 20036

The Honorable Phillip Crane
Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman,

My name is Andrew Durant. I am the Managing Director of Samuels International, a Washington, DC-based consultancy. I have been active in trade and political matters related to Southeast Asia for more than 15 years.

In this capacity, I am writing to express my support for the passage of legislation to provide products from the Lao People's Democratic Republic with normal trade relations.

In light of the progress that has taken place, we believe that the provision of normal trade relations will enhance the economic and civil development of the country.

Sincerely yours,

Andrew G. Durant

New York, New York 10024

To: Representative Charles Crane, Chairman subcommittee on trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
TO: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
CC: laontr@ffrd.org
FAX: 202 225-2610

Congresspeople:

I am writing to voice my support for Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos, one of the world's least developed countries. I urge you to pass the necessary legislation to extend NTR to Laos and bring into force the bilateral trade agreements concluded in 1997.

NTR will benefit both the US and Laos. Increased trade between our two countries will lead to greater economic opportunities and swifter economic development in Laos, directly improving people's lives and living standards and also reinforcing the alternative economic development opportunities in anti-narcotics efforts. Greater cultural and human cooperation will encourage more openness, which I believe will accelerate the positive changes achieved over the past few years.

Laos is a member of ASEAN, an organization with which the US is working to strengthen regional stability as part of the ASEAN Initiative. As such, Laos should have the benefit of NTR as does its neighbors and fellow ASEAN members. And normalized trade relations with the US will be a big first step to further integrate Laos into the world trade system.

Thank you.

Joanne Edgar

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Vientiane, Lao PDR
17 April 2003

fax: 202-225-2610
The Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane,

I am writing to add my support for the House bill which will establish NTR with Laos. This is in concurrence with the recommendations of the State Department and Sec. Colin Powell, as well as that of Ambassador to Laos Mr. Douglas Hartwick.

I am an American citizen, and have worked in Laos for almost 3 years, as Country Director of the oldest continuously serving INGO in the country, Quaker Service in Laos, which is a project of American Friends Service Committee. Laos, as you know, is a small, land-locked country of some 5 million people, and is one of the poorest countries in Asia, with a per capita income estimated at \$290 per year.

It maintains friendly relations with the U.S., as well as its neighbors in the region, and is a member of ASEAN. It has maintained continuous diplomatic ties with the U.S., in spite of the fact that it is reported to have been the most heavily bombed country in the world, by U.S. airpower, in a 'secret war' up to 1973. That war left enormous quantities of UXO, which to this day still kill and maim people in remote villages, as well as remnants of Agent Orange. It has cooperated with U.S. requests to find the remains of MIAs from the Indochina War, and continues to assist U.S. efforts to eliminate opium production.

I have traveled to remote parts of the country where our work is done, and have seen the needs of the country first hand. Medical care, educational facilities, and jobs are greatly wanting. This is not a technologically sophisticated country; to improve its standard of living, trade in basic materials, such as garments, furniture, handicrafts, etc. must be encouraged. Yet, the U.S. imposes an average tariff of 45.3%, compared to a global average of 2.4%; silk dresses, one of the principal commodities produced in Laos, are taxed at 65%, compared to 7% for Vietnam, Cambodia and China. This fact is a clear hindrance to the development of the economy.

I have gotten to know many Lao nationals, and I find that they have a strong liking and deep regard for the American people. I have also gotten to know many diplomats, American Embassy staff, expatriate staff in other INGOs, and expatriate business people, and I have not found any who would not take the same position as myself in encouraging the establishment of Normal Trade Relations with the U.S.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Ferchak, Ph.D.,
Country Director
Quaker Service in Laos

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Fraternité France-Laos
330120 Le Vigan, France
Association Le Frangipanier
48000 Mende, France March 26, 2003

To:

Honourable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means, House of representatives
Fax: 202 225 2610

Honourable Philippe M. Crane,

We are two humanitarian non governmental organizations of Laotians in France (Fraternité France-Laos, Association Le Frangipanier; we have learned with great satisfaction that a letter jointly signed by Mr Collin Power and Mr Robert Zoellick has been sent to the Committee on Finance, United states senate, and to the Committee on ways and means, House of representatives, to request the approval of an agreement between the Lao people's democratic republic and the United states of

America on trade relations with a disposition on NTR. We are for that reason would like to express our great appreciation and sincere congratulation to the US government for its appropriate decision to support the approval of the bilateral Agreement on trade relations. We are convinced that the bilateral Agreement on trade relations will contribute to the enhancement of relations between our two countries and the deepening of the mutual understanding of our peoples. We therefore would like to call upon your very kind support and request that the Agreement between the Lao people's democratic republic and the United states of America on trade relations be approved by the Senate.

Phoungoun Souk-Aloun, MD,
chairman Fraternité France-Laos

Khamsing Phothirath, MD,
chairman Association Le Frangipanier

Global Advance Technology, Inc.
Wichita, Kansas 67210

I want to take this opportunity to introduce my self and my company and the Lao Buddhist Association of Kansas.

My name is Khamphoui Manyseng. I am U.S. citizen and businees owner and Board of Director of Wichita Chamber of Commerce base in Wichita, Kansas, I am writing this letter on behalf of my employees, my fellows Laotian American in Wichita and Cities around and my family. I wholeheartedly support the joint proposal of Honorable Colin L. Powell, State Secretary and Honorable Robert B. Zoellick, U.S. Trade Rep. in granting teh permanent NTR to the Lao PDR.

The Lao PDR is only country in the area that haven't got such Agreement yet although its politico-Social situation are far better than others.

I would like to thank you very much for your kind and cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Khamphoui Manyseng
President & Owner
Global Advance Technology, Inc.

Washington, D.C. 20515
April 11, 2003

The Honorable Phil Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

We write today to implore you to take no further steps toward granting Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR). We respectfully assert that granting NTR to Laos at this time would in fact represent an ill-conceived reward for the consistently dreadful behavior the LPDR regime has exhibited in recent years at home, abroad, and in its bilateral relations with the United States. We offer the following seven facts as evidence the LPDR has not yet earned such an upgrade in its trade status.

1. Two U.S. citizens remain missing after disappearing at the Laotian border in 1999. The LPDR government has been uncooperative in its dealings with U.S. authorities working to investigate their case, and the LPDR government may have been involved in the disappearance itself. According to American eyewitnesses, U.S. citizens Houa Ly and Michael Vang went missing on April 19, 1999 after having last been seen with Lao government authorities near the Laos-Thailand border. U.S. investigators have since pursued the case, but the State Department has acknowledged a lack of cooperation by the LPDR in the investigation, stating in November 1999 that the Lao government "has been slow to respond to our requests for access to the area and has tried to place restrictions on our investigators." In July of 1999, staff members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee traveled to Laos and received information on the case from what they characterized as a "very credible source." The staff report filed after the trip states that, "with a great degree of detail, the tip we received corroborated Hmong-Amer-

ican suspicions that the men in fact crossed into Laos and that the government of Laos captured and killed Messrs. Vang and Ly.”

2. As documented in this year's State Department Report on Human Rights Practices, the LPDR continues to be one of the world's most reprehensible abusers of human rights—with a repertoire that includes torture, harsh restrictions on the press and free speech, and imprisonment of people for their religious beliefs. The report speaks for itself, stating that last year: “The (Lao) Government’s human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit serious abuses. Citizens do not have the right to change their government. Members of the security forces abused detainees, especially those suspected of insurgent or antigovernment activity. Prisoners were abused and tortured, and prison conditions generally are extremely harsh and life threatening—The judiciary was subject to executive, legislative, and LPRP influence, was corrupt, and did not ensure citizens due process. The Government infringed on citizens’ privacy rights. The Government restricted freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and association. The Government continued to restrict freedom of religion, and police and provincial authorities arrested and detained more than 60 members of Christian churches, with 4 members of religious communities in custody or incarcerated for their religious beliefs at year’s end.” These appalling human rights abuses are of particular concern in the so-called “Saysamboun Special Zone” in Laos, where reports of LPDR military offenses against ethnic minorities are common and disturbing. Finally, it is important to note that independent human rights monitoring organizations such as Amnesty International continue to be barred from entering Laos by the LPDR government.

3. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom this year called Laos one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom, stating that forced renunciations of faith and imprisonment of people for their religious beliefs are tragically frequent. In its 2003 report to the president and Congress, the commission urged the Bush administration to name Laos a “Country of Particular Concern,” which would place it in the company of such terrifying regimes as Iraq, Sudan, Burma and North Korea. According to the commission’s report, “for at least the last several years, the government of Laos has engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom—these include the arrest and prolonged detention and imprisonment of members of religious minorities on account of their religious activities, as well as instances where Lao officials have forced Christians to renounce their faith. Between 100 and 200 individuals have been arrested since 1999. At the same time, dozens of churches have been closed. These violations have continued to be committed in the past year . . .”

4. Shockingly, the LPDR continues to foster close ties with Kim Jong-Il's Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)—stating less than two years ago that relations “of friendship and cooperation” between Laos and the North Korean pariah state “are steadily growing stronger,” and congratulating the North Korean people “on the shining successes made in their efforts to build a powerful nation . . . under the wise leadership of Kim Jong-Il.” In a joint communique issued July 17, 2001 by the leadership of the LPDR and DPRK, the North Korean government also commended the Lao government for the “great successes made in their efforts to consolidate and develop the people’s democratic system and estimated the daily rising role and position of the LPDR.”

5. The LPDR recently held state-sanctioned rallies speaking out against U.S. military action in Iraq in the most inflammatory of terms—stating that “the war will bring disaster to the whole of humanity,” and “demand(ing) the U.S. respect the peace and sovereignty of Iraq.” These and other similarly belligerent comments were transmitted throughout Laos on state-run radio and around the globe through various media services.

6. A substantial majority of Laotian-Americans—many of whom know, first-hand, the brutality meted out by the LPDR regime—are strongly opposed to offering NTR to Laos. These people, many of whom are Hmong-Americans who assisted the United States military during the Vietnam War, view the offer of NTR to the government of Laos as a fundamental betrayal of not only them personally, but of our American principles. According to the most recent census, there are approximately 170,000 Hmong living in the United States. An almost equal number of Lao live in the United States as well.

7. Although some argue that Laos presents a potentially lucrative market for U.S. companies, the facts show otherwise. While proponents of improved trade relations with Laos claim that the potential economic benefits outweigh the significant moral questions about Laos as a trading partner, the truth is that the LPDR’s Gross Domestic Product in 2001 was estimated to be \$9.2 billion. For com-

parison, the Gross Municipal Product of Fort Wayne, Indiana in 2001 was more than double that amount: \$18.8 billion. Laos' authoritarian internal economic policies, not a lack of trade with the United States, has created this dismal reality. Without substantial change in those policies, neither the people of Laos nor the United States will ever benefit economically from NTR.

This letter should not be interpreted as a statement that we believe the door to NTR for Laos should be shut forever. In our opinion, however, Laos has failed miserably to demonstrate that it is ready for or deserves NTR at this time. In fact, in the six years since the negotiation of the U.S.-LPDR bilateral trade agreement, the Lao regime's record on basic issues like those mentioned above has actually become worse, not better.

We believe that if, over the next few years, the LPDR government is able to successfully demonstrate concrete improvements in these areas of concern, consideration of NTR for Laos may be appropriate. Until then, however, we should send a strong message to the LPDR regime that economic rewards from the United States will not be forthcoming unless it can improve its abysmal record.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Mark Green
Member of Congress

The Honorable George Radanovich
Member of Congress

Washington, D.C. 20002

To: Congressman Philip M Crane, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means

Dear Congressman:

I would like to strongly urge you to support the initiative for the U.S. NTR to Laos. Normalizing trade relations with Laos would be an important further step in supporting the region and their economic growth as a whole.

I have traveled much in developing countries and the one item which strikes me is how most people in these countries have relatives in the U.S. From cab drivers in Addis Ababa to Korean flower vendors.

Strengthening these ties between our immigrant community and their country of origin not only serves as a means of providing economic benefit to the country, but likewise reflects in establishing respect for the United States in these countries. I urge you to support the efforts and therefore strengthen our links to Laos. It makes economic sense and it makes diplomatic sense.

Thank you for considering this expression of my support.

Geoffrey Greenwell

Bethesda, Maryland 20816

To: House Ways and Means Committee
From: Pamela Griffin

I am writing in order to support Normal Trade Relations between the United States and Laos. Economic stability in this region is vital, and any minor objections by a few vocal opponents are far outweighed by the need to finally put into effect the 1997 agreement to normalize be-lateral relations. In my view, there is no significant reason why Laos should not join Vietnam and Cambodia in receiving this status.

Thank you for making possible the Normalization of Trade Relations between the United States and Laos immediately.

Sincerely,

Pamela Griffin

Arlington, Virginia 22201
 April 16, 2003

The Honorable Phil Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 Ways and Means Committee
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515
 FAX 202-225-2610

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the Vietnam War POW/MIA families, I am writing in strong support of NTR for Laos. Acting on a favorable position established earlier by our voting members, the League's elected Board of Directors has consistently supported this long-overdue step between the United States and Laos.

Since first visiting Laos in 1982, I have worked closely with senior Lao and U.S. officials, both in Vientiane and in Washington. I last visited Laos in February of this year, as head of a small delegation that included League Chairman of the Board Jo Anne Shirley and Policy Advisor Richard T. Childress, a Vietnam War veteran who served for eight years as Director of Asian Affairs, National Security Council, during both Reagan Administrations. As expected, we found serious cooperation and support by the Lao. Our consistent testimony before your Subcommittee, last given in 1999, was also in support of NTR for Laos.

A Bilateral Trade Agreement was initialed in 1998, yet favorable action by Congress to on that agreement and NTR for Laos still lags. Ironically, now that Vietnam, Cambodia and even Burma (Myanmar) have been approved, Laos is the only ASEAN country that does not have normal trade relations with the United States. Even more illogical is that Laos is joined by only two countries in the world without NTR, Cuba and North Korea. It is difficult to justify to Lao officials why this situation has not been rectified.

The Lao Government and people have continuously improved their already significant cooperation on POW/MIA accounting, and though much remains to be done, we have confidence that further requests by the U.S. will also meet with positive responses. Laos has also cooperated well in bilateral and multinational efforts to stem narcotics production and trafficking. The Lao leadership has made difficult decisions required to address human rights, religious freedom and to develop their country's economy for the betterment of the Lao people. Failure to reinforce such positive steps can seriously undercut the prospect of further progress in achieving Lao and U.S. objectives. Now is not the time to cause nations to turn away from the United States, particularly those that demonstrated early and, to the extent of their capacity, full support for our fight against international terrorism.

It is our sincere hope that you will vote to approve NTR to reinforce the positive steps Laos has taken to address bilateral issues, especially POW/MIA accounting. Other U.S. priority concerns are also more likely to continue improving with favorable action by Congress on NTR.

Respectfully,

Ann Mills Griffiths
 Executive Director

cc: Deputy Secretary of State
 Deputy Secretary of Defense

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Vientiane, Lao PDR
 April 19, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane, Chairman
 Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
 hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
 Fax: (202) 225-2610

Dear Sir:

I am writing in response to your request for written public comments regarding the extension of normal trade relations (NTR) status to the products of Laos.

I am an American citizen who has lived and worked in Lao PDR since 1996 with a U.S.-based international non-government organization. I encourage you to grant

permanent NTR status to Laos and to enact the 1997 bilateral trade agreement for Congress to enact legislation amending the HTS to strike Laos permanently from General Note 3(b). I believe this agreement will represent an important step toward economic reform and openness, which are key U.S. priorities in Laos. A more prosperous Laos is in the U.S. interest

The opinions I have expressed here are personal and do not intend to represent an official position by my employer.

Sincerely,

Troy Hansel
Associate Conservationist
WCS—Lao Country Program

Health Frontiers
Kenyon, Minnesota 55946
April 11, 2003

Congressman Philip Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Ways and Means Committee
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Congressman Crane:

We are writing to express the support of Health Frontiers for the proposal to grant permanent Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status to Laos, and to enact the 1997 bilateral trade agreement between Laos and the United States.

Health Frontiers is an all-volunteer non-profit organization, which has enabled hundreds of volunteer faculty physicians from many US institutions to be helpful to the destitute Medical School in Laos over the past dozen years. They have helped the Lao faculty to launch an intensive three-year residency training program in pediatrics and internal medicine. These are the first full-time postgraduate medical education programs in the history of the country, and they have already graduated fourteen new Lao pediatricians.

Throughout these twelve years, we have been able to confirm that Laos, though still a communist country, no longer fits its earlier reputation as the cruel dictatorship that terrorized and killed so many of its own people. Laos is now one of the more peaceful places on earth, daily welcoming planeloads of visiting Lao-Americans and international tourists. It is also one of the least developed countries in Asia, with enormous potential for NTR to spur productive trade. The positive changes in Laos have coincided with its efforts since 1989 to open up to the rest of the world. There can be little doubt that NTR would accelerate these positive changes, both economically and politically.

We wish you and your colleagues much wisdom as you consider this matter, and we trust the Congress will be able to grant NTR status for Laos at this time.

Sincerely yours,

Karen Olness, MD
Medical Director
Hakon Torjesen
President

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Health Frontiers
Vientiane, Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic
April 16, 2003

Normal Trade Relations with Laos

Public Comment Submitted to the Subcommittee of Trade of the Committee
on Ways and Means

We urge that the U.S. Government grant normal trade relations status to the products of Laos. Our comments are based upon the understanding we have gained

from our experiences and what we have witnessed in Laos over the previous five years.

I came here to photograph the people.

Looking at the state of the people in the photographs has brought both of us back to Laos; wanting to do everything we could to help the people. We now work with the Faculty of Medical Sciences National University of Laos, the teaching hospitals, and the Ministry of Health. We travel to the provinces with medical residents and to deliver medical supplies. Everywhere we go, we see the effects of poverty and malnutrition.

We also see the devastation from unexploded ordinance dropped from bombers during the Vietnam War and how it continues to haunt the people of Laos. Here in Laos, they call it the American War. We recently saw an unconscious person in the hospital with a piece of shrapnel in her brain. Her family explained to us that her brother was killed from the explosion as they were working together in their rice field. There was nothing that we could do, except to say, "I'm sorry." Meanwhile the Lao Government cooperates with the USA helping to recover the remains of American MIAs.

In a letter to Charles Rangel, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, dated February 24 2003, signed by Robert Zoellick, U.S. Trade Representative and Colin Powell, Secretary of State; concerns about the Lao Government's human rights record are discussed and summarized by stating "The Administration believes that extending NTR to Laos will create a more cooperative atmosphere and opportunities that will help open the society and leverage our efforts to improve human rights, religious freedom and rule of law in Laos."

Everyday we see disease caused by malnutrition, a direct result of poverty. In the hospitals, many children, already in a pathetic state of health, die from diarrhea. In the countryside, many children walk around with distended abdomens, common with malnutrition and intestinal parasites. Many have white spots or ulcers on their eyes from vitamin deficiency. When their eye gets bad and bothers them, and if they can afford it, they have their eye removed. It only costs \$20 U.S. dollars. We have seen two cases of NOMA, cancrum oris, a secondary infection that afflicts malnourished children after a course of measles or other illness. This infection begins in the mouth and eats away at the lips and cheek. If the children survive the disease, and even more severe malnutrition from not being able to move their jaw and chew their food; they grow up horribly disfigured. It takes eight hours in an American operating room to give them their face back. I told one girl that I would try to help her. We hope that through the influence of these words, and the words in other public comments, others can be prevented from losing their face as she has.

This poverty and poor state of health affects minority people far more significantly than any other segment of the population. Ironically, these are the people mentioned in the letter to Charles Rangel regarding human rights or "protection of minority rights."

We cannot provide the solutions to reduce poverty and thus improve health. We see ourselves and other volunteers working so hard to make even the slightest difference for a few people; sometimes with success, and sometimes with failure. We need to believe that "good enough" is acceptable and sometimes even too much to hope for. The situation in some of the villages is so bad, that we rejoice in even the slightest hint of being able to make a difference. We do not know who would benefit the most from NTR; but we expect that even the poorest people will gain some benefit, directly in the marketplace. These people will also benefit from export taxes that will help the Lao Government develop transportation, communication, education, and health facilities; all necessary to help reduce poverty. Anything that can provide hope to eradicate poverty pertains to individual human rights. The human right for parents to feed their children, should be a far greater and more immediate concern than the government's human rights record. Religious freedom is about offering people choices. Granting the Lao Government "normal" trade relations, should offer to Lao families the "normal" opportunities and choices that our families take for granted in the USA.

Leila Srour, MD
Bryan Watt

Hmong American Planning and Development Center, Inc.
Arlington, Texas 76013

The Honorable Congressman Martin Frost and Congressional members of the Ways and Means Committee,

On behalf of the Hmong American Planning and Development Center, Inc., a non-profit community-based organization of Texas, I write this letter in support for the granting of NTR to Laos.

Once granted, both the American and Lao people will greatly benefit the NTR. During the past several years, many Lao American Entrepreneurs had tried to do business with the Lao people but they faced the international trade barriers. As consequence, many business leaders lost their investment.

The NTR would benefit the current Lao government leadership in the short-term but in the long run, the Lao population will enjoy its good results. Also, the NTR may be one of the instruments for political changes in the future and hopefully democracy will prevail.

Thank your support as well as the United States congress.

Respectfully Yours,

Thao Phia Xaykao
Director

Hmong International Human Rights Watch
Omaha, Nebraska 68104
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Phil Crane
Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Trade
233 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Fax: (202) 225-2610
hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov

Hearing on Extension of Normal Trade Relations to the Lao People's Democratic Republic

Dear Congressman Crane:

Our organization is strongly opposed to the granting of Normalized Trade Relations to Laos before some concrete measures have been taken by the current Lao PDR regime to improve its human rights record and open up the country to international human rights monitors to all areas of the country, most particularly remote areas of Saysomboun Special Zone.

I would like to begin by stating that the Hmong people have been targeted for human rights abuse by the current regime because of their loyal support of the United States during the Vietnam War. It was because of this loyalty that the Hmong continue to be the never ending target of persecution by the Lao PDR up till the present day.

After 1975, the Hmong were singled out for extermination. On September 13, 1981, then-U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig accused the Soviet Union of supplying chemical weapons (trichothecene mycotoxins) to the Lao and Vietnamese governments to use against the Hmong. To this date, the State Department has still not retracted its statement. Today, these weapons would be threateningly referred to as "Weapons of Mass Destruction". It is important to note that these alleged chemical attacks took place in an area now referred to as Saysomboun Special Zone. This is an administrative area operated by Lao military forces. Travel is tightly restricted. U.N. and U.S. Embassy staff cannot travel freely to this remote area. This is a major concern because some of the worst human rights atrocities occur here on a regular basis.

Hmong returnees and their leaders have been the target of human rights abuse. Vue Mai, the leader of a large group of returnees was secretly arrested and never heard from again. Kou Yang, the former leader of Ban Phan Thao repatriation site had to get political asylum in the U.S. after Lao PDR officials made threats on his life. This was all because he spoke out against the lowland Lao taking away many of the Hmong returnees farmland.

Hmong returnees have to carry government-issued identification cards with distinctive markings, which mark them as potential trouble makers. This year's State Department's Human Rights Report on Laos states that such cards tended to reinforce a pattern of societal discrimination against the returnees. This is troubling as the Hmong returnees are often singled out as scapegoats for any societal problems that arise. Since the Hmong returnees living in Ban Phan Thao are not allowed to own guns, unlike the lowland Lao who have AK-47s, they are constantly in a precarious position.

To add insult to injury, the UNHCR closed its office in Laos over a year ago. Lionel Rosenblatt, former State Department official and currently President Emeritus of Refugees International, stated in a RI report released early last year that the U.S. government had promised to fully fund UNHCR's continued operation in Vientiane.

The two Hmong-speaking UNHCR monitors are no longer available to resolve the problems of returnees. Ever since the February 6, 2003 attack on a bus just outside Vang Vieng the Hmong returnees have lived in constant fear of government reprisals. They are afraid because they are often the scapegoat for such violent occurrences. The newspapers reported that instead of trying to preserve the crime scene authorities quickly cleaned up the area, thereby destroying any evidence which could later be used in court.

We have received information that the government arrested a Hmong man from a nearby town in connection with this incident. We fear for his safety, as the recently released State Department's Human Rights Report on Laos states that detainees suspected of insurgency are treated very roughly.

In June 2002, a Hmong-American was an eye-witness when 105 Hmong peacefully surrendered to government authorities in Ban Phan Thao village. He wanted to take photos of the group but authorities denied his request. Shortly thereafter, the Lao government ordered several trucks to take these Hmong away, supposedly heading for the Phukhin Jail in Vientiane. We have presented this information to the U.S. Ambassador in Laos but have not been able to find out where these Hmong were taken or how they are doing right now.

That same month, there was also the case we reported of six Hmong who were arrested in Meung Feung. The U.S. Ambassador has confirmed the arrest but has still not found out where they have been taken to and if they will have a fair trial.

Earlier this month Voice of America reported that the Lao government arrested 3 Hmong leaders from Muang Mok and took them to a jail in Savanakheth. Last month we received news that 150 Hmong living in this area were assaulted by the Lao military, 5 killed, others wounded, with the rest fleeing into the jungle. We are very concerned about what will happen to these Hmong.

There are still over 30,000 Hmong refugees living in Thailand, most of who live at Wat Thamkrabok. These Hmong possess neither Lao nor Thai citizenship. They are without nationality. We know of a case of 5 Hmong who acquired Thai citizenship then legally traveled back to Laos to visit relatives during the new year celebration. These Hmong were wrongfully accused of being Hmong insurgents and put in jail. They have been held for over three years now without receiving a fair trial. Currently, they are in Phongtong jail, Vientiane (more information available upon request).

Lastly, we know of many cases of Hmong working at high levels of the government who are singled out and imprisoned or executed. We have received word that Boua Chong Lee, who was a high level military officer arrested in 1995 has been killed. Then there is the recent case we received of Savangsai Lo (aka: Xaiv Ker Lo), who held a high position in the Trade Department. He was the son-in-law of Xai Ker Yang, former President of the Lao PDR National Assembly. On August 10, 2002, Savangsai Lo was murdered by the Lao PDR, after he refused to take part in government sponsored corruption (more information available upon request).

Conclusion

We would like the U.S. government to establish an Orderly Departure Program (ODP) for those Hmong trapped inside Saysomboun Special Zone and the surrounding remote jungle area.

We would like the U.S. to put pressure on the Lao government to open up Saysomboun Special Zone and other areas of the country so that international human rights monitors can be allowed uninhibited access to all areas of the country.

Prisoners must have the right to fair trials and be allowed visits by family members and ICRC.

Without the granting of such basic freedoms as these we feel that granting Normalized Trade Status to the Lao PDR will have a negative impact on the local population.

Respectfully,

Laura Xiong
Executive Director

CC:

Congressman Xavier Becerra, CA
 Congressman Dave Camp, MI
 Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn, WA
 Congressman Phil English, PA
 Congressman Ramstad, CA
 Congressman Charles B. Rangel, NY
 Congressman E. Clay Shaw Jr. FL
 Congressman Jonh S. Tanner, TN
 Congressman Wally Herger, CA
 Congressman Amo Houghton, NY
 Congressman William J. Jefferson, LA
 Congressman Sander M. Levin, MI
 Congressman Richard E. Neal, MA
 Congressman Jim Nussle, IA

New Haven, Connecticut 06511

Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman
 Subcommittee on Trade
 Ways and Means Committee
 House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515
 Fax: 202-225-2610

Dear Chairman Crane,

I urge you to submit the BTA to the 108th Congress for prompt consideration and passage. I believe that the United States and Laos will benefit greatly from the normal trade relations (NTR) that will follow Congressional passage.

As you know, Laos is one of only seven countries under non-NTR or embargo-type policies in U.S. foreign policy. The denial of NTR to Laos in light of normal trade relations granted to Vietnam and Cambodia makes little sense. The United States and Laos signed the BTA in 1997, and its ratification forms part of President Bush's trade agenda. President Bush recently cited Laos as one of the countries included in the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative, with the aim of helping that country, Cambodia and Vietnam integrate into the international economy. Moreover, bilateral efforts to address POW/MIA issues and stem the flow of narcotics continue to be productive.

I am mindful that trade agreements negotiated by the Executive Branch and approved by Congress are only the first stage of stronger and more mutually beneficial ties. It is incumbent upon the government of Laos to provide American companies and their own state and private enterprises with the legal framework and operational authority they need to pursue successful trade and investments.

After 1975, the United States and Laos maintained official ties when relations with Vietnam and Cambodia had been completely severed. It is time to remove discriminatory tariff barriers and to take this last major step toward the normalization of relations. I look forward to working with you to achieve this. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Benjamin D. Hodgdon

Washington, D.C. 20001

Congressman Philip M. Crane
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515
 Fax (202) 225-2610

Congressman Philip M. Crane:

I am an anthropology specialist who has worked on anthropological research of Vat Phu Province of Laos and through my knowledge on Lao society, is hoping for a smooth carry out of the Bilateral Trade Agreement between Laos and the United States.

The province in Laos that I was working was planned to be designated as a World Heritage by UNESCO. To avoid the cultural destruction by impact of tourists on

residents at the site (who have traditional life style,) anthropologists decided to limit the number of tourists coming into the site at a time. I was against these anthropologists. The residents at the archaeological site are on absolute poverty. If the residents are able to sell their intricate handcrafts to as many tourists as possible, and if that process leads to international trade, their economic situation would improve.

Since the United States has the largest power on international market, the normalized trade between Laos and the United States would impact the most and exponentially help these large number of people in Laos who are suffering under poverty. I am confident that execution of the Bilateral Trade Agreement would better the life of the people of Laos. The people would appreciate the United States, as the country of human rights.

Very sincerely,

Fumie Iizuka

International Mass Retail Association
Arlington, Virginia 22209
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Phillip Crane
Chairman
House Ways & Means
Subcommittee on Trade
1104 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

On behalf of the International Mass Retail Association (IMRA), I urge you to support Congressional approval for Normal Trade Relations (NTR) for Laos this year.

The International Mass Retail Association is the world's leading alliance of retailers and their product and service suppliers. IMRA members represent over \$1 trillion in sales annually and operate over 100,000 stores, manufacturing facilities, and distribution centers nationwide. Our member retailers and suppliers have facilities in all 50 states, as well as internationally, and employ millions of Americans. As a full-service trade association, IMRA provides industry research and education, government advocacy, and a unique forum for its members to establish relationships, solve problems, and work together for the benefit of the consumer and the mass retail industry.

The U.S. and Laos concluded a bilateral trade agreement in August 1997, however the U.S. has never implemented the agreement, which means Laos has yet to receive NTR trade status. As you are well aware, non-NTR tariffs are significantly higher than those granted under normal trade status.

NTR for Laos would lead to increased two-way trade between our countries, giving IMRA's members another option for sourcing and providing U.S. consumers with high quality products at competitive prices, especially wearing apparel. Last year U.S. importers paid close to \$5 million in duties on cotton sweaters, sweatshirts and vests (HTS 611020). Current non-NTR duty rates on these items are 45%, while the NTR rate is only 5%. NTR for Laos would lead to huge savings for American consumers on these and other products.

We urge you to move forward with granting NTR status to Laos this year. If you have any questions, please contact Jonathan Gold, Director, International Trade Policy (jongold@imra.org) in the IMRA office.

Sincerely,

Sandy Kennedy
President, IMRA

Jhai Foundation
San Francisco, California 94112
May 21, 2003

To: members, Ways and Means Committee
From: Lee Thorn, Chair, Jhai Foundation
Re: Normalization of trade with Laos

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this bill.

I am a veteran of the air war in Laos. I was a bombloader on the USS Ranger (CVA-61) in 1966. Most of the bombs I loaded fell on Laos.

For the last five years I and my co-founder, Bounthanh Phommasathit, of Etna, Ohio, and formerly of the Plain of Jars in Laos, have worked on behalf of poor Lao people to build the Jhai Foundation's activities in Laos. We are a reconciliation non-governmental organization and an American non-profit organization under IRS corporate status 501c3.

I wish to add my name to those who support normalization of trade with Laos. I believe it is very important that after all these years Lao people have the opportunity to trade with the United States. It will help not only Lao people, especially women weavers who face a 90% tariff to entry into the U.S. market, send goods. It also will help the most successful Lao-Americans do something good for their homeland through trade and business.

Jhai Foundation helps the rural poor develop information technology for communications and business, helps farmers increase their yields, and helps coffee farmers get a Fair Trade price for their wonderful coffee. We hope also to help Lao weavers sell their goods. All this economic development activity would be greatly helped

Normalization is long overdue. Laos presents no threat to us. It is time to reconcile.

Yours, in Peace,

Lee Thorn
Chairman,
Jhai Foundation

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Vientiane, Lao PDR
June 16, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane, Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
Fax: (202) 225-2610

Dear Sir:

I am writing in response to your request for written public comments regarding the extension of normal trade relations (NTR) status to the products of Laos.

I am an American citizen who has lived and worked in Lao PDR since 1998 as the director of a U.S.-based international non-government organization. I encourage you to grant permanent NTR status to Laos and to enact the 1997 bilateral trade agreement for Congress to enact legislation amending the HTS to strike Laos permanently from General Note 3(b). I believe this agreement will represent an important step toward economic reform and openness, which are key U.S. priorities in Laos. Laos is a poor developing country that needs more contact with the outside world to stay afloat. A more prosperous Laos is in the U.S. interest

The opinions I have expressed here are personal and do not intend to represent an official position by my employer.

Sincerely,

Arlyne Johnson, Ph.D.
Co-director, WCS—Lao Country Program

Washington, D.C. 20002
April 11, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane
Room 233
Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1308

Dear Congressman Crane;

By way of introduction, I am Mr. Robert L. Jones, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary Of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs (DASD POW/MPA). I served in this capacity during the former administration from May 1998 to March 2001. Prior to assuming office I participated in several presidential delegations to South-

east Asia concerning POW/MIA affairs and normalization of relations with Vietnam. In various capacities I had the opportunity to visit Laos and to participate in numerous negotiations concerning the POW/MIA issue.

I am pleased to note that you are soliciting comments concerning the United States extending Normal Trade Relations to Laos. I am aware that the Secretary of State and the U.S. Trade Representative have endorsed this endeavor.

During my tenure as DASD POW/MPA the Lao government was extremely cooperative, within their capability, in assisting our endeavors to determine the fate of missing Americans from the Vietnam War and to recover them with honor. I maintained an open dialogue with officials from the Lao government in Vientiane and their Ambassador in Washington, DC. Through our mutual efforts the U.S. Joint Task Force For Full Accounting was given greater latitude in conducting operations in Laos. Our operations format was given greater flexibility; we were allowed to increase the number of Americans on recovery operations and allowed when appropriate to extend the length of operations. The Lao gave us expanded access to government archives, museums and libraries. We were provided access to the Lao film library. In addition, the Lao expanded their personnel committed to our joint efforts. Granted the process has been slow and activists have criticized it, however it is a process that has produced favorable results. The remains of missing Americans continue to be returned with dignity and honor to their loved ones. This could not be achieved without the full cooperation of the Lao people.

Though the search for missing Americans from the war in Vietnam continues. I believe that the Lao have demonstrated in good faith a willingness to fully cooperate with us in this noble endeavor. I strongly support extending Normal Trade Relations to Laos.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Jones

Falls Church, Virginia 22043

Dear Honorable Philip M. Crane

My name is Ammone Ker.

I wholeheartedly support the initiative for the US NTR to Laos and ask that you support this initiative as well. If you have any questions regarding why you should support this initiative, please contact the US-Lao NTR Coalition.

Respectfully Yours,

**The Voice of the Laotian American National Movement
In support of
The Bush Administration's Trade Initiative
To extend Normal Trade Relations to Laos**

We believe that:

Widespread and rapidly growing unemployment among youth in Laos has driven tens of thousands of them to flee to Thailand and other neighboring countries where they fall prey to exploitative and inhumane treatment by their employers and criminals; while the land-locked Laotian economy continues to weaken due to decline in foreign investment and its weak capability to compete with its neighbors in the export markets. The situation is further aggravated by the continued denial of US NTR while such privilege is enjoyed by its stronger immediate neighbors, including Vietnam and Cambodia.

US NTR for Laos is not a panacea for its social economic problems, but it will put Laos on a level playing field with its neighboring countries on which to compete for a share of the U.S. markets. This in turn will stimulate domestic and foreign investment in Laos and give the country a fair chance to provide decent jobs for its youth and thereby help reverse the current ill treatment and suffering they have had to endure, both in Laos and in neighboring countries.

We realize that Laotian communities across the U.S. are not unanimous in their views about the current Laotian Government and its policies, and that the majority of Laotian Americans still wish to see more political reforms and changes. But we believe that a stronger Laotian economy will improve living conditions of the Laotian people who, in turn, will then become real stakeholders and, eventually catalysts for change. Experience in Asia has amply demonstrated that the democratization process has been economically driven.

While understanding and respecting the views of those opposing the granting of US NTR for Laos, we ask that they also understand and respect our views and positions on this important matter. As American citizens, we have the obligation to respect each other's rights and freedom to express our views in accordance with our belief and conscience.

The majority of Laotian Americans have reconnected with their homeland. Most of them have returned to Laos for visits and have relatives who are still there and wish to see that they be given a fair chance for a better living. Most Laotian Americans believe that promoting economic development is the best way to promote peaceful and sustainable change in Laos.

We wholeheartedly applaud and share the position taken by the Bush Administration on the issue of US NTR for Laos. Ambassador Hartwick is trying to encourage discussion and favorable consideration of this initiative.

Laotian Americans and friends of the Laotians who share our views should exercise their right of freedom of speech by voicing their views to their respective Congressional representatives, especially members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The opposition to the US NTR to date seeks to isolate and impoverish Laos for their own ambiguous political agenda. They have organized and financed aggressive lobby efforts to prevent hearings on this matter. Some of them continue to believe that poverty will force change in Laos. Recent history in Asia shows otherwise. People in isolated and poor North Korea have no means to ask for change, they starve in silence; while in relatively rich South Korea and other parts of Asia (Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines etc.) growing affluence of the peoples have created economically strong and well educated middle class who in turn have proven to be the real incubators and guardians of the growing democratization process.

A constructive engagement approach is a better alternative for the U.S. to promote change in Laos; and that promoting change through peaceful socioeconomic development is far more effective and humane than deliberate impoverishment of our fellow Laotians in Laos. Laos needs to adopt international standards and strengthen the rule of law. We should voice our collective efforts to urge the U.S. Congress to grant Laos the US NTR.

Now is the time for us to make our voice heard. **Please sign on as members and supporters of this national movement, and call, write or email your Senators and Congressmen toda-Y.** Reminding them that, granting NTR to Vietnam and Cambodia, and withholding similar rights for Laos does not make sense.

Laotian American National Movement will try to coordinate and in some cases help to campaign for US NTR for Laos. Our American friends can certainly help to do the same. Let's not leave out any body that can help.

For more information and assistance, please contact:

The US-Lao NTR Coalition
120 Broadway, Suite 4
Richmond, CA 94804
(510) 235-5005, (510) 235-5065
Website: Laotianlink.com
Email: Laotianlink@USA.com

(Please attach this document to emails to your friends and colleagues and ask them to do like wise. It also can be found in www.laotianlink.com—Thank you.)

Amnone Ker

Racine, Wisconsin 53406
April 17, 2003

The Honorable Philip Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Trade of the Committee of Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Crane:

On behalf of the Armenian-American community of Wisconsin, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on and support extending Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status to Armenia.

Extending PNTR status to Armenia will be one more positive step to removing the former Soviet Union's cruel grip on Armenia. It is important to note that in 1920 Armenia faced invasion from both Kemalist Turkey and Bolshevik Russia and

was forced to surrender to the lesser of two evils. The result was 70 years of political, economic and social oppression and alienation from the Western world, instead of what would have assuredly been the completion of Turkey's genocidal campaign started in 1915.

In 1991, Armenia took its first step to removing the Soviet Union's grip by announcing its independence. Since then, Armenia has taken additional steps in this direction and, in the process, is creating a democracy and market economy. Most recently, the World Trade Organization approved Armenia's membership and President Bush certified to Congress that Armenia continues to comply with international standards for freedom of emigration. PNTR is the next logical step in this process.

Extending PNTR status to Armenia will have the added benefit of increasing trade between the United States and Armenia at a time when Turkey and Azerbaijan have imposed an illegal economic blockade. The World Bank has estimated that Armenia has suffered a loss of \$720 million per year due to this blockade. Increased trade with the United States will help to offset these losses.

I once again thank you for the opportunity to comment on PNTR status to Armenia and trust you will make every effort to see it approved.

Sincerely,

A. Zohrab Khaligian
Armenian National Committee of Wisconsin

New York, New York 10019

Congressmen:

Please pass legislation giving NTR status to Laos.

I have done business with Laotian businesses and have visited this wonderful country. I believe that both of our countries would benefit greatly from NTR.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mary Kilty

Burton, Michigan 48509
April 10, 2003

Congressman Phil Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
United States House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We strongly support normal trade relations (NTR) for Laos. NTR is long overdue, particularly when you consider that the only two other countries in the entire world that do not have NTR are North Korea and Cuba!

Laos has consistently worked with the US on POW/MIA accounting, improving each year, under the most difficult conditions of any in Southeast Asia.

They have also cooperated well to counter international narcotics production and trafficking.

The Lao people who will most benefit, need this support to improve their livelihood, and the US can best demonstrate reciprocity for their humanitarian POW/MIA and broader cooperation by taking this long overdue step.

Respectfully,

Jean King
James D. King

Lanxang Democracy, Inc.
 Roseville, Minnesota 55113
 March 20, 2003

Honorable US. Congressman Philip M. Crane
 Chairman of the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
 US. House of Representatives
 Washington D.C

Ref: The granting of a Normalized Trade Relations to Laos.

It is a very important step made by the United States of America in granting a Normalized Trade Relations status to underdeveloped countries which are in need for economic development. It is also a precondition for foreign investors to make direct investments in such poor and risky country as Laos that their finished products would be exported back to rich countries.

On behalf of Lanxang Democracy Party and the free people of Laos, we embrace the US Foreign Policy of "Engagement" and are concerned about the granting of a normalized trade relations status to Laos without evolving an effective mechanism of check and balance. Nevertheless, to maintain a real political stability, social and economic development, and to promote national reconciliation through peaceful means, we highly recommend the US. Congress to make a broader and comprehensive decision based on the following facts:

Socioeconomic conditions: Despite massive international financial aids and low interest loans over the past 27 years, Laos still remains one of the poorest countries on Earth and, according to a recent report of Asian Development Bank (ADB), will default the reimbursement of its foreign debts when becoming due. With more than \$3.6 billions USD of debts on their shoulders, the people of Laos will continue suffering of malnutrition and starvation for several decades. Because of hardship, rural people are pouring into big cities looking for work. For those who live in big cities have then found their ways to clandestinely cross the border to work in other countries. Thousands of them have been exploited and are obligated to becoming prostitutes or performing other illegal activities.

Lao education system is, at worse, the lowest level as compared to its neighboring countries. Coupled with its poor education standard, schools and qualified instructors are fewer everywhere. In June 2002, for example, only about 1700 of the 25,000 high school graduates were admitted to Higher education because of lack of schools. There was no hope for the rest of them and nobody really knows about their status at the present time. Unfortunately, this perilous situation will drag on endlessly if a real reform is not implemented now.

Without work on the horizon, people tend to grab everything they can for cash. Because of its cash-crop status, thousands of Lao people still continue the plantation of opium. Therefore, the narcotic trafficking business of amphetamine or Yaba is soaring and, with Lao officials' complice, it is very difficult to eradicate opium plantation in Laos. Many high ranking Lao officials are directly involved in the business, but each seizure of drug traffickers involves only ordinary people and low ranking Lao officials.

Political and Human Rights conditions: Since the Lao PDR's takeover of the Kingdom of Laos in 1975, thousands of Lao Royal government's high ranking officials, employees, military and police officers were sent to the concentration camps and died there. In these days, hundreds or thousands of Lao citizens still have been arrested and jailed without a due process.

The Lao PDR's 1991 Constitution seems guaranteeing the basic rights for its citizens, but it continues to persecute its own people for the sake of its political ambition and purposes. In 1999, for example, a lot of students who peacefully manifested in the capital of Vientiane were apprehended and jailed without judgement until these days.

Security Concerns: The incident on February 6, 2003 in VangVieng province areas that took 12 civilians' lives, including 3 foreigners, and subsequent attacks are our deep concerns and fear of the security of innocent people. We totally condemn these barbarians acts and feel their severe losses very deeply. We believed that those inhuman acts were committed by members of the poor people and those who are unhappy with the Lao PDR's handle of the nation's affairs.

In assuring lasting peace and security, political stability, and national reconciliation in Laos, we want the US. Congress to make sure that Lao PDR is well aware and fulfills the following preconditions in order to receive our full support for NTR:

1. Lao PDR must open up the free and equal access, without restriction, into every geographical areas to Lao-Hmong overseas; no discriminatory screening of

entry visas to Lao-Hmong overseas; and either donations or private aids to specific localities must be permitted without central government officials' involvement.

2. Business opportunities must be opened to all investors, including Lao overseas and foreigners based on the framework of the United Nations and a fair standard of international competition as defined by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Lao PDR must enact a new business law and regulations that fit into the internationally acceptable economic practices.

3. Lao PDR must provide a written guarantee of non-confiscation of future business entities merely based on the country's economic conditions. If any expropriation should occur, the business owner must be fairly compensated according to the new business law. And Lao PDR must also avoid any domestication, which is the profound effects on the business operations. If conflict should occur, the Lao PDR should be willing to accept the remedy of international legal institutions for avoiding arbitrary remedy.

4. All international assistance or aids and loans must be monitored by credible international agencies and the United States in order to minimize corruption and mismanagement of funds. In this manner, all funds will be certainly applied to the related projects. Those monitoring agencies must include members of Lao-Hmong overseas.

5. If desired, any Lao-Hmong overseas should have the same opportunity to work or be assigned to all levels of Lao PDR's government for economic and social development, national reconciliation, and a lasting stability in Laos.

6. For instant, regime change will only bring further chaos to Laos than ameliorating the life standard of the entire country. Therefore and under the supervision of the United Nations and the United States, political reform should be undertaken through peaceful and progressive means.

7. Lao PDR must facilitate constructive dialogues with Lao overseas oppositions under leadership of Prince Soulivong SAVANG and Prince Sauryavong SAVANG for political settlement once and for all. These dialogues must be orchestrated by the Ambassador of the United States in Vientiane, or ASEAN, or the United Nations.

8. Lao PDR must provide some safety zones for the insurgents or resistance forces for their gradual integration into the society. Those zones must be directly managed by the United Nations and the Ambassador of the United States for a reasonable duration. And no a single returnee should be prosecuted for his or her past political aspiration.

9. Finally, dual citizenship must be offered to all Lao-Hmong overseas.

Before granting a normalized trade relation status to Lao PDR, we want the US Administration and the US Congress to ascertain that Lao PDR complies with the above preconditions. NTR's ultimate purpose is to help impoverished countries and its people in lifting off the ground of poverty by allowing its goods to be sold overseas with the least import taxes imposed by host countries to earn hard currency, in this case the United States. If its primary goal was to sway, the NTR will not benefit the deprived Lao people and its granting will be meaningless and counter-productive.

Therefore, we, Lao overseas, are about to participate in any US. Congressional Hearing on the issue for a better and frank discussion with all political and social organizations to resolve this controversial issue.

Respectfully Yours,

Moua Sao Bliayang
 Tswv Xa Moua
 Gymbay Moua
 Moua Xiong
 Yia Lee
 Joe M.
 Seng Xiong
 Wang Teng Yang
 Chong Xue Chang
 Chai Moua
 Chuck Moua
 Bee Moua
 Ia Moua Yang
 Mai Vang Lee
 Song Bliayang
 Bertrand Moua
 Brian Moua
 Henry Yang
 Shannon
 Cindy
 Sydney
 Saykham
 Pao Lee Moua
 Che Bliayang
 Charles
 Chao Moua
 Wang Moua

Lao American National Republican Party of U.S.A.
 Tennessee Chapter
 Antioch, Tennessee 37013

Dear Congressman Philip M. Crane:
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways and Means
 United States Congress

As Laotian-Americans with many family members still living under the oppressive communist regime in Laos, we urge you to oppose Normal Trade Relations (NTR) for Laos until such time as Laos achieves democratic reforms, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

We believe such opposition is merited by the tremendous record of human rights abuse accumulated over twenty-eight years of oppressive rule by the Lao people's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). These abuses include the lack of free elections, the prohibition on the right of assembly and redress of grievances, the arrest and disappearance of protesters without the right of habeus corpus, and the aggressive repression of the exercise of religion. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom concluded in its February 2003 Report on Laos that: ". . .the U.S. government should make clear to the government of Laos that any such dialogue or other improvement in U.S.-Laos relations must be based on the immediate cessation of practices that abuse religious freedom, including arbitrary arrest and detention, forced renunciations and church closing.

Please, do not reward the oligarches who control the Laotian Communist Party. Do not reward the Party bosses and generals who abuse every tradition of democracy and human rights as they abuse the poor people of Laos. Now is the time for members of the United States Congress to take a stand against political and religious persecution. Oppose unconditional NTR for Laos. Pass NTR for Laos only after

Laos makes real and sincere reform and progress towards democracy, rule of law and respect for basic human rights.

Sincerely,

Noukane Souriyavongsa
Regional Vice President
Lao American National
Republican Party Of USA
Chapter Of Tennessee State

Lao American Repulibcan Party of Tennessee

5101 Countryside Drive

Antioch, TN 37013

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023	Bounleua Souriyavongsa	4612 Dowdy Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
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030	Phongsy Thansamai	2315 Willow Dr. Antioch, TN 37127
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044	Ladda Khounviengxay	4729 Miners Cove Antioch, TN 37013
045	Methy Khounviengxay	4729 Miners Cove Antioch, TN 37013
046	Aun Sada	1210 N. Academy St. Murfreesboro, TN 37130
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049	Nithone Ratanaphone	4621 Cynthia Ln. Murfreesboro, TN 37129
050	Vanpheng Khampakasy	6583 Cabot Rd. Nashville, TN 37209
051	Phosy Vongsaphay	1302 Rutherford St. Murfreesboro, TN 37130
052	kham Ouane Khammysing	4716 McBride Rd. Antioch, TN 37013
053	Pe Sayaseng	2712 Dickerson Rd. Lot #37 Nashville, TN
054	Keo Manyvanh	2714 Murfreesboro Rd. Lot #59 Antioch, TN
055	Khammeng Phommachanh	1506 Sherrill Blvd. Murfreesboro, TN 37130
056	Seuy Xaiyasombath	609 Jay St. Nashville, TN 47210

NO.	FULL NAME	ADDRESSES
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060	Novanpheth Soundara	88 Tusculum Rd. Antioch, TN 37013
061	Savath Vongprachanh	1201 Orchard MTNCT Antioch, TN 37013
062	Bounpheng Phimvong	813 Gladeview CT Lavergne, TN 37086
063	Manichanh Vongxay	205 South Bilbro Murfreesboro, TN 37130
064	Dom Sayvone	117 Blade CT Murfreesboro, TN 37127
065	Kham Sayvorn	117 Blade CT Murfreesboro, TN 37127
066	Chaleunsak Soth	4820 Sunlight Drive Nashville, TN 37211
067	Sisavath Southichak	2025 Rice Avenue Nashville, TN 37217
068	Somphong Vongkhamchanh	633 Mt. Hood Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
069	Thong Chanthavong	1940 Meadow Cliff Dr. Nashville, TN 37210
070	Somchay Phadore	5109 Vickory Wood Antioch, TN 37013
071	Sangvan Phanthourath	1000 Carolyn Ave Nashville, TN 37216
072	Khamfong Vongsamphanh	3836 Valley Ridge Dr. Nashville, TN 37211
073	Samouth Panyavong	4990 Barella Drive Antioch, TN 37013
074	One Phanthalangsy	4116 Pine Ordchand Place Antioch, TN 37013
075	David Sengmany	4214 October Woodsor Antioch, TN 37013
076	Phaeng Vankham	4019 Sunlight Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
077	Keo Panyavong	536 Spann Court Antioch, TN 37013
078	Amphone Khamhoungvilavong	2482 Saddle Wood CT Murfreesboro, TN 37219
079	Nid Keopanya	321 South 17th St. Nashville, TN 37206
080	Khamdy Chindavanh	4701 Apollo Dr, Antioch, TN 37013
081	Phouang Rathsomrath	394 Saint Francis Ave Smyrna, TN 37167
082	Thin Ngo	8500 Maudina Apt. B7 Nashville, TN 37209
083	Kong Amphonephone	5124 Singing Hills Drive Antioch, TN 37013
084	Khampane Panyavong	1015 Betty Lou LN Lavergne, TN 37086
085	Khammouane Souvannakhiry	6341 Mt. View Rd. Antioch, TN 37013
086	Thongma Inta	2714 Milboro Rd. Lot 118 Antioch, TN 37013
087	Daliene Panyavong	2714 Murfreesboro Rd. Lot 122 Antioch, TN 37013
088	Thongbay Sayavongthong	422 Lake Forest Dr. Lavergne, TN 37086

NO.	FULL NAME	ADDRESSES
089	Kham Phay Sayasack	641 Wood Burn Drive Smyrna, TN 37167
090	Basay Khammouanvichit	515 Rose Bank Ave Nashville, TN 37206
091	Bounmee Sirithai	37A Lutie Street Nashville, TN 37210
092	Khamdy Mathavong	4312 Lytle Creek Dr. Murfreesboro, TN 37127
093	Somsak Phoumanivong	2200 Mt. Herman Milboro, TN 37129
094	Supraanee Senmounnarath	2225 Roseeran Circle Lavergne, TN 37086
095	Sisamai Manosinh	2403 Obrien Milboro, TN 37130
096	Simone Khounsanthone	2714 Milboro Rd. Lot 118 Antioch, TN 37013
097	Bouavanh Phengsavanh	2437 Red Mile Rd. Murfreesboro, TN 37127
098	Panh Daranikone	406 Britt Lane Lavergne, TN 37086
099	Somsack Phongpraseut	2714 Murfreesboro Rd. Lot 113 Antioch, TN 37013
100	Montho Keomuangtai	140 Beuging Rd. Antioch, TN 37013
101	Chanthavong Vinavongso	5128 Singing Hills Drive Antioch, TN 37013
102	Soybanh Sengsouk	2122 Madison Sgyrae Blvd Lavergne, TN 37086
103	Bonmy Songvilay	639 Wood Burn Drive Smyrna, TN 37167
104	Khampoun Thepsary	3354 Black Oak Circle Chattanooga, TN 37415
105	Phimpha Charennam	4601 Artelia Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
106	Khamsy Phommalath	2809 Live Oak Rd. Nashville, TN 37210
107	Khamphang Vongsyarath	405 Johnmartin Ave Smyrna, TN 37167
108	Bouleun Sangmany	4124 October Wood Antioch, TN 37013
109	Bangthong Chindavanh	4701 Apollo Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
110	Khamdy Chindavanh	4701 Apollo Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
111	Srivichat Keopanya	321 South 17th Street Nashville, TN 37206
112	Daraphene Keopanya	321 South 17th street Nashville, TN 37206
113	Saysamone Sabchareun	708 Pepper Wood Crecent Antioch, TN 37013
114	Thisady Sabchareum	5172 Singing Hill Drive Antioch, TN 37013
115	Tay Sengbouttarath	2712 Dickerson Road Lot 87 Nashville, TN 37207
116	Sritan Keopanya	321 South 17th Street Nashville, TN 37206
117	Nid Keopanya	321 South 17th Street Nashville, TN 37206
118	Vanna Panyavong	536 Spann CT Antioch, TN 37013
119	Keo Panyavong	536 Spann CT Antioch, TN 37013
120	Boeumee Sirithai	37A Lutie Street Nashville, TN 37210

NO.	FULL NAME	ADDRESSES
121	Phaiborn Sirithai	37A Lutie Street Nashville, TN 37210
122	Vichiene Vongkingkeo	4606 Fannin Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
123	Thongbay Savayongthong	422 Lake Forest Dr. Lavergne, TN 37086
124	Voy Savayongthong	422 Lake Forest Dr. Lavergne, Tn 37086
125	Khampane Panyavong	1015 Betty Lou Lane Lavergne, TN 37086
126	Khanmouene Souvanekhiry	6341 Mt. View Rd. Antioch, TN 37013
127	Daliene Panyavong	2714 Milbro Rd. Lot 122 Antioch, TN 37013
128	Basay Khammouanvichit	515 Rose Bank Ave Nashville, TN 37206
129	Onh Kounlavong	641 Waywood Cr. Antioch, TN 37013
130	Tham Xaiyasombath	609 Jay Ct. Nashville, TN 37210
131	Khamphet Phommochanh	1506 Sherrill Blvd Murfreesboro, TN 37130
132	Hae Phommachanh	1506 Sherrill Blvd Murfreesboro, TN 37130
133	Lathsamai Saenphansiri	1506 Sherrill Blvd Murfreesboro, TN 37130
134	Mone Khounviengxay	212 Oaker Town Rd. Antioch, TN 37013
135	Khiem Bangphexay	446 Tampa Dr. Nashville, TN 37013
136	Saysmone Thansamai	2315 Willow Dr. Murfreesboro, TN 37127
137	Pathoumphonng Soumpholphakdy	793 Summer Hill Atame Dr. Lavergne, TN 37086
138	Nhouk Sada	1210 N Acdemy St. Murfreesboro, TN 37130
139	Phonprachith Sirinong	4700 Apollo Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
140	Som Sabchaheun	5172 Singing Hill Drive Antioch, TN 37013
141	Naly Phimvong	813 Gladeview Court Lavergne, TN 37086
142	Somchith Sirivong	4700 Apollo Drive Antioch, TN 37013
143	Saengaloun Soumpholphakdy	793 Summer hill Drive Lavergne, TN 37086
144	Orady Syurlayvong	819 Corner CT Murfreesboro, TN 37129
145	Thongma lhata	2714 Murfreesboro Road Lot 118 Antioch, TN 37013
146	Phanthalangsy One	4116 Pine Orchard Pl. Antioch, TN 37013
147	Khamsaveuy Mathabong	4312 Lytle Creek Rd. Murfreesboro, TN 37130
148	Champa Prasenerak	412 Asby Place Antioch, TN 37013
149	Phetdavone Vongsaphay	4621 Cynthia Lane Murfreesboro, TN 37128
150	Bounmy Sacthiechak	2025 Rice Avenuu Nashville, TN 37217
151	Sisavat southichuk	2025 Rice Avenue Nashville, TN 37217
152	Thok Chaleunsak	4820 Sunlight Drive Nashville, TN 37211

NO.	FULL NAME	ADDRESSES
153	Chaleunsak Soth	4829 Sunlight Drive Nashville, TN 37211
154	Homxay Sirapradith	4610 Fanning Drive Antioch, TN 37013
155	Khamma Panyavong	4990 Barella Drive Antioch,m TN 37013
156	Vilay Khittaphong	2714 Murfreesboro Rd. Antioch, TN 37013
157	Thong Chanthavong	1940 Meadow Cliff Nashville, TN 37210
158	Soukannha Chanthavong	1940 Meadow Cliff OR Nashville, TN 37210
159	Khamphong Vongkhamcharch	633 MT Hood Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
160	Somphong Vongkhamchagh	633 Mt Hood Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
161	Phim Vankham	4819 Sunlight Nashville, TN 37211
162	Phaeng Vantham	4815 Sunlight Nashville, TN 37211
163	Keooudone Souriyavongsa	1688 Chesapeake Drive Athens, TN 37303
164	Bounheaun Souriyavongsa	1688 Chesapeake Drive Athens, TN 37303
165	Wang Khouanesaknarath	3601 Peerless Dr. Cleveland, TN 37312
166	Khamphoua Khouanesaknarath	3601 Peerless Dr. Cleveland, TN 37312
167	Phetlamphanh Sayasith	919 Boaz St. Athes, TN 37303
168	Bounkhom Sayasith	919 Boaz St. Athen, TN 37303
169	Bounlom Khouanesaknarath	235 Rose Dr. Athnes, TN 37303
170	Nhommala Khouanesaknarath	235 Rose Dr. Athens, TN 37303
171	Desa Sayasak	4574 Artelia Dr. Antioch, TN 37013
172	Pheneg Sayasak	4574 Artelia Dr. Antioch, TN 37013

Lao American National Republican Party
State of Wisconsin
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53215

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
United States Congress

Via e-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
Via fax: 202-225-2610

Dear Congressman Crane:

As a Laotian-American with many family members still living under the oppressive communist regime in Laos, I urge you to oppose Normal Trade Relations for Laos until such time as Laos achieves democratic reforms, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

I believe such opposition is merited by the tremendous record of human right abuse accumulated over twenty-eight years of oppressive rule by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). These abuses include the lack of free elections, the prohibition on the right of assembly and redress of grievances, the arrest and disappearance of protesters without the right of habeus corpus, and the aggressive repression of the exercise of religion. The United States Commission on International

Religious Freedom concluded in its February 2003 Report on Laos that: “. . . the U.S. government should make clear to the government of Laos that any such dialogue or other improvement in U.S.-Laos relations must be based on the immediate cessation of practices that abuse religious freedom, including arbitrary arrest and detention, forced renunciations and church closings.”

Perhaps you are familiar with the writings of the late Vietnamese communist General Trinh Do. Trinh Do was known as the closest confidant of Ho Chi Minh. Unlike most communist leaders in Southeast Asia, Trinh Do spoke openly about the inadvisability of extending economic benefits to an unreformed communist regime. According to Trinh Do, “Democratization is a must and the first condition to ensure expression, freedom of the press, freedom to associate and other fundamental freedom of a democracy, all talks about national development and modernization is useless.”

Please, do not reward the oligarchs who control the Laotian Communist Party. Do not reward the Party bosses and generals who abuse every tradition of democracy and human rights as they abuse the poor people of Laos. Now is the time for members of the United States Congress to take a stand against political and religious persecution. Oppose unconditional NTR for Laos. Pass NTR for Laos only after Laos makes real and sincere reform and progress towards democracy, rule of law and respect for basic human rights.

Sincerely,

Bounliane Rajphoumy
Regional Vice President
Lao American National Republican Party
State of Wisconsin

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Lao Community in Victoria
Victoria, 3031 Australia
18 April 2003

Honourable US. Congressman Philip M. Crane,
Chairman of the Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means,
US. House of Representatives, Washington D.C

Dear Honorable Philip M.Crane,

Re: NTR to Laos

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our concern about the US wanting to grant NTR to Laos.

We are private Australian citizen who were born in Laos and had lived through the war in Laos before becoming refugees and now as naturalized Australians. We are writing this letter to you and your Committee that we share the aspiration of the American people's good intention to improve the living standard of the Lao people by wanting to grant NTR to Laos.

*We also see that in the long-term, the people of Laos will need NTR, as they are part of this global community, but we have **very strong reservation about what NTR can do for Laos at this point in time without conditions.***

NTR, as a new tool, is expected to bring changes in Laos, especially economic and political changes and at the same time to promote trade between the US and Laos. As outlined by Ambassador Douglas A. Hartwick's Public Remark on January 25, 2003, the US Government hopes that NTR will help “the US promote other changes”, including “stronger rule of law: commercial, environmental, treatment of workers, even human rights.” Ultimately, from the US point of view, NTR will bring about “real changes” in Laos, leading to “greater economic and political freedoms in Laos, stronger rule of law and a better life for those involved in trade destined for the U.S. market or doing business with Americans.”

While in theory, the US intention is noble and good and we all want to want to see the fruit ripened for the Lao people.

But Laos, as a country and as a nation is not poor or lacking in resources but the real problem in Laos is directly related to two fundamental issues: (1) the non-conducive ideological policies of the current Phak Pasason Lao (Lao People's Revolutionary Party) that the Party is the “central nucleus” of Laos, having the ultimate power above the law; (2) the Vietnamese domination of Laos.

This is the reason behind our strong view that the current format of NTR, as in its generic format or as similar to the Cambodian version, will NOT be able to deliver the intended US ideal, as per Hartwick's Public Remark, for Laos.

We like to suggest that serious consideration is required and the following issues need to be taken while deliberating the granting of NTR for Laos:

1. The current Lao Government System is not conducive for NTR.

The current Lao Government has been in power since 1975, as one Party, authoritarian system that has the ultimate power above the law of the land as outlined clearly in Article 3 of the 1991 Lao Constitution which states that *"The rights of the multi-ethnic people to be the masters of the country are exercised and ensured through the functioning of the political system with the Lao People's Revolutionary Party as its leading nucleus"*.

The real problem in Laos is the direct result of the divisive, non-reconciliatory, and non-conducive ideological policies of the current Phak Pasason Lao (Lao People's Revolutionary Party), being the "central nucleus" of Laos—the seat of power. The resultant effect of these policies is the continuation of economic mismanagement, lack of business and legal accountability, political instability, Human Right violation, religious persecutions, racial disharmony and narcotic and opium trafficking among many other things.

More importantly, the Laos legal system and business practices in Laos remain far from being able to operate or being compatible within the WTO rules and laws, or acceptable to the IRS, the Dept of Commerce, the Treasury Department and other trading nations. *The bottom line is that Laos, with its current system of governing, is not ready for NTR.*

Hence, to have any "real changes" in Laos, as the US intended, the NTR needs to be granted only as a "**Package**" to contain PRE-EMPTED MEASURES and CONDITIONS that are workable, *measurable and effective for a drastic ideological and fundamental changes in Laos to pave the way for a truly democratic government that will provide the political stability for economic freedom to the people of Laos.*

2. Laos has been a puppet government of Vietnam—this need to change:

This Committee need no reminder that the current Lao Government has been a puppet government of Vietnam since 1975 and that the political instability in Laos, including the past bombings, the recent bus killing at Vang Vieng—Kasi region and other resistance activities are the direct opposition to the Vietnamisation of Laos. As long as Vietnam continues to have a firm grip in Laos, and the current regime remains unchanged, there will be NO improvement in human rights, oppression, corruption and internal rebellion. Hence, the NTR Package needs to contain mechanism to **free Laos from the grip of Vietnam, to ensure political stability in Laos.**

3. National Reconciliation is required.

The Committee also needs no reminder that in 1961, the US Government decided to arm the people of Laos to fight the US war against the communist North Vietnam. Subsequent, the US loyal allies, including the Hmong, are left to the mercy of Vietnam when the US withdraw from Indochina—many of these people—loyal US allied such as the Hmong, are still suffering inhumanly in the jungle of Laos. More than 300,000 freedom-loving Lao have left the country since 1975, causing a brain drain for Laos, and these people now settled around the world. For Laos to have a real future, reconciliation among the Lao people, inside and outside Laos, in town or in the jungle, is a pressing issue. Without this national reconciliation, and participation by all the Lao people, there will be little prospect for a lasting and meaningful political freedom to the people of Laos.

Hence, for Laos to have any "real changes" and for the US to be able to deliver the US promise to the people of Laos, fundamental changes in Laos are required—no more, no less as it is required in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq. Without these fundamental changes in Laos, NTR will be no more than a *cosmetic solution* to the Lao problem as experienced by past US administrations that prescribed a long list of band-aids solution to Laos.

Conclusion:

If the US wanting any "real changes" in Laos, and to help the "common people of Laos", **NTR needs to be a "Total Package" with pre-empted measures and conditions to pave the way for Laos to become a truly democratic and independent nation.** Without these fundamental changes, it will be another mistake of the United States of America, being the most powerful country on Earth, but continuing to add a long list of failures in Laos.

Laos may not be a “key stone” country in Asia any more but the Lao people have sacrifice so much for the US during the Vietnam War, and they were doing so without any formal commitment or signed document from the US people. Now, the people of America as champions of peace and democracy, can help the people of Laos to have the similar opportunity as the Iraqi people to create their future by their own free-willing spirit. ***Once and for all, reality dictates that fundamental changes are required in Laos—not just band-aid solution—and it is high noon that the US, with its coalition, can—if willing as in Afghanistan and Iraq—take up the leadership and deliver a comprehensive package to Laos, with or without NTR to pave the way for true “economic and political freedom” for the common people of Laos.***

You're most faithfully,

Saly Saygnabouth
President of Lao people National Liberation Front of Australia
For and on behalf of the Lao Community of Victoria.

Pao Saykao, MD
Director of P&N Saykao Pty Ltd
For and on behalf of the Lao Community of Victoria.

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Lao Diaspora
Paris, France
10 April 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committees on Ways and Means
United States Congress

Mr. President,

Honorable Members of the 'Ways and Means' Commission,

The representatives of the Lao Diaspora, co-signatories of the present letter, would first of all like to greet the quality of the report published on the 20th of March 2003 in Washington by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, as well as the report on Human Rights published on the 31st of March by the State Department. These documents recount with objectivity and accuracy the very concerning situation of the civil liberties and fundamental rights in the Lao Popular Democratic Republic, country led by an authoritarian regime since the taking of power by the Communist Party in 1975.

Relying on the conclusions of the USCIRF, which denounce the serious violations of civil liberties in Laos and recommend to the American Administration to ***“increase the pressure”*** upon the Lao communist regime and to send it a ***“clear”*** signal by letting it know that the improvement of the relations between Washington and Vientiane depended upon the improvement of the situation of human rights in Laos, **we were shocked and even hurt by the recent campaign led by Douglas HARTWICK, US Ambassador to Laos, in favor of the granting of the ‘Normal Trade Relations’ (NTR) to the LPDR. To us, such as step is both counter-productive and inappropriate.**

Our lack of understanding of the steps taken by Mr. HARTWICK is even greater when looking at the contents of the report of the State Department for the year 2002, which stresses that the LPDR government “continues to commit serious abuses” of human rights, and that the Lao “citizens do not have the right to change their government”.**

Like the majority of Lao-Americans, we insist in letting known **publicly that we are firmly opposed to the granting of the NTR status to the LPDR** as long as the communist leaders will not show tangible, significant and real evidence of the efforts they have made in terms of democracy and respect of human rights.

Too many ‘gifts’ have been made to this regime, and to no avail: loans of hundreds of millions of dollars, aids of hundreds of millions of dollars, remission of debts, donations in kind . . . Offering this time the NTR status without asking for anything in return will appear to the Lao people as a ‘reward’ for dictatorship, for repression, for torture, for violations of human rights, for social injustice, for abuses of power, and for corruption, area in which the leaders of the communist party have now become experts.

In its report, the USCIRF rightfully stressed that the present time was a **“pivotal moment in the history of Laos and US-Laos relations. The United States has a unique opportunity to engage the government and people of Laos in a process of reform that would end the suppression of religious freedom and other related human rights”**.*

Among the measures to be taken, the Commission recommended the opening by the US government of a **“bilateral human rights dialogue”** with the government of Laos, and stressed that **“this dialogue should also address the broader range of human rights concerns in Laos, many of which are related to religious freedom violations, such as torture and other forms of ill-treatment, unlawful arrest or detention, absence of due process, and violations of the rights of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly”**.*

Like the USCIRF, we believe that Laos is at a ‘turning point’ in its history and that the United States of America, well-known for their actions in favor of liberty, democracy and justice around the world, can influence in a positive way the future evolution of the country by maintaining and reinforcing pressure upon the regime when it comes to civil liberties and human rights.

For these reasons, and relying upon the conclusions drawn by the report of the USCIRF and the report of the State Department, we ask that the American Administration reconsiders its decision to grant the NTR status to the Lao PDR.

We also ask that the Honorable Members of Congress of the United States of America be opposed to the granting of the NTR status as long as the recommendations of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom have not been followed with honesty and efficiently by the Lao communist regime.

To us, the significant ‘gestures’ deserving the NTR status include the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience whose only ‘wrongdoing’ was to denounce peacefully the drifts of the regime, to ask for the respect of fundamental rights, of social justice, and to call for an evolution towards multipartism.

Among these prisoners are the two leaders of the ‘Social Democratic Party’, Mr. Latsamy KHAMPHOU and Mr. Feng SACKCHITTAPHONG who have now been detained for 12 years in inhuman conditions, as well as **the five leaders of the students movement of the 26th of October 1999** who were arrested and then disappeared since that peaceful march in Vientiane: Mr. Thongpaseuth KEUAKOUN, Mr. Khamphouvieng SISA-AT, Mr. Seng-Aloun PHENGPHANH, Mr. Bouavanh CHANMANIVONG and Mr. KEOCHAY, symbols of the peaceful struggle for the Lao youth and Lao democrats.

Concerning the five leaders of the ‘26th of October Movement’, the report of the State Department sadly announced their sentence to “20 years of imprisonment” in “a closed trial”**, a sanction that appears to us as another evidence of the dictatorial nature of the regime and of the will of the communist leaders not only to continue to repress civil liberties and democracy, but also of scoffing at the international community as to human rights. Such a behavior should be enough justification for the refusal of the**

Another ‘gesture’ showing a contribution to the national reconciliation would be the cessation of all acts of violence against ethnic or religious minorities in the country, and to honor the memory of the millions of victims of the communist repression.

Mr. President,

Honorable Members of the Commission,

Against the leaders of the Unique Party, whose bad faith and cynicism are now legendary, the NTR status is, as well stressed by the USCIRF, one of the last measures of peaceful pressure for those who aspire to liberty, democracy and justice.

It is in the name of these values dear to the great people of America that we ask that you fully take into account our request before granting the LPDR the ‘National Trade Relations’ status, the prime objective of which is to favor liberty, democracy, and development in the world.

Without liberty, without democracy, without a reconciliation between the Lao-tians, Laos will not be able to achieve a degree of development such that will change its status of one of the poorest country of the planet after 27 years of communist management and in spite of billions of dollars of loans and aids granted to the regime.

Co-signatories:

- Association Fa Ngum—Paris, France
- Fondation Savang Vatthana—Paris, France

- Fondation Savang Vatthana—Paris, France
- Assemblée des Représentants des Lao à l'Étranger—Paris, France
- Lao Houam Phao (Unity of the Lao People)—Paris, France
- Party of the Royal Government of Laos (PGVT)—Paris, France
- Mouvement pour la Démocratie au Laos (MDL)—Paris, France
- Solidarité des Jeunes Lao—Paris, France
- Association des Rescapés des Camps de la Mort—Paris, France
- Association Sithandone Samphan—Paris, France
- Amicale des Militaires Lao (Mittaphab Thahane Lao)—Paris, France
- Association Samphan Lao Lane Xang—Paris, France
- Le Laos Vivant—Nîmes, France
- Association Lao Phatthine en Alsace—Strasbourg, France
- Parti Nation Lao—Paris, France
- Association Ami Hmong—Paris, France
- Association Lao Marne la Vallée—Paris, France
- Association Phinong Champassak—Paris, France
- Association Sananikone—Paris, France
- Association Mittaphab Houaphanh—Paris, France
- Organisation Pacifique Lao pour le Développement Communautaire—Paris, France
- Association Lao Houam Samphanh—Paris, France
- Association Hom Dham—Roubaix, France
- Association Ex Institut Royal de Droit et d'Administration au Laos—Paris, France
- Association Arts et Cultures Lao—Bois, France
- Lao American National Republican Party—USA
- Lao Students Movement for Democracy—Seattle, USA
- Lao Human Rights Council, Inc.—Wisconsin, USA
- United League for Democracy in Laos—Virginia, USA
- United Lao Movement for Democracy of Minnesota—USA
- Lao Veterans of America—California, USA
- Association des Anciens Combattants Lao—Montréal, Canada
- Ligue Laotienne pour les Droits de l'Homme au Laos—Montréal, Canada
- Council of Lao Representative Abroad for Oceanic Region—Australia
- Association Phoutha Séri Praxathipatay—Bruxelles, Belgique
- Organisation Lao Students for Freedom, Independence and Democracy—Poland
- **Lao Movement for Human Rights (LMHR)—France**

Coordination ensured by: **The Lao Movement for Human Rights (LMHR); 9, rue Bazard, 77200 Torcy, France; Phone-Fax: 33 (0) 1 60 06 57 06; e-mail: mldh@chello.fr**

*United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF; Report on Laos, February 2003; 800 North Capitol Street, NW Suite 790, Washington, DC 2002; Phone: 202 523 3240; Fax: 202 253 5020; www.uscirf.gov

**US Department State—Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2002, March 2003—Chapter on Laos; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; 2201 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20520; www.state.gov.

Lao Human Rights Council, Inc., U.S.A.
Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54702
April 9, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
and the Honorable Sander M. Levin,
Ranking Member of the Subcommittee
and all Members of the Committee on Ways and Means
and all Members of the U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Crane and Ranking Member Levin, and all Members of the U.S. House of Representatives:

The purpose of this letter is to request the U.S. Congress, the White House, and the U.S. Department of State to oppose and to reject the proposal of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to the dictatorship and Communist Lao government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) because (1) this Communist Lao government is committing genocide in Laos; (2) the LPDR is a terrorist government; (3) the Communist government of the LPDR is violating human rights; (4) the LPDR is violating freedom of religion; (5) there are Vietnamese domination and biological and chemical warfare in Laos; (6) war crimes have occurred in Laos; (7) the Communist

Lao government of the LPDR is the “king” of opium production and trade in Laos; (8) of the report from the Fact-Finding Commission on Laos; and (9) the LPDR arrested, imprisoned and tortured political prisoners in Laos.

Therefore, the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc., and its members and the majority of Hmong and Lao American people in the United States are requesting you and other members of the U.S. Congress and U.S. Senators to oppose and reject NTR to the LPDR because of the following reasons:

1. Genocide in Laos

In January 2003, U.S. Ambassador to the LPDR Douglas A. Hartwick stated in a report to many Hmong and Lao American people in the United States, “Many of you remember vividly that after the Pathet Lao came to power in 1975, still actively assisted by Vietnam, they waged an intensive effort against Hmong, Khmer and other insurgents who were associated with the previous royal government, leading to the tragic deaths of thousands.” (Speech and public remarks by the U.S. Ambassador to the LPDR, Douglas A. Hartwick, January 25 and 26, 2003)

2. The LPDR is a Terrorist Government

On March 25, 2003, Radio Free Asia-Lao Service and the Voice of America (VOA)-Lao Service reported that there were more than 10,000 Laotian people demonstrated in Vientiane, Laos on March 23, 2003. The purposes of the demonstration were to condemn and to oppose the U.S. policy toward the current government of Iraq under President Saddam Hussein. The former Ambassador of the LPDR to Washington, D.C., and the current Ambassador of the LPDR to Thailand, Hiem Phommachanh, also stated on the VOA that the Lao government of the LPDR opposed and condemned the war against Iraq because the U.S. government violated the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Iraq and the LPDR established full diplomatic relations, economic, educational, cultural, trade, political and military relations.

In Laos, the Communist Lao government of the LPDR did not allow people to demonstrate inside Laos. In the past, many people who demonstrated against genocide, ethnic cleansing war, and human rights violations against people in Laos were arrested, imprisoned, tortured and killed. Why did the Communist Lao government of the LPDR allow more than 10,000 people to demonstrate in Vientiane, Laos, on March 23, 2003? The answer is that the Communist Lao government of the LPDR fully supports the Saddam Hussein government and international terrorism and the production and use of biological and chemical weapons.

On September 20, 2001, President George W. Bush addressed the U.S. Congress and the American people:

“Our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

“And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.”

(The White House, address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American people, September 20, 2001.)

Consequently, the Communist Lao government of the LPDR is a terrorist government and regime because the Communist Lao government of the LPDR supports the Iraqi government under President Saddam Hussein. If the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein is a terrorist government and terrorist regime., then the Communist Lao government is also a terrorist government because this Communist Lao government of the LPDR is a supporter of the current Iraqi government. If the current Iraqi government is a “threat” to American people and the United States, then the Communist Lao government of the LPDR is also a “threat” to the United States. If the current Iraqi government is an “enemy” of the United States, then the Communist Lao government of the LPDR is also an “enemy” of the United States. If the production, possession and uses of “biological and chemical weapons” by the Iraqi government are a “threat” to the United States, then the Communist Lao government of the LPDR is also a “threat” to the United States, because this Communist Lao government has used “biological and chemical weapons” to kill many thousands of Hmong and Lao people and former CIA soldiers in Laos from 1975 to 2003.

3. The Communist Lao Government of the LPDR Violates Human Rights

The Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on Laos of 2002 reported:

“The Lao People’s Democratic Republic is an authoritarian, Communist, one-party state ruled by the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPDR).

“Members of the security forces abused detainees, especially those suspected of insurgent or anti-government activity. Prisoners were abused and tortured, and prison conditions generally are extremely harsh and life-threatening.

“The government restricted freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and association.

“There are no domestic, non-governmental human rights organizations, and the government does not have a formal procedure for registration. Any organization wishing to investigate and publically criticize the government’s human rights policies would face serious obstacles if it were permitted to operate at all.

“In 1999 and 2000, a number of Hmong returnees were forced to renounce their Christian faith, and the authorities closed one church in a returnee village.

“The government continued to restrict freedom of religion” in Laos.”
(Country Reports on Human Rights Practices of 2002, U.S. Department of State, released on March 31, 2003)

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom released a report on Laos in February 2003 which contained:

“Since the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPDR) assumed power in 1975, there has been extensive government interference with and restrictions on all religious communities. In more recent years, the government has focused its repression on religions that are relatively new to Laos, including Protestant Christianity. During this time period, the government of Laos has engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom as defined in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA). These include the arrest, prolonged detention, and imprisonment of members of religious minorities on account of their religious activities. In addition, Lao officials have forced Christians to renounce their faith. At the same time, dozens of churches have been closed.”

4. The LPDR Violated Freedom of Religion

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom “makes the following recommendations to the U.S. government”:

“The President should designate Laos as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) to make clear U.S. concerns over particularly severe violations of religious freedom in Laos, thus engaging the U.S. government in a process to promote changes that would advance legal as well as practical protections of freedom of religion and related human rights in that country.”

(“Report on Laos,” U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom,” February 2003)

Anthony C. Lobaido reported that, “persecution of Christians inside Laos, including forcing them to drink blood, imprisonment and even murder, has been well-documented by World Net Daily.”

(Anthony C. Lobaido, “Christian Persecution,” 2001 WorldNetDaily.com)

Anthony C. Lobaido reported that, “Everyone knows that the government of Laos used biochemical weapons sent by the Russians for use against the Hmong” people in Laos.

Witnesses and leaders of religion in Laos have reported that the Communist Lao government of the LPDR arrested and imprisoned more than 600 Hmong and Lao Christians and believers and closed down more than 65 Christian churches and religious institutions and organizations in Luang Prabang, Phongsali; Savannakhet; Louang Nantha; Oudomxai; Xaignabouri; Champasak; Vientiane; Xieng Khouang; Houapham; and Borikhamxai provinces as well as other provinces in Laos between 2002 and 2003.

5. Vietnamese Domination and Chemical Warfare in Laos

Tim Laard of BBC News Agency reported that “Vietnam also has thousands of advisers in Laos—political as well as military. Officially, the relationship is described by Vietnam as closer than lips and teeth—and by Laos as deeper than the waters of the Mekong” River. (BBC News, 27 August 2001.)

Mr. Yang Toua Thao, Moua Toua Ter, Herr Chai, Vang Chue Chi and Vang Nhia, along with many other witnesses and people in Laos, reported in 2003 that many thousands of Vietnamese soldiers, troops and advisers have been supporting the Communist Lao government of the LPDR to conduct an ethnic cleansing war, genocide and biological and chemical warfare against many Hmong and Lao people and former CIA soldiers in Laos from 1975 to 2003, because of the legacy of U.S.-Hmong relations and cooperation during the Vietnam War.

6. War Crimes in Laos

Mr. Yang Toua Thao, Moua Toua Ter, and many other witnesses and victims in the Xaisomboun Special Region and other provinces in Laos reported that the Com-

unist Lao government of the LPDR and the Communist Vietnamese government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam killed over “300,000 people” in Laos from 1975 to 2003. Consequently, this is “war crimes, crimes against peace and crimes against humanity.” This is a violation of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international human rights conventions, laws and treaties.

7. The Communist Lao Government of the LPDR is the “King” of Opium Production and Trade

In 2003, the U.S. Department of State released a report which included Laos as one of 23 countries in the world which produced “opium” and other types of “illegal narcotics” or “illegal drugs” and “heroin.”

“Lao government employees, and the growing evidence of significant trafficking inside Laos, it must be assumed that some officials and military personnel receive bribes from illicit drug trafficking. Drug traffickers in Laos reportedly are receiving protection from senior level officials who themselves may be involved.” (U.S. Department of State, released on January 31, 2003 and White House Press Release, January 31, 2003.)

As a result, the Communist Lao government of the LPDR is a King or Lord of Opium production and trade in Laos.

8. Report from the Fact-Finding Commission on Laos

On January 18, 2002, and February 5, 2002, the Fact-Finding Commission on Laos released its report on the current conditions in Laos. This report contains the following:

American Veteran Groups

There are 20 veteran groups consisting of 17,177 people still living in the jungles defending themselves from the Communist Lao government. They have 3,334 soldiers. While the veterans have not given up the hope for a democratic government in Laos, or the ideals they fought for in the Secret War, their military actions are not offensive, but are to protect themselves and their families in the jungles from the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops.

These 20 veteran groups currently live in the mountains and jungles all over the country of Laos.

North Vietnamese Troops

The Fact-Finding Commission found that Vietnamese troops, in violation of treaties signed at the end of the war, are stationed in Laos. In conjunction with the Pathet Lao forces, they use helicopters, MI 6, MI 8, and MI 17, to bomb the veterans and their families living in the jungles. Chemical weapons manufactured in Vietnam are being used against the people in the jungles.

Since December 1, 1999, the Communist government of Laos has ordered more forces from North Vietnam. Seventeen military bases, with several battalions of North Vietnamese Army troops, were identified. They are strategically located in regions near the mountain locations where the veterans and their families are located.

Military Bases with North Vietnamese Troops

Location	Province	Estimated Troop Strength (combined North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao)
1. Baben	Louang Namtha	15,000 (Regiment #442)
2. Muang Na	Louang Phrabang	15,000
3. Muang Soie	Xieng Khouang	7,500
4. Ban Ban	Xieng Khouang	7,500
5. Muang Xay Som Boun	Xieng Khouang	15,000 (Regiment #335)
Special Zone		
6. Na Mouang/Vangviang	Vientiane	7,500
7. Pakha/Mouang Fouang	Vientiane	7,500 (Battalion #614)
8. Vientiane	Vientiane	15,000

Military Bases with North Vietnamese Troops—Continued

Location	Province	Estimated Troop Strength (combined North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao)
9. Muang Paksan	Borikhan	7,500
10. Ban Nam	Borikhan	2,500
11. Ban Lakxao	Borikhan	2,500
12. Cong Thong	Borikhan	2,500
13. Saravanh	Saravanh	5,000
14. Xekong	Xekong	10,000
15. Pakse	Champasak	8,000 (Regiment #5)
16. Muang Moon	Champasak	3,000 (Battalion #11)
17. Attapu	Attapu	4,000

“An American Nail”

The genocide of these people is based on their allegiance to the United States. The Communists refer to “the American nail in their head” of those who fought for the United States and their descendants. This American mentality is the enemy of the Communist philosophy. America is their greatest enemy. In their thinking, this “American Nail” is in the genes, so all men, women, and children must be exterminated.

Chemical Warfare

The majority of those in the mountains who have died have done so because of chemical poisons. In violation of international law the Communists are using chemical weapons against the people in the mountains. Bombs described as having white, black, yellow, or green smoke cause vomiting of blood, severe diarrhea with blood, and death within twenty-four hours. Many die from chemicals sprayed on plants and into streams. Chemicals have nearly destroyed the Cassava, which is so important to the survival of those in the mountains. The latest use of chemical bombing was on December 5, 2001.

Bombing

The Communist Pathet Lao government uses helicopters, MI 6, MI8, and MI 17 to bomb the veterans and their families living in the jungles. (Evidence of this is documented in the twelve-minute video, “The Secret War in Laos Continues (1975-Present Time).”

Land Mines

Land mines are a serious problem for the people in the mountains. The mines are placed along trails and around sources of food. Women and children looking for food are the most frequent casualties.

Capture and Torture

Men who are captured are dismembered. Their penises are cut off and placed in their mouths signifying their inability to pass on their “American mentality” to future generations.

Women when captured are raped, then killed. Some are tied to stakes and left to die from exposure. Others have a sharp bamboo stick shoved through their vagina up into their chest cavity, the stick is rolled, and they are left to bleed to death. This is a sign they can no longer produce those who would become enemies of the Communists.

Children who are captured because they are unable to keep up with the fleeing adults have their throats cut or are killed by being swung around and having their heads bashed against trees. There was one report of three children being skewered together on a bamboo pole. (Source: February 5, 2002 Report on Current Conditions in Laos for the Veterans of the U.S. Secret War. Prepared by: The Fact-Finding Commission on Laos.)

According to the evidence and report of the Fact-Finding Commission on Laos of February 5, 2002, there are more than 122,500 Communist Pathet Lao and Communist Vietnamese soldiers who are stationed in seventeen locations in Laos. The Commission also reported that the objectives of the Communist Vietnamese government and soldiers in Laos are to direct, support and assist the Communist Lao government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) to conduct the war and genocide against Hmong and Lao people in Laos. Consequently, the war in Laos from 1975 to the present time is an international war. This is because foreign soldiers and foreign governments have engaged in and supported the war and genocide against former Hmong and Lao veterans, former CIA soldiers, and Hmong and Lao people who are civilians, including men, women and children, being conducted by the Communist Lao government of the LPDR and the government of Vietnam during the past 27 years.

On March 10, 2003, the Fact-Finding Commission on Laos reported on February 19, 2003, that "the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) used two MI-8 helicopters to drop bombs and launch rockets on their (Tong Chia Vue and Wameng Yang) village at Nyuen Nam Xieng, Borikhamxay Province. The Communists led three sorties that day and killed 55 people. A total of five hundred people were exposed to chemical gas and wounded by bomb explosions and gunfire." (News Release of the Fact-Finding Commission on Laos, March 10, 2003.)

9. Political Prisoners in Laos

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger admitted in his book *Years of Upheaval* of 1982 that:

"At this writing, Laos is under Communist rule. Over 40,000 Vietnamese troops remain as an occupation force. Souvanna is under house arrest. Between 10,000 and 30,000 political prisoners are in labor camps in the name of re-education. The Hmong (Meo) tribesmen who fought the North Vietnamese without help are being systematically exterminated, some by poison gas. Hundreds of thousands of Laotians have fled in terror to Thailand."

Information from reliable source in Vientiane, Laos, reported and confirmed that Mr. Thongsouk Saysangkhi, a Lao political prisoner of conscience, died at the end of February 1998 inside a concentration camp in Northern Province, Laos.

In October 1990, Thongsouk, Latsami Khamphoui and Feng Sakchittaphong were arrested and imprisoned by the Communist Lao government because of their peaceful call for economic, social and political reforms and change from Communism to Capitalism in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR). All three men were brought to trial in November 1992. The Communist Court and the Communist Lao government sentenced them to 14 years in prison.

In 1992, the U.S. government and the United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repatriated Mr. Vue Mai, a leader of Hmong refugees in Thailand to Communist Laos in order to repatriate all Hmong and Lao refugees in Thailand to Communist Laos. Witnesses in Laos reported that the Communist Lao government arrested, imprisoned, tortured and killed Mr. Vue Mai, a leader of Hmong returnees in Laos in 1993.

On April 19, 1999, Communist Lao agents and authorities arrested and imprisoned Mr. Houa Ly and Mr. Michael Vang in Ban Houa Xay, Bokeo Province, Laos. Witnesses in Laos reported that Communist Lao authorities tortured and killed Houa Ly and Michael Vang in Laos. They were Hmong-American citizens from the United States. As a result, we know that the legacies of Hmong-American relations and cooperation during the Cold War are direct factors for the Communist Lao and Vietnamese governments to commit ethnic cleansing warfare and genocide against many thousands of people in Laos and the two Hmong-American citizens.

Witnesses in Vientiane, Laos, provided reliable sources and information to the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc. in the United States, that Mr. Chue Ma Vang, a Hmong returnee and political prisoner, died in Vientiane, Laos, on December 4, 2002. Mr. Chue Ma Vang was one of the thirteen Hmong returnees and political prisoners in a maximum security cell at Sam Khe political prison, Vientiane, Laos. In 1995, Mr. Chue Ma Vang and twelve other Hmong returnees were forced to return from Thailand to Laos. Mr. Chue Ma Vang died because the Communist Lao government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) did not provide enough food and other basic human needs to him and many other political prisoners in the Sam Khe political prison. The other Hmong political prisoners who were returnees are: Mr. Wang Chue Yang, Tong Toua Vang, Xai Xang Chang, Pang Toua Lee, Lee Vang, Xai Toua Vang, Xang Her, Cher Tong Lee, Chang Teng Thao, Yong Xao Her, Shoua Thao, and Xia Dang Thao. They and many hundreds of other Hmong and Lao returnees and other Hmong and Lao people are currently locked in the Sam Khe political prison in Vientiane, Laos.

On October 26, 1999, the Communist Lao government of the LPDR arrested, imprisoned, and tortured Mr. Thongpaseuth Kauakhoun, Seng-Sloun Phengphanh, Khamphouvieng Sisa-at, Bouavanh Chammanivong, Keochay, and many other people who organized a demonstration in Vientiane Laos. Witnesses in Laos reported in 2003 that the Communist Lao government of the LPDR arrested and imprisoned approximately 25,000 Hmong and Lao people in Laos from 1990 to 2003.

Peace Before NTR for Laos

We support and endorse the reports, evidence, information and peace proposals from Mr. Moua Toua Ter, Yang Toua Thao, Vang Chue Chi, Her Chai and Vang Nhia, leaders of Hmong and Lao democratic and human rights movements in the Xaisomboun Special Region, Northern Laos, which are enclosed with this letter. On January 17, 2003, the delegates of the Lao Human Rights Council and the Fact-Finding Commission on Laos met with the U.S. Ambassador to the LPDR, Douglas A. Hartwick, at the U.S. Department of State. We submitted a videotape entitled *The War and Genocide in Laos Since 1975, Part II* and other accurate evidence on the ethnic cleansing war, genocide and biological and chemical warfare against former CIA soldiers, Hmong and Lao people in the Xaisomboun Special Region, Northern Laos, to Ambassador Hartwick and the Laos Desk Officer, Kim Karsian, U.S. Department of State. We requested the U.S. Department of State:

1. to take all necessary action plans to investigate and stop the use of biological and chemical weapons against Hmong and Lao people and former CIA soldiers in Laos;
2. to take all necessary action plans to stop the ethnic cleansing war, genocide and biological and chemical warfare in Laos;
3. to plan and take all necessary actions to bring a true peace to Hmong and Lao people in Laos before the U.S. government considers NTR for the Communist Lao government of the LPDR.

Members of the U.S. Congress, U.S. Senators, President of the United States, and Secretary of State, we have submitted many letters, documents and evidence on the true situations in Laos to many officials of the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Embassy in Laos. However, these officials have continued to ignore this true information and situations in Laos. These officials asked for NTR for the LPDR without considering the genocide, human rights violations, ethnic cleansing war, biological and chemical warfare and terrorism against Hmong and Lao people and former CIA soldiers in Laos. Therefore, we request that the U.S. Congress, the White House, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Embassy in Laos should recognize the cries out for peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and survival of former CIA soldiers and many other Hmong and Lao people in Laos before the U.S. government considers NTR for the LPDR.

Problems of NTR for the LPDR

If the U.S. Congress, the White House and the U.S. Department of State grant NTR to the LPDR, NTR will empower the Communist Lao government:

1. to continue to maintain and develop Communism in Laos;
2. to continue to conduct ethnic cleansing war, genocide and biological and chemical warfare against people in Laos;
3. to receive revenue for international terrorism.

Therefore, we would like to propose that the U.S. government must not grant NTR to the Communist Lao government of the LPDR until it completely stops the ethnic cleansing war, genocide, human rights violations and biological and chemical warfare against former CIA soldiers and other Hmong and Lao people in Laos. The U.S. government must not help the violators of peace—the LPDR. The U.S. government must help the victims and those people who have cried out for peace in Laos.

Conclusion

Terrorist Government of the LPDR is not qualified to receive NTR

Consequently, the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc., its members and the majority of Hmong and Lao American people in the United States and Mr. Yang Toua Thao, Moua Toua Ter, Vang Chue Chi, Vang Nhia, Vang Chai, Herr Chai, and many other Hmong and Lao people inside Laos appreciate being able to request that the U.S. government must not grant NTR to the Communist Lao government of the LPDR. This is because the Communist Lao government of the LPDR has been committing terrorism, ethnic cleansing warfare, genocide, human rights violations, biological and chemical warfare and religious persecution against many Hmong and Lao peo-

ple in Laos. This is because the Communist Lao government of the LPDR supports President Saddam Hussein of Iraq against the United States. This is because the Communist LPDR supports international terrorism.

Just as Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein are guilty of terrorism, the Communist Lao government and Communist Lao leaders in Laos are also guilty of terrorism. Just as the government of Iraq is guilty because it produced and used biological and chemical weapons against people in Iraq, the LPDR government and the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam are guilty, because these two Communist governments have been using biological and chemical weapons against Hmong and Lao people in Laos.

We hope that the above reports, information, evidence and proposals are helpful sources for the U.S. Congress, the White House, U.S. Department of State, and U.S. Department of Commerce as the decision regarding NTR to the LPDR is made. Finally, we are glad to have the opportunity to advise the U.S. government that it will be a disaster and big mistake to award NTR to the terrorist dictatorship government in Laos. The Lao Human Rights Council, Inc. and many Hmong and Lao American people in the United States are opposed to the U.S. Congress approving NTR to the LPDR. Please do not award NTR to the terrorist dictatorship government of the LPDR in Laos.

Thank you so much for your consideration of the above requests.

Submitted by:

Vang Pobzeb, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Lao Human Rights Council, Inc.
in the United States

Appendix I

The Governments of Laos and Vietnam Used Biological and Chemical Weapons against Hmong People in Laos **Appeal from Hmong People in the Xaisomboun Special Region, Northern Laos,** **March 14, 2003**

Dear President George Bush:

Dear Members of the U.S. Congress and U.S. Senators:

Dear Secretary General of the United Nations:

Dear Members of the European Union:

Dear International Human Rights and Peace Organizations:

We are Mr. Yang Toua Thao and Moua Toua Ter, Vang Chue Chi, Herr Chai, and Vang Nhia, leaders of the Hmong democracy and human rights organizations and survival movements in Laos. We are in the Xaisomboun Special Region, northern Laos. We appreciate the opportunity to report on the true situation inside Laos since 1975 and until today in 2003 to you as follows:

1. The Communist Lao government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) did not allow officials of the U.S. Embassy and other officials of foreign embassies in Laos to travel to the Xaisomboun Special Region, northern Laos and many other locations inside Laos because the Communist Lao government of the LPDR and Vietnamese government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have been conducting extermination, genocide, ethnic cleansing warfare, and biological and chemical warfare against Hmong people in Laos for revenge because of Hmong-U.S. government relations and cooperation during the Vietnam War.
2. There are more than 14 Vietnamese and Lao military regiments composed of many thousands of soldiers and troops who have surrounded and are conducting an ethnic cleansing war, genocide and biological and chemical warfare against Hmong people in Laos today.
3. The Communist Lao government of the LPDR and Vietnamese government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have killed more than 300,000 people in Laos in the past 27 years (1975–2003). Of this figure, about 46,000 victims were former CIA soldiers and their family members and associates. We Hmong people are victimized by genocide and biological and chemical warfare because of the legacies of Hmong-American relations and cooperation during the Vietnam War. In 1975, the Vietnam War was over for the U.S. government, but the war is not over for Hmong people because the U.S. government pulled out of Laos

and opened the door for the Communist Lao and Vietnamese governments and soldiers to kill Hmong people and former CIA soldiers in Laos.

4. If the governments of Iraq and North Korea are guilty because they have produced and used biological and chemical weapons, weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons, then also the governments of the LPDR and Vietnam are guilty, because these two governments have been using biological and chemical weapons against Hmong people in Laos.
5. We Hmong people in Laos do not want any more war. We need true peace, human rights, freedom and democracy and survival. We do not want to die by genocide and biological and chemical weapons. Because we are human beings we need survival and human rights.
6. The Communist governments of the LPDR and Vietnam are using land mines in the Xaisomboun Special Region and other provinces in Laos. To date, these land mines have killed many thousands of Hmong people in these areas of Laos.

Therefore, we appeal to you and those governments who signed the Paris Peace Agreements of 1973 to end the Vietnam War and to restore peace for Laos and Indochina:

1. To send international fact-finding commissioners and inspectors to inspect the problems of biological and chemical warfare, genocide and ethnic cleansing war against Hmong people in the Xaisomboun Special region and other provinces in Laos.
2. To send news reporters and agencies to cover the problems of international war against Hmong people in Laos.
3. To use the Paris Peace Agreements on Indochina and Laos of 1973 and other necessary action plans to stop the war in Laos and to bring a true peace to the people in Laos.
4. To send airplanes to take Hmong and Lao people and former CIA soldiers and their families in the Xaisomboun Special Region and other provinces in Laos to resettle in the United States, if the U.S. government does not consider our peace proposals and the U.S. and the U.N. do not stop the ethnic cleansing war against Hmong people in Laos.
5. To consider our eight-point peace proposal from Hmong people in Laos of October 7, 2002.

We authorized and requested Dr. Vang Pobzeb, the Director of the Lao Human Rights Council, to record our telephone communications, reports, statements and peace proposals on Laos and we requested him to submit and forward our reports, problems and peace proposals to you. We need you to take all necessary action plans to stop the war in Laos and to save our lives. Many of us are former CIA soldiers and family members. We appeal that you give the opportunity to Dr. Vang Pobzeb and his supporters and other human rights organizations to submit our reports and peace proposals to you on our behalf.

Respectfully requested,

Mr. Moua Toua Ter
Mr. Yang Toua Thao
Mr. Vang Chue Chi, Her Chai and Vang Nhia
Xaisomboun Special Region, Northern Laos

Note and Sources:

The above English version is a translation from the telephone communications and reports and requests from Mr. Moua Toua Ter, Mr. Yang Toua Thao, Vang Chue Chi, and Vang Chai from Laos to the office of the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc., in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, United States, from November 8, 9, and 10, and November 11 and 13, 2002, and March 14, 2003. The two-hour cassette tape recordings are kept at the office of the Lao Human Rights Council.

For information on the above reports and problems, please contact: Dr. Vang Pobzeb, Executive Director; Lao Human Rights Council, Inc.; P.O. Box 1606; Eau Claire, WI 54702, USA; (715) 831-8355 (telephone); (715) 831-8563 (fax); E-mail address: laohumrights@earthlink.net; Website: www.laohumrights.org

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Lao Representatives Abroad
 Assembly, Zone 3, Ontario Canada
April 21, 2003

Chairman Phil Crane, House Trade Subcommittee And Honorable Members of Congress:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share our concerns about the possibility of the United States granting of Normalized Trade Relations (NTR) status to the Communist regime in Laos.

As Laotians who want to see Laos become a true democratic country which can develop its own economy for the well being of its people. Our organization has many members and their relatives throughout the United States and we are staunchly opposed to America granting NTR trade status to the LPDR for the following reasons:

1. The LPDR has never stopped persecuting religious groups in Laos;
2. The LPDR constantly violates and denies human rights to the citizens of Laos;
3. Laos' economy is in shambles due to mismanagement and corruption in the government;
4. When the Lao economy went into deep recession and high inflation, Lao women as young as 14 years old were forced into prostitution and hard labor in Laos and in Thailand to try to earn enough money to feed their family;
5. The LPDR has amassed huge quantities of chemical and biological weapons which they are ready to use against their own people;
6. The LPDR is a communist state; a political system that is dying and unsuitable in the modern era;
7. The LPDR is not a friendly country to the United States as was demonstrated by the government-organized demonstrations in Vientiane against the U.S. policy towards Iraq (when American men and women put their life on the line in "Operation Iraqi Freedom");
8. The LPDR is still controlled by the Communist regime in Vietnam and NTR will benefit Vietnam's hardline regime, not Laos.

The Lao Representatives Abroad Assembly in Ontario, Canada, and its counterparts in America, believe that the U.S. should permit the economy of Laos to fall even deeper into the abyss without a bailout by the U.S. taxpayer. Without a strong economy, the communist government will likely not be able to exist for much longer, and will crumble like the former Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important matter.

Samrith Phromkharanourak
President

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Lao-American College
 Vientiane, Lao P.D.R.

The Honorable Philip Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee
 House Ways and Means Committee
 Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Philip Crane,

On behalf of the Lao-American College, I am writing to express our strong support for the establishment of NTR (Normal Trade Relations) between the US and the Lao PDR.

The Lao PDR is the only ASEAN member nation, of the 10 members, to which this status has not been extended. Unfortunately, a strongly vocal minority, many of whom are not American citizens, and are no longer Lao citizen, appear to have the ear of the Congress. This minority left Laos long ago and is out of touch with the Laos of today. To continue to "punish" Laos, often for their own personal problems, is not justifiable of worthy of a country which prides itself as being a champion and be allowed to hurt a majority of people?

The Lao PDR is not and never has been an aggressor nation. However, Laos has often been the victim of aggressors. The most recent such situation was the so-called "Secret War" during the Vietnam War years, and the aggressor then was the United

States. The tonnage of bombs and bomblets dropped on this country continue to main and kill innocent people.

If the war against terrorism is to be won, then friendship and trade need to be established. Brute force will not and has not won hearts and minds of people anywhere. Laos is the landlink of SE Asia, a position of strategic importance and the cross roads of trade in this area. Here the US Embassy was never forced to close, and this country was the first to allow Americans to search for the MIAs.

Laos, like the US, fought for independence and the sovereign right to determine its own destiny. Instead of punishment, the US could assist the peaceful development of this country and the evolution of governance and an economy suitable for Lao needs and circumstances. Laos wants friendship and respect, peace and prosperity. The Lao want American friendship—why is this not given to Laos and why do you listen to people who don't know or understand Laos today and the poverty, needs, and hopes of the real Lao people?

Sincerely yours,

Virginia Van Ostrand,
Director

(American citizen who has known the real Laos for almost 17 years)
(Over 1,000 college age students + 35 faculty + 20 support staff)

Lao-American College
Vientiane, Lao PDR

Dear William M. Thomas,

As a US citizen and the foremost American private investor in the Lao PDR, I earnestly plead for normalization of US-Laos normal trade relations. Please vote for the passage of US-Laos Normal Trade Relations bill that will benefit both sides.

I urge you to ignore the former Secret War mercenaries that defeated the 1997 trade normalization bill. These people are not part or caring about the present day Laos. To combat the real causes of terrorism, there must be economic opportunity for this and all poor countries.

As a 16 year long education for the Lao people. I welcome any and all inquiries about education needs in the Lao PDR.

Sincerely yours,

Virginia Van Ostrand
Director

Lao-American Community of the Northwest
Seattle, Washington 98146
April 21, 2003

Honorable Congressman William M. Thomas
Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee
United States House of Representatives

Honorable Chairman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Lao-American community of the Northwest, we would like to express our utmost appreciation for the opportunity to submit this testimony before the Ways and Means Committee of the United States House of Representatives to:

1. Call on the House Ways and Means Committee and the US Congress to urge the US Administration to intervene with Lao Communist Government for an immediate and unconditional release of all political and religious prisoners held in various prisons or "re-education" camps, or rather, prison camps, throughout Laos.
2. Call on the House Ways and Means Committee and the Congress to reject the granting of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status to the Lao Communist Government.

First, the Lao-American Community of the Northwest urges the Ways and Means Committee and the Congress as a whole to call on the US Administration to press the Lao Communist Government for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, especially the release of the two former high ranking Lao Government officers, Mr. Khamphoui Ratsmy and Mr. Feng Sackchittaphong, who advocate for peaceful political reform and who have been imprisoned since 1991 when they petitioned the Lao People's Revolutionary Party to allow more freedom

for the Lao people and to implement a multi-political parties system. We also urge for the immediate and unconditional release of the five student leaders—Mr. Thongpaseuth Keuakoun, Mr. Khamphouvieng Sisaath, Mr. Seng Aloun Phengphanh, Mr. Bouavanh Chanhmanivong and Mr. Keochay. These five student leaders were arrested in October 1999 for attempting to hold a peaceful demonstration in Vientiane (the capital of Laos) on October 26, 1999. The demonstration's main objectives were (1) the respect of human rights, (2) the release of political prisoners, (3) fair and open election and (4) the implementation of a multi-political parties system to achieve true democracy in Laos.

These student leaders have been arrested for peacefully exercising their rights as guaranteed in Article 31 of the LPDR's own Constitution, promulgated in August 1991. Article 31 of the LPDR's Constitution stipulates: "*Lao citizens have the right and freedom of speech, press and assembly; and have the right to set up associations and to stage demonstrations which are not contrary to the law.*"

The arrest and the continued incarceration of the student leaders also violate the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly, Articles 2, 11, 19, and 20(1). Article 20(1) of the Declaration specifically stipulates: "*Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*" Laos is a signatory of the Declaration.

True to its dictatorial principles and long tradition of deceptive and lying practices, the LPDR denied and deceived that there ever was a demonstration on October 26, 1999. According to Amnesty International's Public Statement of October 25, 2002 (AI Index: ASA 26/005/2002), a spokesman of the Lao Foreign Ministry was quoted, in November 1999, as saying: "*I have checked the report thoroughly and stand firm that there was no protest or arrest of anyone in the past two weeks. There might have been some drunken people scuffling or making noise that caused outsiders visiting Vientiane to think they were protesting.*" These official lies of the LPDR were unmasked when a group of six students, who participated in the demonstration, were able to escape Laos immediately after the failed attempt demonstration and were granted asylum in Seattle, Washington in October 2000.

The Lao Communist Government would have continued its charade of deception if it were not for the strong pressure from the European Union parliamentarians to come clean regarding the arrest of the protesters. According to the same October 25, 2002 Amnesty International's Public Statement, Lao officials admitted in June 2002 during their talk with European parliamentarians that the five student leaders had been sentenced in June 2001. How could there have been a sentence if there were no arrests? Once again, the Lao Communist Government was caught lying.

Second, while applauding the US Government's policies of engagement with the Lao Communist Government, the Lao-American Community of the Northwest strongly believes that granting NTR to the Lao Communist Government at this point would be counterproductive and lead to further abuse of human rights. It would also send a wrong and conflicting message to the Lao people and the freedom-loving people around the world that the US would reward a murderous and dictatorial government that violates basic human rights as stipulated in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights without requiring significant changes or improvements of human rights and the rule of laws or even a small token gesture of goodwill, such as the unconditional and immediate release of political prisoners, such as the five democracy student leaders and the two former LPDR's reform-minded officers. The release of these seven political prisoners would not pose any threat to the Lao Communist Government's stability. On the contrary, it would indicate the Lao Government's gradual commitment to the rule of laws and its international obligations and it would shine a ray of hopes to its own people—the Lao people—that a new dawn of freedom would not be too long a dream.

Economically, Laos has very few products and virtually no services that would benefit from gaining NTR status and thus, free or low tariff access to the US market, except for the garment industry. The Lao people would not enjoy any benefits as a result of the NTR status. Only the ruling elites and the foreign garment tycoons would fully reap the benefits. As experiences in other developing countries have shown that there have been frequent abuse of women and children in the garment industry in countries where transparency is not the norm, but rampant corruption at the highest level of government is. Laos, under the Communist regime, is no different, if not worse. True, there have been numerous decrees issued to "fight and eradicate" corruption; as a matter of fact, every prime minister since Kayson Phomvihane, the first prime minister of LPDR, through Bounnang Vorachit, the current prime minister, has issued at least one such decree. One has to wonder why corruption today is more rampant. The answer is because in a dictatorial regime the people cannot scrutinize and question their government. This answer may seem simplistic and obvious, but that's the true nature of dictatorship.

It has been almost thirty years that the Lao people have suffered under the dictatorship of the Lao Communist Government. Although there appears to be some economic improvement after billion of dollars in direct foreign aids and loans and foreign investments, the vast majority of the Lao people still live in poverty today. Laos, as a country, has been driven further into one of the least developed countries. While the country and the people are in dire poverty, the ruling elites are enjoying all the luxuries that money can buy. Let's think for a moment: how can a person with a monthly salary of less than five hundred dollars (the official salary of a minister of the LPDR) afford to pay cash for luxury cars and mansions?

Another economic reality is that Laos is a landlocked country where all its exporting products have to go through its neighboring countries such as Thailand and Vietnam. The labor cost must be low enough to offset the high costs of in-land transit transportation. This condition, adding to the rampant corruption at the highest level of government, will lead to a slavery of the Lao women and children working in the exporting industries. What guarantee will they have for reasonable wages and working conditions when the Lao Communist Government has repeatedly ignored its own constitution and its international obligations under the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Politically, by granting NTR status at this point, the US Government would inadvertently send the wrong message to the Lao people that it rewards a dictatorial government, which consistently ignores its own constitution and its international obligations to uphold and comply with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It would dash any hopes and dreams the Lao people may still have and hold dear to their hearts that some day their country, through the international pressure, would enjoy true liberty and democracy that we, Americans, have been taking for granted for so long. Any economic benefits from the NTR status would only further enhance and perpetuate the oppressive and persecutorial regime of the Lao Communist Government and the vast majority of the Lao people would continue to live in poverty and fear.

The Lao-American community of the Northwest believes that there will be a time when NTR status will benefit the vast majority of the Lao people. That time will come when the Lao people can freely and without fear, elect their own representative form of government that is not imposed upon them by a one dictatorial party-state government as they are currently forced to endure. Until then, NTR status would just enhance the bloody, oppressive hands of the Lao Communist Government.

By advocating for the denial of the granting of NTR status to Lao PDR, the Lao-American Community of The Northwest does not advocate for the isolation of Lao PDR. On the contrary, we urge the US Administration to augment its engagement with the Lao Communist Government and we believe the current US support in narcotic control and the US assistance in the UXO program, to name a few, are more beneficial to the vast majority of the Lao people than the NTR status could provide.

In conclusion, the Lao-American community of the Northwest, once again, urges the House Ways and Means Committee and the US Congress to reject the granting of the NTR Status to the Lao Communist Government, unless and until it indicates its strongest commitment to the improvement of human rights and its international obligations. The Lao Communist Government could signify such commitment by unconditionally and immediately release the two former reform-minded LPDR officers and the five student democracy leaders—a simple and small token gesture of goodwill.

Thank you.

For and on behalf of the Lao-American Community of The Northwest

Khamphay Muangchanh
Co-Chair of the Board
 Khamsene Thaviseth
Co-Executive Director



[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Lao-Australian Institute for Co-operation and Development
Campbelltown NSW 2560, Australia
19 April 2003

Mr William M. Thomas
Chairman, Committee Members on Ways and Means
House of Representatives and Committee Members on
Ways and Means
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515 USA

Sir,

On behalf of the Lao-Australian Institute for Cooperation and Development, (LAICD) a non-government organisation based in Sydney, Australia, I am writing to express our unreserved support for the US move towards granting the "Normal Trade Relations" to Laos. We are a body of several thousand migrant Lao who are working with the present Lao government to achieve genuine and successful economic development in Laos.

Mr Vichit Xindavong, the Lao Ambassador to Australia broke this promising news at the Lao New Year celebration in Canberra on April 5. Laos emerged as a contemporary State in 1953 and has been largely a subsistence economy to date. It is one of the twenty poorest countries in the world; about 80 per cent of Laos' revenue are dependent on loans, grants and foreign aid.

Lao people are not familiar with international trade. In its contemporary history Laos has never had an opportunity to trade with overseas countries particularly with great Western powers such as USA and United Kingdom.

The US Normal Trade Relationship is vital for the 5.2 million Lao population of which 85 per cent are still poor multi-ethnic rural people. We strongly believe that NTR will help to eventually expose the Lao people to a genuine Western democratic system, transparent governance and the poverty eradication that the Lao government aims to achieve by the year 2020. This will enable Laos to take a proper role within the community of nations.

We would like to voice our appeal to you, to all the Congressmen and Senators to give humane consideration in granting the Normal Trade Relation Agreement to Laos at the coming US Congress meeting. Thank you in anticipation for your support and we look forward to a historic vote of the US Congress in favour of this small landlocked and least developed country. Laos has inherited its current political colour from cold war history. Thank you very much for your support.

Yours faithfully,
Signed

Kevin Prakoonheang, JP
President, LAIFCAD

Laos Institute for Democracy
April 21, 2003

Dear Chairman Crane and Members of the Subcommittee:

In this intense political climate, we have recently witnessed the fall of a totalitarian dictatorship in Iraq. However, there are still menacing dictatorships in the world which are not being addressed with the same urgency. I would like bring your attention to the violations of religious freedom and human rights in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).

In July 2002, the government of Lao PDR presented new legislation which provides a legal basis for control of and interference with religious activities by government officials. "The decree provides that all persons in Lao PDR have the right to carry out religious activities and to participate in religious ceremonies at established places of worship. It also provides that every citizen of Lao PDR has equal rights before the law to believe or not to believe in a religion and that the Lao PDR government respects and protects legal religious activities in Lao PDR. In addition the decree recognizes that followers of all religions have the right to gather together for worship, receive religious teachings, and conduct religious celebrations at existing places of worship." However, the current situation in Lao PDR does not reflect changes in legislation. Some religious detainees were released following the July 2002 decree, but many remain in custody.

Religious freedom seekers continue to suffer serious violations of their rights. People continue to be arrested and imprisoned, undergo prolonged detention, and are

denied basic human rights. Lao PDR officials have forced Christians to renounce their faith while dozens of churches have been closed. Because of these direct violations of religious freedom and human rights it is very important that Lao PDR be designated as a county of particular concern (CPC). The government of Lao PDR needs to accept change in order to become representative of its people.

Though the Lao PDR is a small country far removed from the U.S., the rights of its people need to be addressed with urgency. I am here representing the many voiceless Laotian people—petitioning you for help in the preservation of their basic human rights. And I am kindly requesting that the U.S. Congress reject—not to grant—Normalized Trade Relations (NTR) to the dictatorship and terrorist Lao PDR regime. I urge you to support the implementation of a democratic government in Lao PDR that is for the people, by the people and affords every citizen basic rights and freedoms—so that they can work together to improve their economy and enhance their own development.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express the position of my organization which seeks to give voice to the freedom-loving Laotian people still suffering in the Lao PDR. We staunchly oppose granting NTR to the Lao Communist at the present time.

Respectfully yours,

Khampoua Naovarangsy,
Policy and Political Analyst
The Laos Institute for Democracy

**Statement of Thongsavanh Phongsavan, Executive Director
Laotian American Council, North Providence, Rhode Island**

Chairman Phil Crane, Members of the Trade Subcommittee, Members of the U.S. Congress and American policymakers:

As we weigh the facts and evidence presented here before us regarding the deplorable Communist regime in Laos, we must consider our own responsibility as a freedom-loving people of principal and faith. We can no longer ignore the silent cries of our Laotian neighbors, friends, and loved ones, who have endured unspeakable injustices at the hands of the oppressive Lao-PDR regime. However, by working together towards an effective resolution to the crisis in Laos, we will rise above the shameful intolerance of the Communist regime, as true leaders.

We urge the Trade Subcommittee and the U.S. Congress to vigorously oppose the granting of Normalized Trade Relations (NTR) trade status with the Communist Lao regime at this time. It is entirely premature, especially given the Lao regime's support for Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq and North Korea.

Understanding the present Stalinist crisis in Laos will provide us effective tools for resolving key issues—including economic, trade, national security and counter-terrorism issues. As the interrelationships among the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the leadership of Communist North Korea, and those who support or sponsor terrorism become increasingly clear as a result of "Operation Iraqi Freedom" and the joint "Lao PDR-North Korean Communiqué", we must implement a decisive policy to counter this growing threat by the Lao regime to all civilized people. The Lao PDR supports Saddam Hussein's regime and North Korea's dictatorship, and works closely with them. Indeed, at this time, when defense spending, national security and war have become imbedded in the minds of most Americans, we must focus on resolving the crisis in Laos before that which is bad becomes far more unpredictable.

While these human rights issues (including the arrest and detention of pro-democracy student activists and intellectuals, religious persecution, torture, genocide, and other, equally despicable crimes against humanity) have become major roadblocks to future cooperation between the United States and Laos, there are still some who—astonishingly—wish to grant the Lao-PDR government Normalized Trade Relation (NTR) status as an act of faith—without reasonable conditions in a post-Sept. 11th environment. Although many of the people who are closest to this debate agree that some form of diplomatic concession—including political and economic reforms—are required on the part of the Lao-PDR before economic restrictions can finally be lifted, those who are for approving NTR without a foundation for improvement and serious reforms by the Communist regime seem to forget the horrific reality of the situation in Laos.

Amnesty International and all other independent human rights organizations are still not allowed into Laos to monitor the situation after almost three decades of rule by the Stalinist regime.

Over the years, the U.S. Congressional Forum on Laos has helped to raise awareness and understanding of the situation in Laos and give voice to many of the victims of the brutal Communist regime. I am especially grateful to Congressman Patrick Kennedy, Congressman George Radanovich and Congressman Mark Green as well as Philip S. Smith, Executive Director for the Center for Public Policy Analysis, for helping to cosponsor and coordinate today's special session held in the U.S. Congress where I also joined with many of my colleagues to present testimony—including the United League for Democracy in Laos, Inc., the Lao Nationalist Reform Party, Inc., Amnesty International, the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom, the Laos Institute for Democracy, the United Lao-Hmong Congress for Democracy, Inc. and many others.

For the sake of humanity, we need to act together now to nip this great menace of Lao Marxism in the bud. With the Lao Communist regime's present alliance with North Korea and key terrorist organizations, the lifting of any restriction on Laos must be carefully weighed. As recent history has demonstrated, those who support tyranny and oppression must be dealt with accordingly if national rehabilitation is sought. We do not wish to embolden a lawless dictatorship with money or status, but to hold it accountable for the dire situation that the Lao people, as well as Laotian-Americans, must now confront.

With our voices on this matter now being heard internationally, we must set an example that people of every culture will respect. We can no longer backtrack to a more innocent time, but we can and will address these injustices by the rule of law. As Laos' already poor record on human rights has hit a new low with its unlawful restriction of religious worship, according to the recently released report by the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom, we must make it clear that any work toward cooperation between this regime and the world community must begin with guarantees of social and religious freedoms. In the final analysis, peace with this brutal, dope-peddling dictatorship cannot be achieved by giving in, but by holding it to the standards of the free and civilized world.

For these and other persuasive reasons, we urge every responsible person connected with these issues to reassess [their] strategic implications. We do not wish for war, though the relationship among Laos and her belligerent neighbors threatens not only that region, but also the stability of the world as we know it. There must be a crackdown on the illegal activities, state-sponsored terrorism, and institutional violence, that is currently being conducted! by the Lao communist regime, before any real healing can begin; and in this case the initiative lies with you. With deferment of NTR status, we believe the Lao-PDR will have little choice but to come to the bargaining table.

We therefore, on behalf of the vast majority of the Laotian community in the United States, and in Laos, urge the Trade Subcommittee, and Members of the U.S. Congress to deny NTR trade status to the Communist regime in Laos.

We urge Members of Congress, and Trade Subcommittee Members, to carefully read, support and cosign the U.S. Congressional letter to President Bush, Secretary Powell and Chairman Crane, in strong opposition to NTR trade status for Laos at this time. The letter is co-authored by Rep. George Radanovich (R-CA) and Rep. Mark Green (R-WI), and cosigned by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI), Rep. Devin Nunes (R-CA) and many other Members of Congress. It also addresses the important issue of missing Hmong-American citizens.

Thank you very much for your leadership and support. By continuing to work with you on a bipartisan level to oppose the granting of NTR trade status to the Communist regime in Laos, the concrete results desired by the majority of the Laotian people, in terms of reform and regime-change in Laos, including the restoration of basic human freedoms and democracy, will be attained in the near future.

Laotian-American National Coalition
Richmond, California 94804

Honorable Congressman Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
Capital Hill
Washington DC
Fax (202) 225-2610
Subject: US NTR for Laos

Dear Honorable Congressman Philip M. Crane

We, the Americans of Laotian descent, hereby express our wholehearted support the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative in Southeast Asia to extend the US NTR to Laos and ask that you support this initiative as well.

Respectfully Yours,

**The Voice of the Laotian American National Movement
In support of
The Bush Administration's Trade Initiative
To extend Normal Trade Relations to Laos**

We believe that:

Widespread and rapidly growing unemployment among youth in Laos has driven tens of thousands of them to flee to Thailand and other neighboring countries where they fall prey to exploitative and inhumane treatment by their employers and criminals; while the land-locked Laotian economy continues to weaken due to decline in foreign investment and its weak capability to compete with its neighbors in the export markets. The situation is further aggravated by the continued denial of US NTR while such privilege is enjoyed by its stronger immediate neighbors, including Vietnam and Cambodia.

US NTR for Laos is not a panacea for its social economic problems, but it will put Laos on a level playing field with its neighboring countries on which to compete for a share of the U.S. markets. This in turn will stimulate domestic and foreign investment in Laos and give the country a fair chance to provide decent jobs for its youth and thereby help reverse the current ill treatment and suffering they have had to endure, both in Laos and in neighboring countries.

We realize that Laotian communities across the U.S. are not unanimous in their views about the current Laotian Government and its policies, and that the majority of Laotian Americans still wish to see more political reforms and changes. But we believe that a stronger Laotian economy will improve living conditions of the Laotian people who, in turn, will then become real stakeholders and, eventually catalysts for change. Experience in Asia has amply demonstrated that the democratization process has been economically driven.

While understanding and respecting the views of those opposing the granting of US NTR for Laos, we ask that they also understand and respect our views and positions on this important matter. As American citizens, we have the obligation to respect each other's rights and freedom to express our views in accordance with our belief and conscience.

The majority of Laotian Americans have reconnected with their homeland. Most of them have returned to Laos for visits and have relatives who are still there and wish to see that they be given a fair chance for a better living. Most Laotian Americans believe that promoting economic development is the best way to promote peaceful and sustainable change in Laos.

We wholeheartedly applaud and share the position taken by the Bush Administration on the issue of US NTR for Laos. Ambassador Hartwick is trying to encourage discussion and favorable consideration of this initiative.

Laotian Americans and friends of the Laotians who share our views should exercise their right of freedom of speech by voicing their views to their respective Congressional representatives, especially members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The opposition to the US NTR to date seeks to isolate and impoverish Laos for their own ambiguous political agenda. They have organized and financed aggressive lobby efforts to prevent hearings on this matter. Some of them continue to believe that poverty will force change in Laos. Recent history in Asia shows otherwise. People in isolated and poor North Korea have no means to ask for change, they starve in silence; while in relatively rich South Korea and other parts of Asia (Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines etc.) growing affluence of the peoples have created economically strong and well educated middle class who in turn have proven to be the real incubators and guardians of the growing democratization process.

A constructive engagement approach is a better alternative for the U.S. to promote change in Laos; and that promoting change through peaceful socioeconomic development is far more effective and humane than deliberate impoverishment of our fellow Laotians in Laos. Laos needs to adopt international standards and strengthen the rule of law. We should voice our collective efforts to urge the U.S. Congress to grant Laos the US NTR.

Laotian American National Movement will try to coordinate and in some cases help to campaign for US NTR for Laos. Our American friends can certainly help to do the same. Let's not leave out any body that can help.

For more information, please contact:
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C/o Laotian-American National Coalition
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 Richmond, CA 94804
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The list of endorsers and supporters

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The Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship
 Minnesota State Representation
 Brooklyn Park, Minnesota 55443
April 15, 2003

The Honorable Phillip Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 House Ways & Means Committee
 233 Cannon House Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

We are a group of Laotian Americans from various ethnic backgrounds of Laos (Lao, Hmong, Khmu, U-Mien, Thaidam, Lue, etc.). We all came together to form the Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, whose ultimate purpose is to promote education, economic development, and social and political progress within the Laotian multi-ethnic communities both in the United States and Laos.

On behalf of our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, which has representation in various states of the United States, we have the honor of writing to urge you to move forward legislation to establish Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos. We are well aware that NTR with Laos has been strongly endorsed by Secretary of State Powell and U.S. Trade Representative Zoellick. As new Americans having roots in Laos, we would like to express our strong support of the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative in Southeast Asia and, more particularly, its extension of Normal Trade Relations with Laos.

Our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship is not unaware of human rights abuses, ethnic profiling, religious discrimination, etc. in Laos after the takeover by the communist Pathet Lao in 1975. Fearing for our life, along with our families, we fled the country—mostly by foot—across Laotian jungles to take the road of exile. Dr. Yang Dao,⁽¹⁾ a Hmong educator and scholar and the current National Chair of this alliance in support of the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative, wrote several articles,⁽²⁾ published as early as 1980 in France and in the U.S., denouncing arbitrary arrests by the communist Pathet Lao authorities who had sent tens of thousand royal Lao cadres, technicians and intellectuals to the "political re-education camps",⁽³⁾ and condemning the communist Pathet Lao's violent repression against the Hmong population in Northeastern Laos. These efforts have contributed to the many but slow changes made by the current government of Laos.

However, twenty eight years have passed since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, and the world has profoundly changed. In 1991, democracy prevailed over Communism in the former U.S.S.R. In October 2002, China officially adopted a more liberal system leading toward capitalism. Under international political and economic pressures, Laos must follow this move. According to the Bush Administration and the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, Laos is showing signs of moving toward religious freedom, human rights and economic reforms. After 27 years of exile, Dr. Yang Dao was invited by the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to visit Laos in November 2002. He observed that the current Lao Government has adopted a multi-ethnic policy to consolidate national unity in Laos, and as a result, Hmong, Khmu and other Laotian ethnic minorities are actively participating in the government, filling regional and national leadership positions ranging from city mayor to provincial governor to government minister. Thus, for the first time in Laotian history, a Laotheung⁽⁴⁾ has become the Prime Minister of Laos and a Hmong woman acts as the Vice-President of the Laotian National Assembly.

In these new perspectives, our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship strongly believes that, if granted, the U.S. Normal Trade Relations

⁽¹⁾ Yang Dao is a Hmong from Laos. He received his Ph.D. in social science at the Sorbonne, University of Paris, France, in 1972. From 1972 to 1974, he was a director in the Ministry of Planning of the Royal Lao Government. From April 1974 to May 1975, he was appointed by the King of Laos to the National Political Council of Coalition (Congress) of the Kingdom of Laos. He has authored and co-authored several books on Hmong history, culture and traditions. He is now a faculty member of the Asian Cultures and Literatures Department of the University of Minnesota.

⁽²⁾ Gas Warfare: the Communist Solution to the Problems of the Minorities in Laos (in French) in *Les Temps Modernes*, Paris, France, 1980; Why Did the Hmong Leave Laos? (in English) in *Hmong in the West*, University of Minnesota, U.S.A. in 1982; and *Human Rights and Gas Warfare in Laos* (in English) in *Southeast Asia Review*, Geneva, Switzerland, 1984.

⁽³⁾ The "political reeducation camps", established along the Laos-Vietnam border after the takeover Laos by the communist Pathet Lao in 1975, reportedly looked like the Soviet gulags.

⁽⁴⁾ Laotheung is the largest ethnic minority which includes the Khmu group and represents 27 percent of the total population of Laos.

(NTR) will have a catalytic effect on the rate of economic, social and political reforms in Laos.

a. **Economic Reform:**

The US NTR would contribute to creating crucial opportunities to increase employment in Laos by providing legal and institutional frameworks which would develop the private sector and encourage foreign investments to accelerate the economic reform in Laos. This will further strengthen anti-narcotic efforts by strengthening substitute crops and industries (coffee, tropical fruits, medicinal plants, etc.). The US NTR, indeed, would reduce duties to 2.4% and allow Laos to export agricultural products and other kinds of merchandise to U.S. markets. This transaction would benefit both the multi-ethnic population of Laos and the Laotian-American community.

b. **Social Reform:**

By establishing a constructive dialogue with Laotian authorities, the US NTR would contribute to promoting social welfare and to developing the education system in Laos. Standardizing education in Laos would create a strong foundation for social reform which respects human rights and defends social justice for all Laotian citizens of all ethnic backgrounds. The Lao, Hmong, Khmu, U-Mien, Thai-Dam, Lue, and other Laotian peoples would live in the same community of destiny: national consciousness.

c. **Political Reform:**

Through a mutual understanding and trust with the Laotian government, the US NTR would contribute to accelerating political reform by promoting civil rights and democratic liberties. Such political reform would contribute to strengthening national solidarity, assuring political stability in Laos and maintaining peace in Southeast Asia and the world over.

Our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship strongly supports the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative and its extension of Normal Trade Relations with Laos for these reasons above, as well as the following:

1. To Enhance U.S.A.-Laos Special Relations

Since Laos became an independent country in 1954, its diplomatic relations with the U.S.A. have never been interrupted in spite of political difficulties and ideological changes. By irony of fate, today this tiny country is still denied NTR status which has been granted to Vietnam and Cambodia which, paradoxically, broke ties with the United States during the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Therefore, our Multi-Laotian Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship feels that it is only fair that NTR treatment be also extended to Laos, whose human rights record is not worse than that of Cambodia, Vietnam or China. NTR status indeed will contribute to heal the wounds of the past, to strengthen U.S.A.-Laos friendship and to help the Laotian people from all ethnic backgrounds who still have parents, brothers, sisters and relatives both in Laos and in the United States of America to work together for the future.

2. U.S. Economic Expansion in Southeast Asia:

Laos is a landlocked and poor country with a population of 5.2 millions. However it possesses a significant amount of arable land (50% of which is still covered with dense forests), a variety of natural resources (iron, zinc, silver, gold, sapphire, etc.) and a huge reserve of hydroelectric resources which draws the attention of a number of potential suitors. Since 1987, Laos has become a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (A.S.E.A.N.), which includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. A.S.E.A.N. countries constitute a market of 500 million people. Laos' main exports include electricity, garments, wood and wood products, coffee, small handicrafts, hand-made textiles, and some agricultural and forest products. Its trading partners are mainly countries in the SE Asian sub-region, particularly Thailand and Vietnam.

In 1998, Laos's textile products were granted quota and duty free status by the European Union (EU). Since then, about 25% of its total garment exports are sold to EU countries, particularly France. China is moving forward with negotiations with Laos and other A.S.E.A.N. countries for a China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and Japan and Europe are also beginning to implement similar arrangements with A.S.E.A.N.

In this international trading context, it is in the interest of the United States to extend NTR status to Laos, which plays an increasing role in Southeast Asia and in the world, attested by its hosting in 2002 the first A.S.E.A.N.-EU trade meeting, in Vientiane, capital of Laos. With U.S. NTR and with its low labor and energy costs

and tremendous amounts of arable land, Laos would be able to export to the United States processed tropical food, instant coffee, and other labor-intensive products such as shoes and leather items as well as some minerals. Furthermore, given its unique culture and ethnic diversity, Laos would sell its silk weavings, furniture and timber products, and Hmong traditional clothing to meet the needs of about 500,000 Laotian Americans of various ethnic backgrounds and more than one million Asian Americans from different cultures in the United States of America active in the U.S. market.

3. To Increase U.S. Political Presence in Southeast Asia:

Right in the middle of the Mekong River region, Laos has always been a crossroad of migrations and trade from China to Cambodia and from Thailand to Vietnam. Thus, for centuries, its geographic situation made this tiny country an avenue for transit of goods and ideas. Contemporary history demonstrated Laos' strategic importance during the Vietnam conflict.

In this context, Laos is called to play a more and more important role in Asia, due to its geographic situation and its various natural resources. "At any time, officials from China, Vietnam and Thailand are courting their Lao counterparts in the hope that their efforts will be rewarded with mining, hydropower and logging contracts, and convenient access to each other's markets" wrote Catherine McKinley, in a Dow Jones Newswire Column (February 4, 2003).

Therefore, extending the NTR status to Laos would greatly contribute to reinforcing the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. With the increasing threat of international terrorism, this presence is essential to maintaining peace and political stability in Asia.

In conclusion, on behalf of our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, we would like to express our gratitude to you and your Subcommittee for giving us the opportunity to explain the reasons for our support of extending U.S. NTR to Laos. We strongly urge you to move forward legislation to establish Normal Trade Relations with Laos, which will greatly benefit our two countries and our two populations. For your high consideration, we are enclosing petitions signed by members of the Laotian American communities in support of this letter and granting NTR to Laos.

With great respect,

Mr. San Souvannasoth
Co-Chair
Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance
 Yang Dao, Ph.D.
Chair
Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance

**Petition of Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance
 for USA-Laos Friendship
 In support of the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative
 To extend Normal Trade Relations to Laos**

We, the undersigned, are Americans of Laotian descents (Lao, Hmong, Khmu, U-Mien, Lue, Thai-Dam) hereby express our full support of the Bush Administration Trade Initiative in Southeast Asia and its extension of Normal Trade Relations to Laos.

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Jonny	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Vang	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Shoua	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Andre	Yang .....	.....	.....	.....
Toua	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Paul	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Tou Va	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Kifi	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Teng Sa	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Dia	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Yang Heu	Jong Pao	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Young	Jong Pao	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Der Thao	Jong Pao	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Zong Cheng	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55102
May Houa	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55102
Jong	Yang	Mounds View	Minnesota	55112
Vu	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
May Sy	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Khamsy	Yang	Rogers	Minnesota	55374
Yia	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota	55405
Xue	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota	55445
Thai	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota	55444
Ja	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota	55119
Ker	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Nao Pao	Yang	Rogers	Minnesota	55374
Thai	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Kou	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55109
Thai	Vang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Kao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Jimmy	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Lor	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55445
Kia	Vang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55445
Ze	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Paj	Yang	Ham Lake	Minnesota	55304
Cziasarh N.	Yang	Ham Lake	Minnesota	55304
Phouangsouvanh ..	Bouphasavanh	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Phim	Thongrasmy	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55430

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Soonhwa	Huang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Bouachay	Phetvorasack	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55430
Chom	Soudaly	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Phoukhong	Huang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Khong	Phonvidone	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55445
Oudom	Inthirath	Champlin	Minnesota	55316
Sing	Chaleunphone .....	.....	.....	.....
Toy	Sichanh	Maple Grove	Minnesota	55369
Sourisack	Somsanith	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Vongsavanh	Onsouvanh	Champlin	Minnesota	55316
Sisavath	Phetvorasack	Andover	Minnesota	55304
Keo	Phetvorasack	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Sonney	Sarichith	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Savay	Ekhasith	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Khamphone	Bouphasavath	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Sysay	Fongthiane	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Chitchay	Inthapanya	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55430
Keith	Sari	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Peter	Inthisone	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Phosavath	Inthisone	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Bounseuy	Phongsavath	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Joy	Vannavong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Josie	Vannavong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Leune	Phetsamone	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Lammai	Phetsamone	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Sai	Phetchamphone	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Bountou	Phetchamphone	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Kouang	Phetchamphone	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Seuth	Phetchamphone	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Boupha	Singvongsa	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Kham	Singvongsa	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Leng	Vongsoury	Robbinsdale	Minnesota	55422

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Leth	Saengosot .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Deth	Saengosot .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Soulideth Dave	Vongdeuane	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55429
Jay	Vongdeuane	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Khandy	Vongxay	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55429
Bounhou	Piammalay	Mounds	Minnesota	55364
Thongsouk	Piammalay	Mounds	Minnesota	55364
Sisomphane	Piammalay	Mounds	Minnesota	55364
Uthai	Saengphachan .....	.....	Minnesota	55429
Vailaiphone	Saengphachan	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Louane	Saengphachan	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Nikone	Saengphachan	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Somsanouk	Vorarath	Inver Grove Heights	Minnesota	55077
Anh	Vorarath	Inver Grove Heights	Minnesota	55077
Phanasouk	Vorarath	Roseville	Minnesota	55113
Mark	Carroll	Big Lake	Minnesota	55309
Janice	Carroll	Big Lake	Minnesota	55309
Laddavanh	Chantraphone	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55433
Bounxou	Chantraphone	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55433
Leu	Lugiu	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55433
Thippaph Hone	Lugiu	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55433
Khao	Insixiangmay	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Khouthong	Insixiangmay	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Phetsamone	Insixiangmay	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Monemany	Daoheuang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
King Walker	Daoheuang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Phonesamth	Chantharat .....	.....	.....	.....
Kongsy	Chantharat .....	.....	.....	.....
Songkane	Choulamountry	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Douane	Prommachai	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Thongsai	Prommachai	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Souane	Prommachai	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Penny	Phouthavong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Sene	Phouthavong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Sangvane	Samchapae .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Phone	Daoheuang .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Phouratsamy	Sysouchanh	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Po	Chanthaline	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Ketspnom	Chanthaline	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Boualai	SaengPhachan	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Soupheuy	Kheosamphanh	Rosemount	Minnesota	55068
Souk	Greenson	Rosemount	Minnesota	55068
Phourasmy	Keochanhome	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55417
Tick	Keochanhome	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55417
Seng	Phetsamone	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Phoukhio	Khaochonethanh	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55430
Khamphong	Khaochonethanh	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55430
Jeff	Greenson .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Chao	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Thao	Lor	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Xia	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Neng Chou	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Chong Sue	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Ger	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Mai Pa	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Toulee	Ly	Vadnais Heights	Minnesota	55127
Blia	Yang	Vadnais Heights	Minnesota	55127
Toutha	Ly	Vadnais Heights	Minnesota	55127
MayPahou	Ly	Vadnais Heights	Minnesota	55127
Dao	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Mo	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Shila	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Khou	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Shilu	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Dona	Vue	Minneapolis	Minnesota	
Anthony	Vui	Minneapolis	Minnesota	
Maijoua	Vui	Minneapolis	Minnesota	
Mai	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Tou	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Shoua	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Toua	Ly	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Phia	Ly	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Sao	Vue	White Bear Lake	Minnesota	55110
Chai	Lo	Cottage Grove	Minnesota	55016
Chong	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
May Yer	Ly	Vadnais Heights	Minnesota	55127
Joe	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Vangcha	Lo	Vadnais Heights	Minnesota	55127
Mee	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Blia	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Chong Wa	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Sao	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Tia	Vue	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Sai	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Pa	Lee	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Cher	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Pha	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Mee	Xiong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Kou	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Kia	Moua	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Ger	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Eng	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55430
Mai Nhia	Thao	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55430
Chia	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55430
Mai True	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55430
Pao	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Cee	Vang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Hue	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55109
Bao	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55109
Mai Lee	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55109
Cheng Chua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Pang	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
True	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Bee	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Kao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Der	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Yang	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Lue	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Nhia Her	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Sue	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Cia	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Tong Vang	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Meng	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Jaa	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Chong Moua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Sue Blong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Marvin	Lee	White Bear Lake	Minnesota	55110
Bao	Lee	White Bear Lake	Minnesota	55110
Yue Pheng	Lee	White Bear Lake	Minnesota	55110
Blia	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Kia	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Nhia	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Nao Mai	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Ong	Lee	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Thai	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chaxiom	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Wacheng	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Xochia	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Xiong	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Wa Doua	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Fue	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Lor	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Nhia Her	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Cha	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55107
Pang	Vongphengsy	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Heuang	Intravong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Siriphanh	Intravong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Chanthone	Sirivong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Saeng Keo	Heuanphommavong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Saengphaivanh	Heuanphommavong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Phoungun	Chanthamounry	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Vinny	Chanthamounry	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Don	Chanthamounry	Plymouth	Minnesota	55441
Yvonne	Chanthakhoun	Plymouth	Minnesota	55441
Kongkham	Thiravong	Austin	Minnesota	55912
Souphy	Thiravong	Austin	Minnesota	55912
Bounthavy	Phouisangiem	Austin	Minnesota	55912
Keo	Phouisangiem	Austin	Minnesota	55912
Khamphay	Keomalaythong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Ming	Keomalaythong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55428
Onsa	Thammavong	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Khampha	Thammavong	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Sam Champ	Vongvan	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Chomdy	Vongsouvanh	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Viraphonh	Thammavong	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Phenkamon	Thammavong	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Thida	Vongkaisone	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Ninov	Widjaja	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Bounhom	Phithaksounthone	Richfield	Minnesota	55423

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Vinith	Phithaksounthone	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Savath	Vongphengsy	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Pangtang	Lor	Woodbury	Minnesota	55125
Blong	Lor	Woodbury	Minnesota	55125
Alun	Lor	Woodbury	Minnesota	55125
Vue	Lor	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Kao	Lor	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Shua	Thao .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Sia	Lor .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Cha Tua	Lor	St. Paul	Minnesota .....	.....
May	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Gymbay	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Shua	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55127
Mang	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55127
Katherine	Lor	Woodbury	Minnesota	55125
May	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Dua	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Noy	Phomphackmy	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota .....	.....
Chansone	Littana	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota .....	.....
Lon	Littana	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota .....	.....
Oneta	Chompathong	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Noumay	Outhaaphay	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Boualy	Phompheng	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Vandala	Kangla	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Syalichanh	Souvannachack	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota .....	.....
Thone	Champa	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Boualay	Inthavong	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Khamlay	Thammasiv	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Deth	Manivang	Bloomington	Minnesota .....	.....
Matt	Souvannasith	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota .....	.....
Vieny	Rittirat	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota .....	.....
Xayasack	Ratsamy	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55408

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Sam	Limsithy	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55408
Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Xe	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Khue	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Koua	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Mayky	Lypalao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Anouvong	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Maytioua	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Ben	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Maysy	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Tong	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55430
Lykerpkery	Gasere	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55424
Yee	Khang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Rick	Yang	Coon Rapid	Minnesota	55448
Maysia	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Yang	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Mayshoua	Ly	Oakdale	Minnesota	55128
Maitria	Ly	Lake Elmo	Minnesota	55042
Tommy	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55102
Chue	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Mai	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Sally	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Tang Xiong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Souk	Savanh			
Chou	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	
Chong Yee	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Doua Lor	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Steven	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Bao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Kao	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55459
Chia T	Xiong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55430
Jesse	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Leng	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Pao	Her	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Lee	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Houa	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Kia	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Mai	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Va Lor	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Sue	Xiong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Mai	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Dara	Xiong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55445
Mai Thao	Yang	Oakdale	Minnesota	55128
Lee L.	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Kaying	Yang	Inver Grove Heights	Minnesota	55077
Toua	Xiong	Oakdale	Minnesota	55118
Rob	Carwright	Osseo	Minnesota	55369
la	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Dzeu	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Guillaume	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Nelly	Lauj	Roseville	Minnesota	55113
Ka	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chris	Cha	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55445
Paul	Xiong	Hilltop	Minnesota	55421
Khue	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Nao Thai	Yang	Oakdale	Minnesota	55128
Khue	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Cyndy	Hang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Long	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Nao Yeng	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Andrew	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Yang	Ly	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Tina	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55430
Sher	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55408

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Rook	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Houa	Vang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55430
Kao	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Ma	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Yer	Lee	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Khoo	Xiong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Minne	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Houa	Yang	St. Cloud	Minnesota	56303
Kathy	Vang	St. Cloud	Minnesota	56303
Wa Thai	Yang	Coon Rapids	Minnesota	55433
Shoua	Xiong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Maxwell	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Xiong	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Lee	Vang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Toua	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Youa	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Lee	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Bo	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Touma	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Dara	Vang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Zhua	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Thao Pao	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Jenny	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Pai	Xiong	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Phia	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Chianeng	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Fue	Yang	Coon Rapids	Minnesota	55433
Koua	Yang	Coon Rapids	Minnesota	55433
Ker	Yang	Coon Rapids	Minnesota	55433
Chawa	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Mai	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Chia Neng	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Chee	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Se	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Bee L.	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Ka	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Christopher	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Deng	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chong	Yang	Walnut Grove	Minnesota	55106
Xiong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Seng	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Peter	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Shong	Yang	Lonsdale	Minnesota	55096
Chong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Teng	Yang	Inver Grove	Minnesota	55076
Kou	Yang	Inver Grove	Minnesota	55076
Phonh	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Por	Lee	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Pheng	Vang	Columbia Heights	Minnesota	55421
Ya	Yang	Robbinsdale	Minnesota	55422
Phoua	Yang	Robbinsdale	Minnesota	55422
Toby	Yang	Columbia Heights	Minnesota	55421
Tou	Yang	Columbia Heights	Minnesota	55421
Kong	Yang	Columbia Heights	Minnesota	55421
Judy	Hang	Columbia Heights	Minnesota	55421
Kevin	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Paul	Thao	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Vang	Yang	Milwaukee	Wisconsin	53215
Xiong	Lee	Milwaukee	Wisconsin	53215
Xiong	Houa	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Sam	Xiong	Burnsville	Minnesota	55337
Por	Vang	Detroit	Michigan	48205
Xhonching	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Toua	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Doua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Paul	Yang	Columbia Heights	Minnesota	55421
Wesley	Vue	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55405
Chuseng	Vue	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55445
David K.	Vue	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Her	Vue	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
David D.	Vue	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Vang X.	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Carrie	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55430
Bao	Yang	Columbia Heights	Minnesota	55421
Yia	LeePalao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
MayKa	LeePalao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
ChongTong	LeePalao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Chomchanh	Soudaly	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota .....	.....
Kham Phal	Soudaly	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota .....	.....
Khamphouang	Phetharath	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota .....	.....
Rick	Vongkaysone	Plymouth	Minnesota .....	.....
Niphunh	Vongkaysone	Elk River	Minnesota .....	.....
Moun	Vongkaysone	Plymouth	Minnesota .....	.....
Malay	Muor	Elk River	Minnesota .....	.....
Vienortham	Vongkaysone	Plymouth	Minnesota .....	.....
Naly	Vongkaysone	Plymouth	Minnesota .....	.....
Home	Phonekongxa	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Rithavong	Phouthavongxay	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Vanna	Sysenkhan	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Leus	Phetuore	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Khampheth	Phothilath	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Saeng	Phetsamone	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Soukha	Jack	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Soumanna	Keshamon	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Vilayvanh	Chayananh	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota .....	.....
Sboun	Phangluamenaly	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Chanthay	Syengchanh	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Chomsy	Kouanchav	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Daravanh	Sihanathorath	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Tou	Thongsi	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Yam	Pommachan	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Kina	Phomvongsa	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Xa	Phomvongsa	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Kai	Phonxiengsa	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Lay	Kounlabout	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Sou	Soukhampanx	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Sy	Sysomvong	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Chanhom	Sinouthasy	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota .....	.....
James K.	Photisanh	Burnsville	Minnesota .....	.....
Molly	Photisanh	Burnsville	Minnesota .....	.....
Sika	Phomvongsa	Minneapolis	Minnesota .....	.....
Pany	Romanson	Apple Valley	Minnesota	55124
Rich	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Inpanh	Thammavongsa	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55413
Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Fong	Lor	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Daniel	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Michanh	Suongxay	Savage	Minnesota	55378
Dany	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55430
Ong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chue	Vang .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Xeng	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Jerry	Xiong .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Paul	Chang .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Kong	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Molly	Yang .....	.....	.....	.....
Maikao	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Pakou	Vang .....	.....	.....	.....

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Tracy	Pederson .....	.....	.....	.....
Jenny	Chounlamontry .....	.....	.....	.....
Lee	Vue	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Wa Chee Meng	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Mao	Thao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Nhia Xou	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Lucy	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Tong	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Ntsuab Pai	Kong .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Vilky	Soung .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Xeng	Kong .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Xao	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Lor	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Teng	Xiong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Chao	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Adam	Yang	Roseville	Minnesota	55113
Bouachao	Yang	Hudson	Wisconsin	54016
Nou	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Yia	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Chanh Kevin	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Tong Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Thao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Tong	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Houston	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55075
Mai	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Nao Ko	Yang .....	.....	Minnesota .....	.....
Chao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Xee	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Choua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Meng	Vang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Jimmy	Xiong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Ker	Thor	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Koob	Her	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Bao	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Dao	Her	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Yeem	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Tsueyee	Her	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Sam	Yang	Anoka	Minnesota	55303
Lee	Chang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Yer	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Diana	Lor	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55407
Long	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Linda	Vang	North Branch	Minnesota	55056
Ong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Dao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
CherTham	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Moua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Syher	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Va	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Blia	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Thomas	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
June	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Fong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Mai	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Choua	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55109
Bong	Xiong	Maplewood	Minnesota	55109
Chong	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119
Cho	Lee	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119
Kong	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119
Youa	Vang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119
Xue	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119
Phoua	Ly	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Luke	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55108
Houa	Vue	St. Paul	Minnesota	55108
Pheng	Yang	Roseville	Minnesota	55113
Kaoyingly	Yang	Roseville	Minnesota	55113
Theresa	Thao-Yang	Roseville	Minnesota	55113
Pa	Yang	Roseville	Minnesota	55113
Sua	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
William	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Joua	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Kue	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
May	Chang-Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Ai	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55429
Bee	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55412
Blia	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Cha	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Chai Neng	Yang	Oakdale	Minnesota	55128
Cher	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55071
Cher Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Cher Thai	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Chia	Yang	Rosemound	Minnesota	55068
Chia Xa	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chong Cher	Yang	Blaine	Minnesota	55066
Chong Koua	Yang	Lake Elmo	Minnesota	55042
Yong Seng	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Chong Yee	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chue Kao	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55429
Chue Vang	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Nao Kao	Yang	Oakdale	Minnesota	55128
Ger	Yang	Cottage Grove	Minnesota	55016
Ger	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Hue	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Thomas	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55113

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Jer	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55407
Nraj Lis	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55107
Kou	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55102
Lee	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55408
Neng Vang	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Neng Vang	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Lor	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Moua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Nhia Chong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Nhia Pao	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55408
Nhia Xou	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Chong Yee	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Ong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Pa Ge	Yang	Taylors Fall	Minnesota	55084
Pa Chao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Pao Ge	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Shong Leng	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55118
Nkias Suab	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Thao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Thao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Tong	Yang	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Tong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Tong Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Tong See	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55407
Thaj Yeeb	Yang	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Tria	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Txam	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Wa Khue	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55407
Wa Lee	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Wa Tou	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Wa Chor	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Xai Shoua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106


First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Xia Shoua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Xia Ying	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55413
Xia Ying	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Yee	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Ying	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Youa Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Za Dang	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chong Neng	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Doua	Yang	White Bear Lake	Minnesota	55110
Niam Toj Pov	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Pao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Niam Txhij Kaus	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Niam Tooj Xeeb	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Nraj Lis	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55107
Thai	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Mok	Khounviseth	Eagan	Minnesota	55122
Mek	Luangsaysana	Apple Valley	Minnesota	55124
Noi	Phothisanh	St. Michael	Minnesota	55376
Blacky	Phothisanh	Shakopee	Minnesota	55379
Jake	Phothisanh	Shakopee	Minnesota	55379
Rathaporn	Manikong	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Somsack	Chetana	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Lair	Sayarath	Shakopee	Minnesota	55379
Jack	Emphanavong	Eagan	Minnesota	55122
Deek	Saengsouvichanh	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Judy	Saengsouvichanh	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Pho	Souvannasane	Lakeville	Minnesota	55044
Chanpheng	Phongsavath	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
Kongme	Phongsavath	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55412
William	Inthisone	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Keo Oudone	Detvongsa	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Phongsavath	Dithyovong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Sisathone	Lithyouvong	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Rathaporn	Manikhong	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Vatsana	Inthisone	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Pnanomporn	Daoheuang	Coon Rapids	Minnesota	55433
Soubanh	Daoheuang	Coon Rapids	Minnesota	55433
Khamseung	Phauthavong	Eagan	Minnesota	55122
Chanhmaly	Phauthavong	Eagan	Minnesota	55122
Keopraseuth	Phauthavong	Eagan	Minnesota	55122
Keophoxay	Phauthavong	Eagan	Minnesota	55122
Chaleunxay	Keomany	Eagan	Minnesota	55122
Vikasouk	Phanthavong	Eagan	Minnesota	55122
Sitto	Phamthavong	Richfield	Minnesota	55123
Keosavanh	Phamthavong	Richfield	Minnesota	55123
Keomanivong	Phothirath	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota	55429
Sounthone	Ratrisavath	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Taimany	Supantavong	Farmington	Minnesota	55024
Vanh	Manikhong	Richfield	Minnesota	55423
Phetsamone	Bouphasavan	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	
Phio	Sivongsa	Minneapolis	Minnesota	
Damdy	Keodonamgdy	Minneapolis	Minnesota	
Thongmee	Changouthory	Minneapolis	Minnesota	
Noun	Phangluangmaly	Minneapolis	Minnesota	
Bounsonane	Inthisone	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55427
Kim	Inthisone	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55427
Nouphanh	Rattavong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55427
Boun Em	Rattavong	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55427
Kong	Thanosack	Apple Valley	Minnesota	55124
Shong	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Zoua	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55118
May	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Mee	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Lee	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Mai	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Chao	Thao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Yang	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Billy	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Paul	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Thao	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Lee	Thao	New Brighton	Minnesota	55112
Nhiatou	Vue	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55403
Mao	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55403
Thong	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
See	Thao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Lee	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Jer	Yang	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55407
Lor	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Wa	Khue	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55407
Wa Joe	Vu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Gaosay	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Dacey	Vu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Yang	Her	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
William	Vue	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55443
Xao Chia	Vue	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Neng W.	Thao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Bee	Lee	St. Paul	Minnesota	55119
Ger	Vue	St. Paul	Minnesota	55117
Xia Vu	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Neng	Vue	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Koua	Vue	Champlin	Minnesota	55316
Xue	Vue	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chufue	Vu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Samson	Vu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Nou	Vue	St. Paul	Minnesota	55104
Ka Ying	Vang .....	.....	Minnesota	55038

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Ong	Vang .....	.....	Minnesota	55038
Gao Sy	Vu .....	.....	Minnesota	55038
Ying	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Blong	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Yang	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Bay	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Teng	Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chukou-Chu-Yang	Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55016
Yee	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Shayipheng	Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Xay Chu Yang	Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
CherPao	Thao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Heu Lang ChuYang	Heu	Woodbury	Minnesota	55125
Lou Chu Yang	Heu	Woodbury	Minnesota	55125
Fua	Vaam	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Mang	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Sab	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Pao	Her	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Youa	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Fisher	Moua	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Yer	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chou	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Linus-See	Moua	Minneapolis	Minnesota	55411
Fuavaam ChuYang	Heu	Woodbury	Minnesota	55125
Ling	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Chaky	Xiong	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Monia X.	Moua	Brooklyn Park	Minnesota	55444
Chia Chang	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Mai	Vang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Kang	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
By	Moua	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Xing	Chu-Yang-Heu	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106

First Name	Last Name	City	State	Zip Code
Patrick	Her	Maplewood	Minnesota	55117
Wayne X.	Her	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
William	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Chai	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55106
Va	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota .....	.....
Boua Fue	Thao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Lucy Yang	Thao	St. Paul	Minnesota	55101
Tong Sao	Thao .....	.....	Minnesota	55305
Keota	Thao .....	.....	Minnesota	55305
Chay	Lo	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119
A	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119
Choi X Chao	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Sy Lo	Yang	St. Paul	Minnesota	55103
Joseph	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119
Marie	Yang	Maplewood	Minnesota	55119


 The Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship
 Washington State Representation
 Seattle, Washington 98108
April 15, 2003

The Honorable Phillip Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 House Ways & Means Committee
 233 Cannon House Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

We are a group of Laotian Americans from various ethnic backgrounds of Laos (Lao, Hmong, Khmu, U-Mien, Thaidam, Lue, etc.). We all came together to form the Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, whose ultimate purpose is to promote education, economic development, and social and political progress within the Laotian multi-ethnic communities both in the United States and Laos.

On behalf of our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, which has representation in various states of the United States, we have the honor of writing to urge you to move forward legislation to establish Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos. We are well aware that NTR with Laos has been strongly endorsed by Secretary of State Powell and U.S. Trade Representative Zoellick. As new Americans having roots in Laos, we would like to express our strong support of the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative in Southeast Asia and, more particularly, its extension of Normal Trade Relations with Laos.

Our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship is not unaware of human rights abuses, ethnic profiling, religious discrimination, etc. in Laos after the takeover by the communist Pathet Lao in 1975. Fearing for our life, along with our families, we fled the country—mostly by foot—across Laotian jungles to take the

road of exile. Dr. Yang Dao,⁽¹⁾ a Hmong educator and scholar and the current National Chair of this alliance in support of the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative, wrote several articles,⁽²⁾ published as early as 1980 in France and in the U.S., denouncing arbitrary arrests by the communist Pathet Lao authorities who had sent tens of thousand royal Lao cadres, technicians and intellectuals to the "political re-education camps",⁽³⁾ and condemning the communist Pathet Lao's violent repression against the Hmong population in Northeastern Laos. These efforts have contributed to the many but slow changes made by the current government of Laos.

However, twenty eight years have passed since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, and the world has profoundly changed. In 1991, democracy prevailed over Communism in the former U.S.S.R. In October 2002, China officially adopted a more liberal system leading toward capitalism. Under international political and economic pressures, Laos must follow this move. According to the Bush Administration and the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, Laos is showing signs of moving toward religious freedom, human rights and economic reforms. After 27 years of exile, Dr. Yang Dao was invited by the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to visit Laos in November 2002. He observed that the current Lao Government has adopted a multi-ethnic policy to consolidate national unity in Laos, and as a result, Hmong, Khmu and other Laotian ethnic minorities are actively participating in the government, filling regional and national leadership positions ranging from city mayor to provincial governor to government minister. Thus, for the first time in Laotian history, a Laotheung⁽⁴⁾ has become the Prime Minister of Laos and a Hmong woman acts as the Vice-President of the Laotian National Assembly.

In these new perspectives, our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship strongly believes that, if granted, the U.S. Normal Trade Relations (NTR) will have a catalytic effect on the rate of economic, social and political reforms in Laos.

a. **Economic Reform:**

The US NTR would contribute to creating crucial opportunities to increase employment in Laos by providing legal and institutional frameworks which would develop the private sector and encourage foreign investments to accelerate the economic reform in Laos. This will further strengthen anti-narcotic efforts by strengthening substitute crops and industries (coffee, tropical fruits, medicinal plants, etc.). The US NTR, indeed, would reduce duties to 2.4% and allow Laos to export agricultural products and other kinds of merchandise to U.S. markets. This transaction would benefit both the multi-ethnic population of Laos and the Laotian-American community.

b. **Social Reform:**

By establishing a constructive dialogue with Laotian authorities, the US NTR would contribute to promoting social welfare and to developing the education system in Laos. Standardizing education in Laos would create a strong foundation for social reform which respects human rights and defends social justice for all Laotian citizens of all ethnic backgrounds. The Lao, Hmong, Khmu, U-Mien, Thai-Dam, Lue, and other Laotian peoples would live in the same community of destiny: national consciousness.

c. **Political Reform:**

Through a mutual understanding and trust with the Laotian government, the US NTR would contribute to accelerating political reform by promoting civil rights and democratic liberties. Such political reform would contribute to strengthening national solidarity, assuring political stability in Laos and maintaining peace in Southeast Asia and the world over.

⁽¹⁾Yang Dao is a Hmong from Laos. He received his Ph.D. in social science at the Sorbonne, University of Paris, France, in 1972. From 1972 to 1974, he was a director in the Ministry of Planning of the Royal Lao Government. From April 1974 to May 1975, he was appointed by the King of Laos to the National Political Council of Coalition (Congress) of the Kingdom of Laos. He has authored and co-authored several books on Hmong history, culture and traditions. He is now a faculty member of the Asian Cultures and Literatures Department of the University of Minnesota.

⁽²⁾Gas Warfare: the Communist Solution to the Problems of the Minorities in Laos (in French) in *Les Temps Modernes*, Paris, France, 1980; Why Did the Hmong Leave Laos? (in English) in *Hmong in the West*, University of Minnesota, U.S.A. in 1982; and *Human Rights and Gas Warfare in Laos* (in English) in *Southeast Asia Review*, Geneva, Switzerland, 1984.

⁽³⁾The "political reeducation camps", established along the Laos-Vietnam border after the takeover Laos by the communist Pathet Lao in 1975, reportedly looked like the Soviet gulags.

⁽⁴⁾Laotheung is the largest ethnic minority which includes the Khmu group and represents 27 percent of the total population of Laos.

Our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship strongly supports the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative and its extension of Normal Trade Relations with Laos for these reasons above, as well as the following:

1. To Enhance U.S.A.-Laos Special Relations

Since Laos became an independent country in 1954, its diplomatic relations with the U.S.A. have never been interrupted in spite of political difficulties and ideological changes. By irony of fate, today this tiny country is still denied NTR status which has been granted to Vietnam and Cambodia which, paradoxically, broke ties with the United States during the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Therefore, our Multi-Laotian Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship feels that it is only fair that NTR treatment be also extended to Laos, whose human rights record is not worse than that of Cambodia, Vietnam or China. NTR status indeed will contribute to heal the wounds of the past, to strengthen U.S.A.-Laos friendship and to help the Laotian people from all ethnic backgrounds who still have parents, brothers, sisters and relatives both in Laos and in the United States of America to work together for the future.

2. U.S. Economic Expansion in Southeast Asia:

Laos is a landlocked and poor country with a population of 5.2 millions. However it possesses a significant amount of arable land (50% of which is still covered with dense forests), a variety of natural resources (iron, zinc, silver, gold, sapphire, etc.) and a huge reserve of hydroelectric resources which draws the attention of a number of potential suitors. Since 1987, Laos has become a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (A.S.E.A.N.), which includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. A.S.E.A.N. countries constitute a market of 500 million people. Laos' main exports include electricity, garments, wood and wood products, coffee, small handicrafts, hand-made textiles, and some agricultural and forest products. Its trading partners are mainly countries in the SE Asian sub-region, particularly Thailand and Vietnam.

In 1998, Laos's textile products were granted quota and duty free status by the European Union (EU). Since then, about 25% of its total garment exports are sold to EU countries, particularly France. China is moving forward with negotiations with Laos and other A.S.E.A.N. countries for a China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and Japan and Europe are also beginning to implement similar arrangements with A.S.E.A.N.

In this international trading context, it is in the interest of the United States to extend NTR status to Laos, which plays an increasing role in Southeast Asia and in the world, attested by its hosting in 2002 the first A.S.E.A.N.-EU trade meeting, in Vientiane, capital of Laos. With U.S. NTR and with its low labor and energy costs and tremendous amounts of arable land, Laos would be able to export to the United States processed tropical food, instant coffee, and other labor-intensive products such as shoes and leather items as well as some minerals. Furthermore, given its unique culture and ethnic diversity, Laos would sell its silk weavings, furniture and timber products, and Hmong traditional clothing to meet the needs of about 500,000 Laotian Americans of various ethnic backgrounds and more than one million Asian Americans from different cultures in the United States of America active in the U.S. market.

3. To Increase U.S. Political Presence in Southeast Asia:

Right in the middle of the Mekong River region, Laos has always been a crossroad of migrations and trade from China to Cambodia and from Thailand to Vietnam. Thus, for centuries, its geographic situation made this tiny country an avenue for transit of goods and ideas. Contemporary history demonstrated Laos' strategic importance during the Vietnam conflict.

In this context, Laos is called to play a more and more important role in Asia, due to its geographic situation and its various natural resources. "At any time, officials from China, Vietnam and Thailand are courting their Lao counterparts in the hope that their efforts will be rewarded with mining, hydropower and logging contracts, and convenient access to each other's markets" wrote Catherine McKinley, in a Dow Jones Newswire Column (February 4, 2003).

Therefore, extending the NTR status to Laos would greatly contribute to reinforcing the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. With the increasing threat of international terrorism, this presence is essential to maintaining peace and political stability in Asia.

In conclusion, on behalf of our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, we would like to express our gratitude to you and your Subcommittee for giving us the opportunity to explain the reasons for our support of extending

U.S. NTR to Laos. We strongly urge you to move forward legislation to establish Normal Trade Relations with Laos, which will greatly benefit our two countries and our two populations. For your high consideration, we are enclosing petitions signed by members of the Laotian American communities in support of this letter and granting NTR to Laos.

With great respect,

Charlie J. Chang, Ph.D.
Co-Chair
Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance
 Yang Dao, Ph.D.
Chair
Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance

**Petition of Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance
 for USA-Laos Friendship
 In support of the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative
 To extend Normal Trade Relations to Laos**


We, the undersigned, are Americans of Laotian descents (Lao, Hmong, Khmu, U-Mien, Lue, Thai-Dam) hereby express our full support of the Bush Administration Trade Initiative in Southeast Asia and its extension of Normal Trade Relations to Laos.

First Name	Last Name	City	State
Charlie	Chang	Seattle	Washington
May Xee	Ly	Seattle	Washington
Blong	Ly	Seattle	Washington
Neng	Lee	Seattle	Washington
Tong	Thao	Seattle	Washington
Bob	Lientakune	Seattle	Washington
Mee	Inthoulay	Seattle	Washington
Chann	Saenphimmachak	Seattle	Washington
Pep	Inthoulay	Seattle	Washington
Washer	Moua	Demoiné	Washington
Xai	Cha	Woodinville	Washington
Lucy	Thao	Woodinville	Washington
Toulu	Cha	Snoqualmie	Washington
Jer	Cha	Snoqualmie	Washington
Laotheng	Jasengnou	Carnation	Washington
Carol	Cha	Carnation	Washington
Blai/Prai	Xiong	Carnation	Washington
Judy	Cha	Carnation	Washington
Jason	Xiong	Kent	Washington

First Name	Last Name	City	State
Youa	Moua	Kent	Washington
Tony	Cha	Carnation	Washington
JoAnn	Lee	Carnation	Washington
Baothai	Cha-Thao	Redmond	Washington
Natalie	Thao	Redmond	Washington
Manda	Thao	Seattle	Washington
Yee	Cha	Redmond	Washington
Frances	Primero	Kent	Washington
Pa	Cha	Carnation	Washington
Chue	Chang	Renton	Washington
Mai	Thao	Bellevue	Washington
Leng	Lee	Bellevue	Washington
Kaying	Xiong	Snomomish	Washington
Tong	Xiong	Carnation	Washington
Ma	Thao	Carnation	Washington
Nicole	Cha	Carnation	Washington
Bialea	Lor	Bellevue	Washington
Neng Xiong	Thao	Bellevue	Washington
Blong	Cha	Carnation	Washington
Neng	Yang	Snohomish	Washington
Chadoua	Lor	Bellevue	Washington
Nengva	Cha	Bellevue	Washington
Youa Her	Lor	Bothel	Washington
Chue Meng	Cha	Bellevue	Washington
Mo	Cha	Bellevue	Washington
Pa	Yang	Bothel	Washington
Yia	Yang	Bellevue	Washington
Neng	Vang	Bellevue	Washington
la	Lao	Lynnwood	Washington
Soua	Vue	Lynnwood	Washington
Andy	Khamboon	Seattle	Washington
May	Chang	Seattle	Washington

First Name	Last Name	City	State
Vang	Xiong	Carnation	Washington
Jaylie	Xiong	Kirkland	Washington
Xiong	Lee	Kirkland	Washington
Mansak	Laotheng	Seattle	Washington
Chien	Vongdara	Auburn	Washington
Sou	Hang	Seattle	Washington
Vang	Ying	Des Moines	Washington
Vangva	Her	Des Moines	Washington
Nou	Xiong	Turkwa	Washington
Terry	Light	Seattle	Washington
Key	Hang	Seattle	Washington
Khouseach	Sack	Seattle	Washington
Vanh	Her	Seattle	Washington
Robert	Hang	Renton	Washington
Tong X.	Hang	Renton	Washington
Chertoua	Hang	Seatac	Washington
Inponp	Rasabout	Seattle	Washington
Kham	Praseuth	Seattle	Washington
Laovu	Jasengnou	Carnation	Washington
Laocheng	Jasengnou	Carnation	Washington
Chay Ya	Cha	Carnation	Washington
Tsu	Zeb	Kirkland	Washington
Eu	Lee	Everett	Washington
Dang	Moua	Seattle	Washington
Maiker	Thao	Everett	Washington
Leng	Hang	Seattle	Washington
Der	Xiong	Seattle	Washington
Chue	Hang	Seattle	Washington
Bounhom	Bounyarith	Seattle	Washington
Moune	Phoumiong	Kirkland	Washington
Thavone	Saysanasy	Kirkland	Washington
Xia	Thao	Kirkland	Washington

First Name	Last Name	City	State
Boualai	Khounuchi	Kirkland	Washington
Anan	Eaidrueng	Seattle	Washington
Orlando	Dollente	Kirkland	Washington
Quenyuen	Tran	Seattle	Washington
Bao Hang	Chang	Seattle	Washington
Boun	Hai	Seattle	Washington
Thai	Vang	Seattle	Washington
Kao	Vang	Seattle	Washington
Thao	Say Chang	Renton	Washington
Yohang	Xiong	Kirkland	Washington
Neng	Yang	Kirkland	Washington
Peng	Vang	Seattle	Washington
Teng	Thao	Seattle	Washington
Moua	Thao	Seattle	Washington
Chai	Thao	Seattle	Washington
lab	Yang	Seattle	Washington
Cha	Chasengnou	Bellevue	Washington
Khampoun	Vilayvanh	Bellevue	Washington


 The Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship
 Wisconsin State Representation
 Wausau, Wisconsin 55443
April 15, 2003

The Honorable Phillip Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 House Ways & Means Committee
 233 Cannon House Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

We are a group of Laotian Americans from various ethnic backgrounds of Laos (Lao, Hmong, Khmu, U-Mien, Thaidam, Lue, etc.). We all came together to form the Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, whose ultimate purpose is to promote education, economic development, and social and political progress within the Laotian multi-ethnic communities both in the United States and Laos.

On behalf of our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, which has representation in various states of the United States, we have the honor of writing to urge you to move forward legislation to establish Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos. We are well aware that NTR with Laos has been strongly endorsed by Secretary of State Powell and U.S. Trade Representative Zoellick. As new Americans having roots in Laos, we would like to express our strong support of the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative in Southeast Asia and, more particularly, its extension of Normal Trade Relations with Laos.

Our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship is not unaware of human rights abuses, ethnic profiling, religious discrimination, etc. in Laos after the takeover by the communist Pathet Lao in 1975. Fearing for our life, along with our families, we fled the country—mostly by foot—across Laotian jungles to take the road of exile. Dr. Yang Dao,⁽¹⁾ a Hmong educator and scholar and the current National Chair of this alliance in support of the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative, wrote several articles,⁽²⁾ published as early as 1980 in France and in the U.S., denouncing arbitrary arrests by the communist Pathet Lao authorities who had sent tens of thousand royal Lao cadres, technicians and intellectuals to the “political re-education camps”,⁽³⁾ and condemning the communist Pathet Lao's violent repression against the Hmong population in Northeastern Laos. These efforts have contributed to the many but slow changes made by the current government of Laos.

However, twenty eight years have passed since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, and the world has profoundly changed. In 1991, democracy prevailed over Communism in the former U.S.S.R. In October 2002, China officially adopted a more liberal system leading toward capitalism. Under international political and economic pressures, Laos must follow this move. According to the Bush Administration and the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, Laos is showing signs of moving toward religious freedom, human rights and economic reforms. After 27 years of exile, Dr. Yang Dao was invited by the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to visit Laos in November 2002. He observed that the current Lao Government has adopted a multi-ethnic policy to consolidate national unity in Laos, and as a result, Hmong, Khmu and other Laotian ethnic minorities are actively participating in the government, filling regional and national leadership positions ranging from city mayor to provincial governor to government minister. Thus, for the first time in Laotian history, a Laotheung⁽⁴⁾ has become the Prime Minister of Laos and a Hmong woman acts as the Vice-President of the Laotian National Assembly.

In these new perspectives, our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship strongly believes that, if granted, the U.S. Normal Trade Relations (NTR) will have a catalytic effect on the rate of economic, social and political reforms in Laos.

a. **Economic Reform:**

The US NTR would contribute to creating crucial opportunities to increase employment in Laos by providing legal and institutional frameworks which would develop the private sector and encourage foreign investments to accelerate the economic reform in Laos. This will further strengthen anti-narcotic efforts by strengthening substitute crops and industries (coffee, tropical fruits, medicinal plants, etc.). The US NTR, indeed, would reduce duties to 2.4% and allow Laos to export agricultural products and other kinds of merchandise to U.S. markets. This transaction would benefit both the multi-ethnic population of Laos and the Laotian-American community.

b. **Social Reform:**

By establishing a constructive dialogue with Laotian authorities, the US NTR would contribute to promoting social welfare and to developing the education system in Laos. Standardizing education in Laos would create a strong foundation for social reform which respects human rights and defends social justice for all Laotian citizens of all ethnic backgrounds. The Lao, Hmong, Khmu, U-Mien, Thai-Dam, Lue, and other Laotian peoples would live in the same community of destiny: national consciousness.

c. **Political Reform:**

Through a mutual understanding and trust with the Laotian government, the US NTR would contribute to accelerating political reform by promoting civil rights and democratic liberties. Such political reform would contribute to

⁽¹⁾Yang Dao is a Hmong from Laos. He received his Ph.D. in social science at the Sorbonne, University of Paris, France, in 1972. From 1972 to 1974, he was a director in the Ministry of Planning of the Royal Lao Government. From April 1974 to May 1975, he was appointed by the King of Laos to the National Political Council of Coalition (Congress) of the Kingdom of Laos. He has authored and co-authored several books on Hmong history, culture and traditions. He is now a faculty member of the Asian Cultures and Literatures Department of the University of Minnesota.

⁽²⁾Gas Warfare: the Communist Solution to the Problems of the Minorities in Laos (in French) in *Les Temps Modernes*, Paris, France, 1980; Why Did the Hmong Leave Laos? (in English) in *Hmong in the West*, University of Minnesota, U.S.A. in 1982; and *Human Rights and Gas Warfare in Laos* (in English) in *Southeast Asia Review*, Geneva, Switzerland, 1984.

⁽³⁾The “political reeducation camps”, established along the Laos-Vietnam border after the takeover Laos by the communist Pathet Lao in 1975, reportedly looked like the Soviet gulags.

⁽⁴⁾Laotheung is the largest ethnic minority which includes the Khmu group and represents 27 percent of the total population of Laos.

strengthening national solidarity, assuring political stability in Laos and maintaining peace in Southeast Asia and the world over.

Our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship strongly supports the Bush Administration's Trade Initiative and its extension of Normal Trade Relations with Laos for these reasons above, as well as the following:

1. To Enhance U.S.A.-Laos Special Relations

Since Laos became an independent country in 1954, its diplomatic relations with the U.S.A. have never been interrupted in spite of political difficulties and ideological changes. By irony of fate, today this tiny country is still denied NTR status which has been granted to Vietnam and Cambodia which, paradoxically, broke ties with the United States during the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Therefore, our Multi-Laotian Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship feels that it is only fair that NTR treatment be also extended to Laos, whose human rights record is not worse than that of Cambodia, Vietnam or China. NTR status indeed will contribute to heal the wounds of the past, to strengthen U.S.A.-Laos friendship and to help the Laotian people from all ethnic backgrounds who still have parents, brothers, sisters and relatives both in Laos and in the United States of America to work together for the future.

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Laos is a landlocked and poor country with a population of 5.2 millions. However it possesses a significant amount of arable land (50% of which is still covered with dense forests), a variety of natural resources (iron, zinc, silver, gold, sapphire, etc.) and a huge reserve of hydroelectric resources which draws the attention of a number of potential suitors. Since 1987, Laos has become a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (A.S.E.A.N.), which includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. A.S.E.A.N. countries constitute a market of 500 million people. Laos' main exports include electricity, garments, wood and wood products, coffee, small handicrafts, hand-made textiles, and some agricultural and forest products. Its trading partners are mainly countries in the SE Asian sub-region, particularly Thailand and Vietnam.

In 1998, Laos's textile products were granted quota and duty free status by the European Union (EU). Since then, about 25% of its total garment exports are sold to EU countries, particularly France. China is moving forward with negotiations with Laos and other A.S.E.A.N. countries for a China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and Japan and Europe are also beginning to implement similar arrangements with A.S.E.A.N.

In this international trading context, it is in the interest of the United States to extend NTR status to Laos, which plays an increasing role in Southeast Asia and in the world, attested by its hosting in 2002 the first A.S.E.A.N.-EU trade meeting, in Vientiane, capital of Laos. With U.S. NTR and with its low labor and energy costs and tremendous amounts of arable land, Laos would be able to export to the United States processed tropical food, instant coffee, and other labor-intensive products such as shoes and leather items as well as some minerals. Furthermore, given its unique culture and ethnic diversity, Laos would sell its silk weavings, furniture and timber products, and Hmong traditional clothing to meet the needs of about 500,000 Laotian Americans of various ethnic backgrounds and more than one million Asian Americans from different cultures in the United States of America active in the U.S. market.

3. To Increase U.S. Political Presence in Southeast Asia:

Right in the middle of the Mekong River region, Laos has always been a crossroad of migrations and trade from China to Cambodia and from Thailand to Vietnam. Thus, for centuries, its geographic situation made this tiny country an avenue for transit of goods and ideas. Contemporary history demonstrated Laos' strategic importance during the Vietnam conflict.

In this context, Laos is called to play a more and more important role in Asia, due to its geographic situation and its various natural resources. "At any time, officials from China, Vietnam and Thailand are courting their Lao counterparts in the hope that their efforts will be rewarded with mining, hydropower and logging contracts, and convenient access to each other's markets" wrote Catherine McKinley, in a Dow Jones Newswire Column (February 4, 2003).

Therefore, extending the NTR status to Laos would greatly contribute to reinforcing the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. With the increasing threat of international terrorism, this presence is essential to maintaining peace and political stability in Asia.

In conclusion, on behalf of our Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U.S.A.-Laos Friendship, we would like to express our gratitude to you and your Subcommittee for giving us the opportunity to explain the reasons for our support of extending U.S. NTR to Laos. We strongly urge you to move forward legislation to establish Normal Trade Relations with Laos, which will greatly benefit our two countries and our two populations. For your high consideration, we are enclosing petitions signed by members of the Laotian American communities in support of this letter and granting NTR to Laos.

With great respect,

Mr. San Souvannasoth
Co-Chair
Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance
 Yang Dao, Ph.D.
Chair
Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance

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First Name	Last Name	City	State
Sou	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Soua	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Jer X.	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Wa Thao	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Wang Chou	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Kou	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Pao	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
David	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chang Say	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Xong	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Shoua	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Emily	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Youa V.	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Nou	Xiong	Wausau	Wisconsin
Wang Sao	Yang	Weston	Wisconsin
Plia K.	Yang	Weston	Wisconsin
Xay T.	Yang	Germantown	Wisconsin
Cher	Yang	Germantown	Wisconsin

First Name	Last Name	City	State
Francois	Yang	Rockford	Wisconsin
Tracey	Yang	Rockford	Wisconsin
Chu Lao	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chi V.	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Michel	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Jessica	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Joshua	Hes	Wausau	Wisconsin
Leeann	Hes	Wausau	Wisconsin
Ka Phout	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
May	Xiong	Wausau	Wisconsin
Xiong	Chang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Ngee	Xiong	Wausau	Wisconsin
Ka Ying	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Sua T.	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Peter	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Zer	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Tong	Yang	Weston	Wisconsin
Youa	Yang	Weston	Wisconsin
Choua	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chao	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Luke	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chasing	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Youa	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Carl	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Xao	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Neng	Xiong	Schofield	Wisconsin
Chue Lee	Khang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chia Yang	Khang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Tou Ya	Khang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Wang Lue	Lee	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chue	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chou Y.	Lee	Wausau	Wisconsin

First Name	Last Name	City	State
Neng	Yang	Schofield	Wisconsin
Touhoua	Yang	Schofield	Wisconsin
Maikou	Yang	Schofield	Wisconsin
Kia S.	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Ker L.	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Shoua	Thao	Wausau	Wisconsin
Da Lee	Lor	Wausau	Wisconsin
Tai	Lor	Wausau	Wisconsin
Yong Lee	Lor .....	.....	Wisconsin
Doua	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Thong	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Tong	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Cher Bee	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chiasu	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Sue	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Wa Neng	Yang	Schofield	Wisconsin
Ong	Yang	Schofield	Wisconsin
Wa Thao	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Shoua	Lor	Wausau	Wisconsin
Neng	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Tou	Xiong	Wausau	Wisconsin
Fu	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Ya	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Chue	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Lue	Lee	Wausau	Wisconsin
Mee	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Ber	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Jordan	Lee	Wausau	Wisconsin
Frank	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Tracie	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Blong	Yang	Rothschild	Wisconsin
Tong	Yang	Rothschild	Wisconsin

First Name	Last Name	City	State
Beu	Yang	Wausau	Wisconsin
Jordan	Lee	Wausau	Wisconsin

Morrisville, North Carolina 27560

The Honorable Chairman Williams Thomas
 and Congressional members of the Ways and Means Committee
 2208 Rayburn HOB
 Washington, D.C. 20515-0522

Dear Chairman Thomas,

I am writing this letter to give my CONDITIONAL support for NTR to Laos.

I am a Hmong-American who was born in the United States. This issue is an issue that hits home for many Hmong-Americans. As you well know, Hmong-Americans have a stake in regards to Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to Laos due to family ties in Laos. As young Hmong-American, I understand that NTR will provide an avenue for change both social and economic in Laos. Laos should not be left in isolation and we should engage to promote change.

What concerns me is that currently, the majority of the population that resides in Laos lives in poverty. With NTR, the citizens of Laos will be open to exploitation such as sweat shops and child labor.

We must critically and strategically analyze that Southeast Asia as a whole will help us (the United States) in the future as China grows into a trading superpower. We will need to have an influence in that region of the world. That is why, it is imperative that our agreement (NTR) be tailored to assist a developing Laos. We must also analyze the current social and economic infrastructure of Laos before we grant NTR. NTR should bring economic prosperity to Laos but it must also bring our ideologies such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and democracy.

I understand that our government has good intention to improve the standard of living of the Lao people by wanting to grant NTR to Laos. With NTR, we expect that it will be a tool to help change things in Laos, especially as a catalyst for economic change within Laos and that it will promote trade with the US, and vice versa. At the same time, the we hope that NTR will help “promote other changes”, including “stronger rule of law: commercial, environmental, treatment of workers, even human rights.” Ultimately, from the our point of view, NTR should bring about “changes” in Laos, leading to “greater economic and political freedoms in Laos, stronger rule of law and a better life for those involved in trade destined for the U.S. market or doing business with Americans.”

While in theory, our intention is noble and good but in reality, NTR alone will not be able to deliver the intended ideal for Laos. A couple of problems in Laos are the direct result of some fundamental issues: (1) the non-conducive ideological policies of the current Phak Pasason Lao (Lao People’s Revolutionary Party). Phak Pasason Laos is the “central nucleus” of Laos, having the ultimate power; (2) the Vietnamese domination of Laos.

Hence, to have an impact in Laos, as we expect, the NTR need to be granted as a “Package” contained measures and CONDITIONS that are workable, measurable and effective to: (1) lessen the grip of Vietnam on Laos and (2) with incentives for ideological fundamental changes in Laos to pave the way for a truly democratic government.

Some of the measures and conditions include:

1. Ideological Change is the first pre-requisite for real change in Laos.

The current Lao Government, who has been in power since 1975, is a one Party, authoritarian system that has the ultimate power above the law of the land as outlined clearly in Article 3 of the 1991 Lao Constitution which states that “The rights of the multi-ethnic people to be the masters of the country are exercised and ensured through the functioning of the political system with the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party as its leading nucleus.” A problem in Laos is the direct result of the divisive, non-reconciliatory, outdated and on-conducive ideological policies of the current Phak Pasason Lao (Lao People’s Revolutionary Party), being the “central nucleus” of Laos—the seat of power. The resultant effect of the Phak Pasason Lao is the continuation of economic manage-

ment, political instability, Human Right violation, and religious persecutions. So, how can we make NTR effective in order to change the current ideology of Laos?

2. Vietnam has substantial influence on the current Lao Government: Ambassador Hartwick can confirm that before any Lao Government Official or Citizen takes a post within the government. They are sent to Vietnam for training before accepting the position. I learned of this from Ambassador Hartwick on his last trip to Washington, D.C. where there was a briefing held in the Rayburn Building in the Gold Room. From history, we can understand why there is a relationship between the Lao and Vietnamese Governments. As an American, I value individualism as well as coalitions. I feel that Laos should be an individual unto its own versus being an understudy to another country. The Committee needs no reminder that the current Lao People's Revolutionary Party (PPRP) and many of its ruling elite are the offspring of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) with the aim to create an Indochinese Federation as propagated by the ICP. The PPRP had violated the 1962 Geneva Accord, and the 1973 Vientiane Agreement, and took over Laos in 1975. Since 1975, Laos has been influenced by the Vietnamese government and that the economic and political instability in Laos are the direct result of the Lao Communist Government policies. As long as Vietnam continues to influence Laos and the current regime in Vientiane remains unchanged, there will be Human rights violation, oppression, corruption and tyranny by the ruling elite. I hope that the conditions in NTR will promote Laos to change? Otherwise, NTR will not be able to deliver our promise to the people of Laos without fundamental change in Laos and this fundamental change is no more or less as it required in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Without the fundamental changes in Laos, the benefits of NTR will only be realized for the elite/upper-class, while NTR will be a dream for the impoverished. Such as the saying, "4% of the worlds population owns 80% of the worlds wealth." This will be the case in Laos, if NTR is not coupled with conditions.

In conclusion, if we want "changes" in Laos and to help the common people of Laos, NTR can only work if it contains a "Total Package" to pave the way for Laos to be a truly democratic and independent nation. Without these fundamental changes, it will be a band-aid solution. The Lao people, who have sacrifice so much for the US during the Vietnam War, deserve to have the same opportunity as the Iraqi people to create their future by their own free-willing spirit.

Thank you for your time,

Pao Lo
Hmong-American

Louisiana Regional Lao Republicans
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70810

Honorable Mr. Philip M. Crane
Chairman Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
United States Congress

Dear Congressman Crane

On behalf of the Louisiana Regional Lao Republicans we praise you for your effort protecting DEMOCRACY throughout the world.

Many of our familymembers are still living under the oppression of the communist government of LAOS. We urge you to OPPOSE any additional trade with the communist of LAOS. Allow trade to resume ONLY when the people of Lao achive DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, RESPECT for human rights and the rule of law.

Respectfully

Somdy Rasy

Falls Church, Virginia 22041

To
 Honorable E. Grassley, Chairman, Committee of Finance, United States Senate
 Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means, House
 of Representatives
 E-mail hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
 Fax (202) 225 2610

Honorable,

As an American Citizen, I wholeheartedly support the joint proposal of Honorable Colin L. Powell, State Secretary and Honorable Robert B. Zoellick, US Trade Representative in granting the Permanent Normal Trade Relations to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Lao PDR is the only country in the area that does not have such facility yet, even though its Politico-Social situations are far better than others.

I should appreciate if you could take the said proposal and my noble wish in consideration and render to Laos the fairness and real touch of the US generosity toward a country that maintains good relations and cooperations with the United States.

Once again I thank you very much for your kind cooperation

Sincerely yours,

Kouy Luangphinit

—
 New York, New York 10012
April 21, 2003

Hearing Clerk
 Ways and Means Committee
 US House of Representatives

Dear Congressional Representatives on the House Ways and Means Committee:

I strongly urge you to pass NTR for Lao PDR. I worked in Vietnam for four years, two of them for the US Commercial Service in Hanoi (1997–1999), and saw first hand the mutual benefits normalized trade relations have for countries. I have also traveled in Laos and understand that while very different economies, the fundamental impact of a trade agreement with the United States would be similar.

Benefits from NTR are more than just monetary for a country like Vietnam or Laos. The process of negotiation and restructuring to comply with any trade agreement with the U.S. entails tough choices on the part of the leaders of the country, and necessitates a strong commitment to open markets, accountability, and strengthening of the legal system. While Laos may not be an important trading partner for the U.S. financially, I firmly believe that NTR will bring stability and growth to the region, which on aggregate is vitally important to America's international trade with Asia and general security.

Please take this opportunity to pass NTR for Laos.

Sincerely,

Tara McAuliff

—

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Mekong Law Group
 Bangkok 10110, Thailand
April 10, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways & Means
 United States House of Representatives

**COMMENTS SUBMITTED IN RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR WRITTEN
 COMMENTS ON NORMAL TRADE RELATIONS FOR LAOS**

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF NTR FOR LAO P.D.R.

My name is David Doran. I have worked as a legal adviser in Cambodia, Laos and Thailand for over 10 years. I started out my career in this region with Baker & McKenzie's Bangkok office in 1992. From there, I joined Dirksen Flipse Doran & Le as a founding partner in 1994. I started our Phnom Penh office in January 1995. I moved to Thailand two months ago to establish our Bangkok office.

I received my *Juris Doctor* degree from the University of Washington School of Law, where I was on Law Review. I received a post graduate degree in law and economics from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, with highest marks. While in Geneva, I also clerked at the GATT (now WTO). I am a member of the California and Washington State Bar Associations.

I am writing to ask that the United States Congress grant Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to the Lao P.D.R ("Laos").

Background to DFDL

The core business of my firm is to provide commercial and corporate legal services to foreign investors and lenders operating in Laos and Cambodia. We are the leading firm in both countries. Most of our clients are international companies, some being major U.S. companies. We are well known and respected by the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia and Laos, and have represented the U.S. Government on a number of significant matters in Cambodia. We currently have 11 lawyers in the three countries.

I do NOT provide my comments on behalf of the Lao Government, or any Lao government institution, or any clients. In fact, during the course of our representation of clients in Laos, we have occasionally been required to take positions on behalf of our clients against government action or policies in both countries.

Nonetheless, we strongly support NTR for Laos.

My Cambodia Experience

My experience in Cambodia shows that NTR can have very significant and wide reaching benefits. Not only is NTR an important stimulus by itself, it also opens the door to many other significant benefits.

Cambodia received NTR from the U.S. on September 25, 1996. NTR opened the door for the garment sector to create thousands of jobs for poor Cambodians, thereby earning the country important foreign exchange and stimulating economic growth in other sectors. It also opened the door for the grant of GSP and was the first step in Cambodia's rapid advance toward accession to the WTO.

In short, NTR has been a key catalyst in propelling Cambodia into the community of trading nations. I believe it can also have this positive effect in Laos.

The Committee is most certainly already aware of the direct benefits that NTR would have in Laos and I will not go into these in detail in these Comments.

I would like to highlight for the Committee the importance of NTR for Laos in relation to GSP. GSP is very significant for countries like Laos and Cambodia because such countries can benefit substantially from the graduation of Thailand and other ASEAN countries from GSP. Cambodia and Thailand already have a well developed plan to relocate "GSP" factories from Thailand to Cambodia, further generating growth and jobs for Cambodia's poor. Laos shares a long, open border with Thailand, and would also benefit considerably from such GSP relocation factories. However, without NTR, there will be no GSP.

Why Does Laos Deserve NTR?

To answer this key question, I would again like to draw on my experience in Cambodia. I supported NTR for Cambodia in 1996 and participated in a committee aimed at encouraging the Cambodian government to take the steps necessary to ob-

tain NTR. We strongly believe that if Cambodia deserved NTR in 1996, (which it did), Laos certainly deserves NTR now.

1. NTR is good for democracy. NTR has assisted to improve economic growth in Cambodia such that a small new middle class is being created. And as we have seen elsewhere in Asia, the creation of such a middle class is key to democracy. I note the strong showing of the opposition party in Cambodia's communal elections earlier this year.
I also would point out that while Cambodia held elections in 1993, the government in charge at the time NTR was granted was not the elected government. NTR was, nonetheless granted.
2. The Legal System in Laos is ahead of Cambodia. The Laos Legal system is more advanced in many ways than Cambodia's was at the time that NTR was granted. Even to this day, Cambodia lacks key laws for commercial and human rights. In Cambodia, there is still no law of civil procedure, no company law, no bankruptcy law, no mining law, no domestic arbitration law and no secured transaction law. A modern land law was only passed recently. All of these laws have existed in Laos for quite some time. Cambodia had not implemented the N.Y. Convention on the Enforcement of Arbitral Awards when it was granted NTR, while Laos has acceded to the Convention.

In short, I believe there is no longer any reason that Laos should be subject to more stringent conditions for NTR than conditions imposed on Cambodia when it was granted NTR. It is time for the U.S. to assist the people of Laos by opening up its market equally to Lao goods.

For these reasons, we again ask that the U.S. Congress approve NTR for Laos.

I thank the Committee and Sub-Committee for considering my comments.
Sincerely yours,

David Doran
Director, Mekong Region

Copy provided to:
Mr. Douglas A. Hartwick, U.S. Ambassador to Lao P.D.R.
Honorable Jon Huntsman, Deputy Director, USTR
Ms. Francis Zwenig, US-ASEAN Business Counsel

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED BY WITNESS

I am writing as a witness on behalf of
(1) Dirksen Flipse Doran & Le (Laos) Co. Ltd
(2) Dirksen Flipse Doran & Le (Cambodia) Co. Ltd.
(3) Mekong Law Group—Cambodia & Thailand

Mennonite Central Committee
Akron, Pennsylvania 17501
April 16, 2003

Attn: Hearing Clerk
House Ways and Means
202-225-2610
Chairman Philip Crane
House Subcommittee on Trade
Attn: Hearing Clerk
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane,

I am writing on behalf of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to state our strong support for granting Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to the Lao PDR.

MCC is the relief, development and peace-building agency of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches and has maintained a presence in Laos since 1975. Now more than 25 years after the end of the Vietnam War, we believe that granting NTR status to Laos, a country with which the United States never broke diplomatic ties, is long overdue and an appropriate gesture of reconciliation.

Moreover, normal trade relations have the potential to contribute positively to efforts to overcome poverty in the country. Private sector trade and investment have a clear impact on the population with which we work. Since the mid-1980's, we have worked with an artisans' cooperative to improve quality and marketability of their

products. Some of these products are marketed in North America through an MCC-related program, Ten Thousand Villages. However, our ability to market these products is severely limited by the high tariffs imposed by the United States.

The U.S. government presently spends a sizeable amount of money in Laos to develop income alternatives to the production of opium. One component of the U.S. government's efforts in Laos is the promotion of silk production and weaving. The marketing of this craft is being restricted by lack of fair access to U.S. markets. Removing a major trade barrier would enhance that effort and give new income options to local craft producers at little or no added cost to the United States.

The bilateral trade agreement between Laos and the United States was signed in 1997. We encourage you to move implementing legislation through the Congress without delay.

Thank you for your attention to our views.

Sincerely,

Betsy Headrick McCrae
Director, East Asia Program

Movement for Democracy in Laos (MDL)
Burnsville, Minnesota 55337

The Honorable Congressman
Chaiman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
United States Congress

Dear Congressman:

The Movement for Democracy in Laos (MDL) calls on the United States of America Administration and the Congress to delay the granting of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status to the Lao Communist Government.

The Movement for Democracy in Laos is fighting for human rights, freedom, and democracy in Laos,

- applauds the US government's policies of engagement with the Lao Communist Government and many approaches of humanitarian aspects with regards to the Lao people. However, many fundamental issues relating to the interest of both countries, Laos and the USA remain pending since the dictatorial communist rule in Laos, instead of seeing the burden decreased.
- appeals to the US Administration, the Congress, the American public and the humanitarian organizations to sift thoroughly any practical steps for the benefit of both American and Lao people concerning the granting of the NTR to the Lao Communist Government. For, we consider that this topical issue should not be barred from all comprehensive and original problems.
- considers that the NTR will not be beneficial at all to the American and Lao people and, on the contrary, will profit only communist leaders. The NTR will further abuse human rights while aggravating rampant corruption, especially among the ruling leaders, and, to crown it all, will reinforce the power of oppression of the Party's communist dictatorship and worsen the dire poverty of the vast majority of the Lao people.
- states that, all things considered, our organization has at all times expressed our views. Our organization on various occasions has called on the Great Powers, different governments and parliaments involved in Laos affairs, and the United Nations representing the world community to put pressure on the Lao Government to respect its own constitution, and its international obligations and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unfortunately, however, in all aspects of the ruling authority of the Lao Administration of one-party dictatorship and the conditions of the Lao people's life, the situation of Laos is getting more and more deteriorated. The Lao people still live ever more impoverished, backward and ignorant, shut away and cloistered from the outside world due to the misinformation media system of the Lao Authority. Any economic benefits, if they ever existed, from the NTR status, would only further enhance and perpetuate the oppressive and prosecutorial regime of the Lao Communist totalitarian government.
- charges the Lao People Democratic Republic has a long tradition and dictatorial principle of deceptive and untruthful practices and, further, ceaselessly denies all of its acts of brutality, and its arrest and continued incarceration of the student leaders. Witnessed by the European parliamentary protesters and unmasked by the students participating in the demonstration of 1999 who were

able to escape Laos after the failed attempt, as well as, by the Amnesty International public statement of October 25, 2002, proof to grievous humanitarian infractions are substantiated. The disappearance of Michael Vang and his companion Houa Ly in Laos four years ago is another proof of insecure working conditions in Laos.

- believes that granting the NTR status in this inappropriate moment conveys a flawed message. The Lao PDR continues its arrogant and hardened stance, as evidenced by its having never flinched an ounce to the appeals, advices, and warnings of most of the countries giving assistance to Laos with respect to human rights, religious freedom, decent treatment of political prisoners and their unconditional release. Thus, granting NTR status inadvertently constitutes the wrong message to the multi-ethnic Lao people as rewards to the dictatorial government.
- believes, as the Movement for Democracy in Laos representing the Lao overseas voice, that there will be a time when NTR status will benefit the vast majority of the multi-ethnic Lao people. That beneficial opportunity will come when the Lao people can freely elect, without fear and or threat, their own legitimate representative form of government not one imposed upon them by a one dictatorial party-state government as they are currently forced to endure. The MDL reiterates its call for delaying the granting of NTR status until human rights violations are ceased and all of our petitions and request for an immediate and unconditional release of all political and religious prisoners held in various prisons or “re-education” camps through Laos are met.

The Movement for Democracy in Laos seizes this occasion to renew to the US government and Congress its highest consideration and its best wishes for their unshakable endeavors for their people’s safety.

For the President of the Movement for Democracy in Laos

Bounleuang Kataviravong
The Secretary General

National Retail Federation
Washington, D.C. 20004
April 21, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
VIA EMAIL: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov and
FAX: (202) 225-2610

Dear Chairman Crane:

In response to the Subcommittee’s request for comments on extending normal trade relations (NTR) to products from Laos, I would like to state for the record that the National Retail Federation fully supports such an extension.

The National Retail Federation (NRF) is the world’s largest retail trade association with membership that comprises all retail formats and channels of distribution including department, specialty, discount, catalog, Internet and independent stores. NRF members represent an industry that encompasses more than 1.4 million U.S. retail establishments, employs more than 23 million people—about 1 in 5 American workers—and registered 2002 sales of \$3.6 trillion. In its role as the retail industry’s umbrella group, NRF also represents 32 national and 50 state associations in the U.S. as well as 36 international associations representing retailers abroad.

While there is currently very little business conducted by NRF member companies in Laos, it is important to note that Laos is the only Southeast Asian country that is not afforded NTR status. Consequently, Laos faces the highest tariff rate of any country in the world. As a result, Laos’ exports to the United States have decreased dramatically, and US investment that once was in Laos has fled for Vietnam, China and Cambodia because of these countries’ NTR status with respect to the United States.

The Laotian Government has increasingly recognized the importance of integrating itself into the global economy despite the challenges it still faces as a result of the Asian Financial crisis and its geographical disadvantage as a fully landlocked country. By continuing to subject Laos to the archaic Jackson-Vanik provisions of the Trade Act of 1974, the United States is inhibiting Laos from fully reaching its economic potential and effectively shutting out US companies that are willing to in-

vest in this country. The potential impact on Laos once it has NTR status is evidenced by the explosive growth in trade with Cambodia and Vietnam once those countries obtained NTR status.

As you know, Secretary of State Colin Powell and USTR Ambassador Robert Zoellick have expressed their support for extending NTR for Laos. I hope that the Subcommittee will act favorably upon this request.

Sincerely,

Erik O. Autor
Vice President, Int'l Trade Counsel

Nichols Properties Inc.
Palm Springs, California 92262
April 19, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman
VIA FAX: 202-225-2610
House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade U.S. House of Representatives
1104 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: NTR with Laos

Dear Chairman Crane and Members of the Subcommittee:

I write to support normal trade relations (NTR) with Laos, a long overdue step that will certainly improve trade and benefit businesses on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. I know that small businesses, including import-export firms, in our region will be positively affected by NTR with Laos, and that further delay in this matter can only have harmful economic effects.

For all of the reasons underlying the joint letter to Congress on February 24, 2003, from Secretary of State Colin Powell and US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, the 1997 trade agreement with Laos should be implemented. This agreement is beneficial to both Laos, in the form of increased investment by U.S. firms, and to the U.S., for example in the protection of property rights held by U.S. interests within Laos.

Laos clearly seeks to be a responsible player in the international trade environment. In 1997 Laos joined ASEAN, and it is negotiating with respect to membership in the World Trade Organization. Moreover, Laos has a long record of cooperation with the United States in the search for MIAs.

At this time, when a stronger international economy is of vital concern to our country, it is clearly in our national interest to take all reasonable steps, including NTR with Laos, that will promote and normalize international trade and investment. Continued trade discrimination against Laos can only be harmful to both of our countries.

Sincerely,

Stephen C. Nichols

cc: Hon. Mary Bono (via e-mail)

**Statement of NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the
Baltic States & Eurasia**

NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia welcomes the opportunity to submit written comments regarding the extension of Permanent Normal Trade Relations Status ("PNTR") to Armenia and Moldova.

NCSJ, representing nearly 50 national organizations and more than 300 local community-based federations, community councils and committees on Jews in the successor states of the former Soviet Union ("FSU"), speaks for the organized American Jewish community on issues affecting the Jewish minority in the successor states. NCSJ evaluates graduation for each successor state based on a set of country-specific issues, achievements, and challenges. For over three decades, NCSJ has mobilized public opinion to oppose human rights violations in the FSU and the successor states, including such efforts as the 1987 March on Washington—"Freedom Sunday for Soviet Jews"—which drew an estimated 250,000.

Members of the Committee have earned a place of merit in the struggle to save the Jewish people in the Soviet Union from the concerted policy of the Communist Party to extinguish their religion, culture, and language. Those who met with refuseniks under the eyes of the KGB, delivered Hebrew texts when they were banned and stood for the linkage between human rights and trade policy gave courage to those who struggled for freedom. Jackson-Vanik is a bipartisan issue.

Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974—the Jackson, Vanik, Archer, Mills Amendment (“Jackson-Vanik”)—was enacted to “assure the continued dedication of the United States to fundamental human rights,” and in so doing sought to eliminate barriers to emigration, an internationally recognized human right. Congress has recognized that Jackson-Vanik has become an instrument of U.S. policy for assessing certain countries’ observance of basic human rights and the protection of minorities.

THE POSITION OF NCSJ ON GRADUATION

NCSJ supports terminating the application of Title IV (i.e., “graduating”) for Soviet successor states, contingent upon resolution of outstanding concerns and inclusion of appropriate language in the legislation to graduate. It was on this basis that NCSJ, working together with this Committee, the United States Government and fellow American Jewish organizations was able to support the graduation of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Georgia in 2000.

As NCSJ testified before the Committee on April 11, 2002, this organization and its member agencies support the graduation of Russia from Jackson-Vanik in principle, pending appropriate language in the graduating legislation. This support was the result of ongoing discussions with the Administration, interested Members and staff, community leadership, and others in the United States and Russia.

It is not the position of NCSJ that the terms of Jackson-Vanik should apply in perpetuity to the successor states. However, graduation for any successor state must be conditioned upon the development of a legal structure that guarantees internationally recognized human rights for its Jewish citizens, and other religious and national/ethnic minorities. In the absence of such conditions, there is in our opinion no possibility of establishing democratic institutions applicable to all citizens.

NCSJ believes that economic growth in the successor states is in the strategic interest of the United States. We devoted considerable resources to support enactment of the 1992 Freedom Support Act, and continue to support the current assistance package as we have advised every Member of Congress. NCSJ is an active participant in a broad-based coalition of business, public interest and ethnic organizations that supports full funding for U.S. foreign assistance through the Function 150 account. As with freedom of emigration, building democratic societies in the wake of Soviet tyranny is hardly something we can afford to take for granted.

Beginning in 1989, the NCSJ Board of Governors endorsed annual waivers of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment for the Soviet Union and its successor states. This support was contingent on (1) the President’s affirmation that waivers would encourage emigration and progress on other humanitarian issues; and (2) assurances concerning a commitment of further progress in connection with these concerns. Since 1994, NCSJ has supported semi-annual findings by the President that Armenia and Moldova, and most of the successor states, are in compliance with Jackson-Vanik’s emigration provisions and have demonstrated progress on protection of minority rights.

The opening of the doors to emigration is not the exclusive factor that determines our support for graduation of a given country. NCSJ’s position on graduation is based on substantial progress toward three factors:

An unrestricted right of emigration, protection of minority rights, including legislation to provide protection against incitement to violence against persons or groups based on various criteria, including religion (e.g., anti-Semitism), and the exercise of freedom of religion;

The incorporation of human rights standards (including freedom of emigration and religion) into the country’s constitutional and legal structure, their protection by the judiciary, and the implementation of administrative practices that do not detract from such rights; and

Participation in bilateral and multilateral mechanisms related to the observance of religious freedom and basic human rights, demonstrating a commitment to these freedoms and rights.

Although Armenia and Moldova have both gained accession to the World Trade Organization, the decision to graduate a country from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment should be based upon those issues which motivated the original enactment of this law: religious freedom and human rights.

Representative Bill Archer, later to serve as Chairman of this Committee, declared his support for the eventual passage of Jackson-Vanik: "By taking this action we call upon the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to cease persecution of these people on the basis of religious belief—, as a result of their attempt to exercise their religious beliefs and to study their religious heritage and culture." In conclusion, he affirmed, "We do not need foreign trade enough to do business with countries that practice religious discrimination and this form of bondage."

The Report of the Committee on Finance for the Trade Reform Act of 1974 (H.R. 10710) emphasized that Jackson-Vanik extended beyond emigration policy. The Report states a deeper motivation beyond that of emigration: "The Committee believes that it is equally reasonable to establish conditions on all basic human rights, including the right to emigrate as well as basic property rights, before extending broad concessions to communist countries." Writing in 1980, the late Senator Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson reiterated that this law "has long been the principal hope of thousands of Soviet Jews and others who have struggled to obtain visas so that they might emigrate to Israel, the United States, or other countries where they are free to live and worship according to their faith—a freedom denied them in the Soviet Union."

Especially in the post-Soviet landscape, emigration, the ability of Jews and other minorities to identify with their cultural heritage, restitution of communal property, governmental responses to anti-Semitism and xenophobia as well as commitments on implementation of laws and practices ensuring minority protection have become part of the test for graduation. These are reasonable standards and, in effect, confirm the transition from the legacy of communism to the development of a civil society.

The following two sections briefly review the status of Armenia and Moldova regarding substantive concerns of the Jewish community. Additional information and updates are available online at www.ncsj.org.

ARMENIA

Armenia's small Jewish community is relatively well treated and maintains a good working relationship with the government. NCSJ views Armenia as having been in compliance with the freedom of emigration requirements of Jackson-Vanik. Although there are no significant restitution issues concerning Armenia, NCSJ hopes that an appropriate public space may be made available to the Jewish community as symbolic compensation for communal properties destroyed during the Soviet period.

Armenia's participation in local and multilateral mechanisms to resolve regional disputes is an encouraging sign of future possibilities. One of Armenia's greatest resources is a sophisticated and well-educated diaspora community, notably in the United States, that continues to play a vital role in the continued development of Armenia's civil society. Currently, in its capacity as a Participating State of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Armenia is participating in the working group to plan an unprecedented international Conference on Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region, scheduled for June 19–20 in Vienna.

MOLDOVA

Moldova is home to a rich variety of Jewish religious and cultural life, and the government has positive relations with Israel. Emigration is generally free. Only a fraction of communal property has been returned to the Jewish population of over 30,000, in contrast to the Orthodox Church which has resolved nearly all of its outstanding property claims. Even a handful of properties would make a vital difference to older double-survivors of the Holocaust and Soviet terror who now depend on community assistance, and for younger Jews seeking access to the spiritual and intellectual treasures once denied them. Lack of progress on communal restitution means more limited resources must be diverted to paying rent where the community's own buildings remain beyond reach.

Anti-Semitism remains a feature of Moldovan society, but official discrimination is relegated to the past and anti-Semitic incidents are generally investigated and publicly denounced. It is notable that, earlier this month, the President of Moldova joined Jewish community leaders and others to mark the 100th anniversary of the infamous Kishinev (Chisinau) pogrom, which killed dozens of Jews and prompted a historic wave of westward emigration. Addressing the past is indispensable to assuring the future. Appropriate Language for Graduation

NCSJ recommends strongly that the Ways and Means Committee consider legislation that clearly expresses the continued long-term commitment of the United States to free emigration, minority rights, and freedom of religion. This should pro-

ceed within the deliberate context of ensuring future adherence to international norms and obligations, thereby advancing the goals of Jackson-Vanik.

In this regard, NCSJ will continue to be in contact both with Members of the Committee and the Committee staff to present its detailed views. H.R. 528, introduced by Representatives Joe Knollenberg and Frank Pallone on February 4, 2003, does not contain language reflecting any of the points concerning the primary purpose of Jackson-Vanik—"to assure the continued dedication of the United States to fundamental human rights . . ."

The longstanding commitment of the United States Congress, which motivated the passage of Jackson-Vanik as well, will be advanced and reaffirmed if the legislation to graduate a successor state includes reference to the following:

The state has continued to return religious and communal properties confiscated from national and religious minorities during the Soviet period, facilitating the reemergence of these communities in the national life of the country; and has committed, including through an exchange of letters, to continue its efforts toward the restitution of such properties in accordance with existing laws.

The state is committed to addressing issues related to its national and religious minorities as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and to adopt measures for ensuring that persons belonging to national minorities have full equality individually, as well as in community with other members of their group.

The state is committed to the 1990 Copenhagen Document of the OSCE affirming the right of national minorities to establish and maintain their own educational, cultural and religious institutions, organizations or associations and to establish and maintain unimpeded contacts among themselves within their country as well as contacts across frontiers.

The state has enacted statutory provisions to provide protection against incitement to violence against persons or groups based on national, racial, ethnic or religious discrimination, hostility or hatred, including anti-Semitism.

Recognition that the exchange of letters between the Governments of Russia and the United States, and related assurances, are viewed by Congress as binding obligations by the Russian Federation.

Since the graduation of the Republic of Georgia (Public Law 106-476), the United States Government has exchanged letters with most or all of those successor states still subject to Jackson-Vanik. These letters contain assurances from the respective governments regarding freedom of emigration and other human rights. These important documents should be referenced within the legislation to graduate a given country, reflecting the shared commitment of the successor government and the United States Government.

Graduation of a country from Jackson-Vanik does not mean anti-Semitism has disappeared, or that the authorities are doing all they could to eradicate racism, xenophobia, and intolerance. Nor does it mean that the gains for Jewish life are irreversible; this progress remains vulnerable to the voices of darker days, voices that can be heard still in the successor states, among citizens, politicians, and the media. The referencing, in the graduating legislation, of relevant commitments and progress in this context is more than declaring a historical triumph of Congressional and U.S. policy. It is a reminder to those in America and in the successor states that these principles remain vigorous standards for U.S. policy, that new bilateral and multilateral mechanisms exist for ensuring them, and that it is on this basis a given country is removed from Jackson-Vanik.

Kensington, Maryland 20895

Dear Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

I am writing to urge you to take the lead in supporting Normal Trade Relations with Laos.

U.S. and Lao diplomatic ties have withstood many difficulties over the years—never having been broken even during the years of the U.S.-Indochina war. Laos cooperates with the U.S. in the search for MIAs in Laos and shares our interest in stopping narcotics traffic.

Laos is a very poor, landlocked country of only a few million inhabitants. It has been introducing economic reforms since 1986. Laos became part of ASEAN in 1997 and is negotiating membership in the WTO. NTR will provide the legal authority for U.S. and Lao companies to pursue good trade investments and will obligate Laos to protect U.S. property rights.

I have visited Laos several times. Visitors from the U.S. are warmly welcomed in this charming, off-the-beaten-track country. It is time for us to grant NTR to Laos. Secretary of State Powell and U.S. Trade Representative Zoelick have spoken to the Administration's support for NTR status for Laos to fulfill a 1997 bilateral trade agreement.

Sincerely,

Carlie Numi

Odlo U.S.A.
Farmington, Maine 04938
March 12, 2003

Chairman, House Ways & Means Sub-Committee
Honorable Philip Crane

Re NTR Laos

Since 1997 we have purchased textile garments from Laos, and consequently paid 50–90% duty rates as unfavored nation status (column 2). We now understand this situation may change, as there is a movement to consider granting NTR to Lao.

I have written repeated letters dating back to 1997, to House Ways & Means, as well as Senate Finance members, additionally my own State of Maine Senators, Snowe & Collins, requesting such legislation. I am delighted to read of this movement and accordingly voice my support and encouragement to approve the vote.

It has always struck me as very odd, that all of SoEast Asia has NTR except Lao, and these countries (Vietnam, Cambodia, China, etc) export to USA at 20–30% rates of duty, compared to the 50–90% which my company has been forced to pay for identical garments.

Secondly, the factories which I engage, Lao Garment Co Ltd. and Trio Laos Export Co., are equal or superior in every aspect of quality, workers conditions, and general service to our needs, when compared to other SoEast Asian countries which we source. However, should this resolution be denied, I surely will be forced to cancel my Laos contracts, as the uncompetitive situation can not be continued any longer.

Sadly, this would negatively effect both Lao, and my employees, as well as the 400 retail establishments which sell our Lao made products to the USA consumers. A no-win situation, but clearly there are no alternatives, any longer.

I thank you for the opportunity to hear my views, and I urge your swift action, PRIOR to Jul 1, 2003, and further deliberations will produce nothing more nor new to this situation. 1997–2003 has been sufficiently long to pay these premium duty rates, as the political forces countered each other in this NTR debate, and now is time for action in the form of approval.

Sincerely,

Leonard J. Widen
V-President Odlo USA

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Organization of Lao Student for Independence and Democracy
40–018 Katowice. Poland

Congressman Philip M. Crane (R-IL),
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the
Committee on Ways and Means,

Dear Sir,

I feel that by granting Normalized Trade Relations (NTR) Status to Laos without making NTR subject to pre-conditions on human rights, and release of political prisoners, will only have the effect of legitimizing the continuation of the Lao PDR's oppressive powers and human rights abuses against its citizens. Granting NTR now, along with its attendant aid and loans, would preclude using this important tool of U.S. policy vis-à-vis a future government in Laos.

Unfortunately there a number of elected officials who mistakenly believe that many Lao- and Hmong Americans support giving NTR to Laos with no [enforceable] pre-conditions on human rights. There are also native borne Americans and US vet-

erans who oppose NTR. There are a number of common themes in the debate surrounding the recent surge of efforts to weaken U.S. policies toward the LPDR. It's said that granting NTR and disarming freedom fighters would alleviate economic hardships in Laos, fuel the U.S. economy by tapping into new markets and, in the end, cause the demise of the LPDR's totalitarian regime. These arguments don't consider the harsh realities of Laos under the communist leaders like Khamtay Siphandon and Somsavath Lengsavad. Giving into the Lao government and granting NTR now without any preconditions would only serve to strengthen the LPDR's grip on the landlocked country and its people.

Supporters of a granting NTR suggest the regime would allow tourists and investments from the United States to influence Lao society. That won't happen. The LPDR is not willing to trade total control of power for an improved economy. We have seen it with North Korea, Iraq, China, and Cuba. We see the example of China which even before and after receiving NTR and WTO membership continued its massive human rights abuses, with the US government fearful of doing anything to disturb the \$40 billion plus trade relationship for business reasons. Granting NTR and disarming democratic movement groups inside Laos without meaningful democratic and free-market reforms in Laos would certainly guarantee the perpetuation of the institutions and groups that support the regime. The LPDR only wants U.S. credits and tourism because it desperately needs hard currency to fuel the regime.

U.S. investors would quickly discover that they were operating on the LPDR's turf. Workers are not permitted to contract with companies. There is no infrastructure and no accountable banking system. If a foreign company needs local workers, it must go through the regime, which then assigns workers and collects their wages in dollars. The regime then pays its workers in worthless Kip. Translation: Foreign investment bankrolls the LPDR and leaves the workers destitute. Every other country in the world is free to trade with Laos and even donated millions and millions of dollars, which clearly has not helped the country's economic plight. If the U.S. were to provide credits to the LPDR regime to buy American goods, the U.S. taxpayer will eventually foot the bill. The regime does not pay its bills. The LPDR economic system is a miserable failure that stifles productivity. Yet it continues to spend recklessly on the military. Allowing the LPDR access to hard currency will not only strengthen its hold on the Lao people, but also allow it to build up its military and continue its oppressive human rights abuses. Repeatedly, Amnesty International has documented the human rights abuses in Laos. AI receives continual reports of extremely poor conditions of detention and the use of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. These included the prolonged use of stocks, deprivation of light, confinement in small cells, and inadequate provision of food, water and medication. Bear in mind, in Laos today, even if someone is arrested, the family must know someone in the outside world and have a way to make the name and details public-which the Lao PDR promptly denies, and frequently does not inform family or relatives of the arrest(s) and where they are held. SEE:

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/countries/laos?OpenView&Start=1&Count=30&Expandall>.

There are 19 website links by AI documenting the Lao government's oppression and human rights abuses.

No information was made public about protesters arrested in 1999 and 2000, and their whereabouts and fate remained unknown today. These included five members of the "Lao Students Movement for Democracy of 26 October 1999", arrested in October 1999. Thongpaseuth Keuakoun, Khamphouvieng Sisaath, Seng-Aloun Phengphanh, Bouavanh Chanhmanivong and Keochay were among a group of people who had attempted to publicly call for respect for human rights, the release of political prisoners, a multi-party political system and elections for a new National Assembly. Sinh Keotha, a woman arrested in connection with the same demonstration, was believed to have been released, while her brother, Sinh Sanay, remained in detention. At least 15 people arrested in November 2000 following a demonstration in Champasak province remained unaccounted for.

Khamtanh Phousy, a prisoner of conscience detained since 1996, remained in Prison Camp 7, in a remote area of Houa Phan province. A former army officer who converted to Christianity, he was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on what were believed to be politically motivated charges. No information was available about the situation of two other political prisoners believed to be still held in Prison Camp 7. Sing Chanthakoumane and Pangtong Chokhengboun, detained for "re-education" and held without charge or trial since 1975, had been sentenced to life imprisonment after an unfair trial in 1992.

Prisoners of conscience Feng Sakchittaphong and Latsami Khamphoui, both aged 61, remained in Prison Camp 7. Both men are former government officials who were arrested in 1990 after advocating peaceful political and economic change. In 1992 they were sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment under national security legislation following an unfair trial. Conditions of detention were extremely harsh. They continued to be held in darkness, and to be denied adequate food and medical care. Visiting rights for their families were severely restricted.

In late 2000, an Australian couple Kerry and Kay Danes, who had been working in Laos for a security company, were arrested and charged with theft. The couple were detained in Phonthong prison and since their release in 2001 have reported suffering torture and ill treatment at the prison, and of witnessing appalling treatment of other prisoners. Their case showed that the concern of a government which is an important aid donor to Laos in this case Australia did not prevent the torture and ill-treatment of nationals of that country in the Lao prison system, even with the support of determined consular officials. Foreign nationals arrested in Laos are vulnerable to serious human rights abuses. Lao nationals under arrest are even more helpless.

In November 2001, five foreign nationals, including a member of the European Parliament, were arrested after staging a protest in Vientiane to commemorate the second anniversary of the attempted demonstration on 26 October 1999. They were tried after two weeks, each given a two-year suspended sentence for anti-government propaganda, and deported.

Religious persecution. Despite official denials, arrests and harassment of members of small unauthorized Christian churches continued. The majority of reported incidents took place in villages in the provinces. The authorities closed churches and people who refused to renounce their faith in writing were imprisoned. Although several Christians previously detained in the provinces of Savannakhet, Luang Prabang and Attapeu were released, at least 30 remained in prisons around the country. These included Seuat, Khamthorn and Dam, arrested in November 2000 and held in Savannakhet City Jail; and Thongchan, Nhot and See arrested in Oudomsay province in 1999 and sentenced to 15, 12 and 12 years' imprisonment respectively. At least eight new arrests took place. In some cases people were held for short periods, while others were serving long sentences. It was reported that people released from prison were subjected to restrictions on movement by local authorities. Three Christian pastors were arrested in May in Bolikhamsai province after their church was closed down because they refused to sign a document renouncing their faith. Siaye Wang, aged 40 with six children, Tongkhue Wue, aged 43 with five children, and Yiaprie Wue, aged 31 with six children, were believed to be in poor health since their arrest because they were held in stocks and not given adequate food.

In January-February 1973, at the time of OPERATION HOMECOMING when some 591 American POWs were released by Hanoi, the United States, was still seeking almost 400 other POWs, MANY who were known to be alive on the ground in >Laos and in Vietnamese controlled areas of Laos at the time of their loss, some of whom had even been used by the Pathet Lao and North Vietnam in propaganda. As of January 2, 2003, the National League of Families lists 382 American still unaccounted for in Laos. Why grant Laos NTR, when as of now, some 350 MIA thought to have been alive in Laos at the time of their loss, and who were not returned to the U.S. at the time of the January 1973 Operation Homecoming: (1) might be alive and under the control of the Lao government, or (2) are dead because the Communist Lao forces killed them. Perhaps you can tell me which it is, (1) or (2)? Why doesn't the US demand that Laos explain what happened to those Americans who were alive on the ground at the time they were lost? Is the US too caught up in saying it gets excellent cooperation from the LPDR on POW-MIA instead of repeatedly demanding an accounting of those LKA?

Until the LPDR respects human rights, releases political prisoners and holds free and internationally supervised elections, AND accounts for American POWs who were alive on the ground when lost, NTR should remain closed. To reward the LPDR now is to ensure that Laos' 5.4 million citizens will continue to face the same horrors and hardships they suffer today—just under a regime bolstered by U.S.

Sincerely yours,

Bounthanh Thamavong
Chairperson

Pacific Inter-Trading and Consulting Co.
 St. Paul, Minnesota 55103
March 28, 2003

The Honorable Chairman Williams Thomas
 and Congressional members of the Ways and Means Committee
 2208 Rayburn HOB
 Washington, D.C. 20515-0522

Dear Chairman Thomas,

We are writing this letter to support NTR for Laos. A subsidiary of our company, Services 2000, has been doing business in Laos for a number of years now, and we feel it is most justified to grant NTR for Laos at this time.

Laos seems to be the only country remaining in the South East Asian region that has not yet been granted this trade status, and we feel it will be imbalance in our justice system while granting NTR for everyone else except Laos. Furthermore, Laos have been working very hard with the U.S. and the world community in order to improve the concerned human rights issues in Laos and others of similarity. Like many countries around the world, Laos is also in struggle for economic reforms in order to survive this world crisis and economic depression. With NTR, Laos can change more and be able to compete better with the world market systems; thus improving its economy by creating more jobs and attracting more foreign investment in to Laos which will help secure a better future for the many generations to come.

We realized that there are still some small groups of people who view Laos as a dangerous country with horrible human rights and religious freedom violation. But through our experience working with the Lao people and constant visits to that country, I must say **this is no longer a true picture of Laos today**. Gradually, Laos have changed, especially during the last few years. I am sure there is still rooms for improvement for every walks of life but only time can help Laos to become economic self-sufficient and be in full compliance with the United Nations standards. Therefore, we should not penalize Laos by holding back NTR which may be the only tool to help Laos succeed in those areas. NTR will also enable Laos to gain equal access to information and same advantage to economic opportunities like other countries. The United States, being a great country by reaching out to help small countries such as Laos, can only reflect the true liberty and justice for all of this great nation once again. Therefore, we pledge that you would vote "YES" to NTR for Laos at the United States congress. If I can be of further help, please do not hesitate to let me know.

With the best regards, I remain.

Respectfully yours,

Wayne Saykao
President

PacMar Inc.
 Honolulu, Hawaii 96816
April 11, 2003

Honorable Philip M Crane, Chairman,
 Subcommittee on Trade,
 Committee on Ways and Means'
 House of Representatives,
 United States Congress.

Honorable Neil Abercrombie,
 Congressman (Hawaii)
 House of Representatives,
 United States Congress

Dear Congressmen Crane and Abercrombie:

I am a Hawaii-based Laotian American, President and CEO of Pacific Management Resources (PacMar Inc.), a well-established U.S. international consulting company providing professional expertise and a wide range of business development advisory services throughout the Asia Pacific region for the past two decades.

I am writing in support of the Bush Administration's recommendation to grant permanent NTR to Laos (Lao People's Democratic Republic).

For this purpose, I have attached a statement which was jointly drafted and adopted by key Laotian-American community leaders/professionals in Hawaii and those across the U.S. Mainland. The said statement, in my view, reflects very accu-

rately the opinions of the vast majority of the 4,000 Laotian-Americans in Hawaii, and over half million other Laotian-Americans across the United States, on this issue. I respectfully urge your full review of this statement, and favorable action by your esteemed Committee. The said statement outlines the socio-political, and humanitarian reasons for granting the NTR to Laos. I would like to add the following additional economic and strategic reasons for granting the NTR to Laos:

We support granting the NTR for Laos not only because it reflects the collective sentiments of the vast majority of the Laotian-American communities in Hawaii and across the U.S.; but, more importantly, granting the NTR to Laos will serve the best long-term economic and strategic interests of the United States of America in the greater ASEAN region.

Laos is a member of ASEAN. The country is strategically located right in the heart of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS), which is home to over 250 million ethnically diverse populace with some of the fastest-growing markets and most dynamic economies, including those of China, Vietnam, Thailand, as well as the newly emerging but fast-changing economies of Cambodia, and Burma.

Major multi-lateral funding agencies (e.g. the ADB, Worldbank), bilateral donors, and leading private U.S. and other multi-national companies are committing massive aid and investment resources into the GMS. They view the GMS as one large, and increasingly integrated market, and highly promising new investment "frontiers," of which Laos is an inseparable part.

Major multi-modal infrastructural networks (new trans-national road networks, railroads, civil aviation and telecommunication systems) are being planned and developed at rapid pace for this GMS region, most of them connecting to and/or traversing various parts of Laos (which shares common borders with all other five GMS nations).

Laos—being richly endowed with diverse forestry/mineral resources, and vast exportable hydro-power potential—is poised to be one of the key "hubs" for cross-boarder trade, and economic exchanges, and lucrative market links among the six GMS nations. The U.S. is currently among the leading economic "stakeholders" in the GMS. Continued refusal to grant NTR to Laos is detrimental to the current and long-term U.S. national interest in this dynamic and fast-growing region.

The significance of Laos to the U.S. regional economic and security interests must be viewed in this broader ASEAN and GMS context. It is in the light of these broader U.S.-ASEAN regional economic and security interests that I urge your esteemed Committee to recommend the granting of the much overdue US-NTR to Laos.

Sincerely yours,

Puonpun Sananikone
President and CEO, PacMar Inc.

Attachment:

**Statement of Support From Laotian-Americans in Hawaii
For The Bush Administration's Trade Initiative
To extend Normal Trade Relations to Laos**

We, Laotian-Americans in Hawaii, believe that:

Widespread and rapidly growing unemployment among youth in Laos has driven tens of thousands of them to flee to Thailand and other neighboring countries where they fall prey to exploitative and inhumane treatment by their employers and criminals; while the land-locked Laotian economy continues to weaken due to decline in foreign investment and its weak capability to compete with its neighbors in the export markets. The situation is further aggravated by the continued denial of US NTR to Laos while such privilege is enjoyed by its stronger immediate neighbors, including Vietnam and Cambodia.

US NTR for Laos is not a panacea for its social economic problems, but it will put Laos on a level playing field with its neighboring countries on which to compete for a share of the U.S. markets. This in turn will stimulate domestic and foreign investment in Laos and give the country a fair chance to provide decent jobs for its youth and thereby help reverse the current ill treatment and suffering they have had to endure, both in Laos and in neighboring countries.

We realize that Laotian communities across the U.S. are not unanimous in their views about the current Laotian Government and its policies, and that the majority of Laotian Americans still wish to see more political reforms and changes. But we believe that a stronger Laotian economy will improve living conditions of the Laotian people who, in turn, will then become real stakeholders and, eventually cata-

lysts for change. Experience in Asia has amply demonstrated that the democratization process has been economically driven.

While understanding and respecting the views of those opposing the granting of US NTR for Laos, we ask that they also understand and respect our views and positions on this important matter. As American citizens, we have the obligation to respect each other's rights and freedom to express our views in accordance with our belief and conscience.

The majority of Laotian Americans have reconnected with their homeland. Most of them have returned to Laos for visits and have relatives who are still there and wish to see that they be given a fair chance for a better living. Most Laotian Americans believe that promoting economic development is the best way to promote peaceful and sustainable change in Laos.

We wholeheartedly applaud and share the position taken by the Bush Administration on the issue of US NTR for Laos. Ambassador Hartwick is trying to encourage discussion and favorable consideration of this initiative.

Laotian Americans and friends of the Laotians who share our views should exercise their right of freedom of speech by voicing their views to their respective Congressional representatives, especially members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The opposition to the US NTR to date seeks to isolate and impoverish Laos for their own ambiguous political agenda. They have organized and financed aggressive lobby efforts to prevent hearings on this matter. Some of them continue to believe that poverty will force change in Laos. Recent history in Asia shows otherwise. People in isolated and poor North Korea have no means to ask for change, they starve in silence; while in relatively rich South Korea and other parts of Asia (Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines etc.) growing affluence of the peoples have created economically strong and well educated middle class who in turn have proven to be the real incubators and guardians of the growing democratization process.

A constructive engagement approach is a better alternative for the U.S. to promote change in Laos; and that promoting change through peaceful socio-economic development is far more effective and humane than deliberate impoverishment of our fellow Laotians in Laos. The granting of NTR to Laos will open up U.S. market to tens of thousands of Laotian entrepreneurs and workers. This will ultimately lead to greater economic empowerment of Laotians, making them stakeholders in their own society and, thereby, creating genuine impetus towards democratization and the rule of law.

For more information and assistance, please contact:

The US-Lao NTR Coalition
120 Broadway, Suite 4
Richmond, CA 94804
(510) 235-5005, (510) 235-5065
Website: Laotianlink.com
Email: Laotianlink@USA.com

Hawaii Contact:

Email: puongpun@pacmarinc.com
telephone: 808-7352602, 7328731
fax: 808-7342315

Mail: 3615 Harding Avenue, Suites 408-409, Honolulu, HI 96816

Redmond, Washington 98052
April 20, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Fax 202/225-2610

Dear Congressman Crane:

I lived in the country of Laos as a young American girl in 1962 at the age of 9 because of my father's job with USAID. I have made two return trips to Laos, in 1993 and 1996, and have re-established a strong and heartfelt bond with the land and the people of that country.

I am writing to you today to ask that you and the U.S. Congress support the normalization of trade relations with the Lao PDR. I have a particular interest and passion for the handwoven textiles that are made by the weavers in Laos. I have

visited workshops where these ancient skills are being passed on to poor, uneducated young girls from the countryside. Income from sales of these beautiful textiles offers a means of supporting a family, as well as preserving a venerable and valuable cultural heritage. The Lao weavers would benefit tremendously from improved and eased access to the highly important U.S. market. This is only one example from one small segment of the Lao economy.

The Lao people have suffered enough. They have already paid heavily with the loss to war of so many in an older generation; the loss of so many educated people who fled as refugees; the loss of hands, feet, and limbs to the unexploded ordnance we left behind in the '60s and '70s. It is time to put the MIA issue behind us in favor of fulfilling our obligation, rooted in history, of opening opportunities to a better life for today's people of Laos.

Sincerely yours,

Nancy L. Penrose
Writer/editor

CC: Representative Jennifer Dunn
Representative Jim McDermott

Washington, D.C. 20001
April 12, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Fax 202/225-2610

Dear Congressman Crane:

As a daughter of a Lao textile weaver, I know how valuable it is to have craft skills in Laos during hard times because I have experienced and seen first hand that such skills can help one feed one's family. Since 1995, I visited Laos numerous times and I saw many Laotians, especially weavers, who were eager to work and sell their products. However, the morning market was the only market where they can sell their products for a small price to sympathetic tourists. As an American, I cannot turn a blind eye and ignore that these people have not suffered enough. This is why I am writing you to ask that you and the Congress grant Laos normalized trade relations (NTR). By granting Laos NTR, we are giving the Laotians a chance to rebuild their country. With the crisis that is going on around the world, granting Laos NTR is one of the many ways that we Americans, which we take pride in, can give dignity and pride back to the people of Laos. In return, they will look upon the United States as friends. If Laos is granted NTR, we are giving its people an opportunity to become productive citizens.

Sincerely yours,

Thiphasone Phimviengkham
Radio Production Engineer

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Washington, DC 20008
April 9, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade,
Ways and Means Committee
United States Representatives

Honorable Crane,

On behalf of the Government and the people of Laos, I would like to express my sincere thank and appreciation for being given the opportunity to submit comments to the US House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade regarding the extension of the Normal Trade Relations status to Laos. We applaud the efforts of the United States to actively engage the relationship with Laos on a political and trade related basis.

Laos and the US had initialed the Bilateral Trade Agreement in 1997, and the document has not been yet approved. In the past few years the Lao Government

and its people in collaboration with the US Administration as well as the Lao-American living in the United States, have worked hard in order to push forward and bring into force the comprehensive bilateral trade agreement between the United States and Laos.

We are gratified that our country was included in the President's International Trade Agenda. On February 24, 2003, Honorable Colin Powell, Secretary of State, and Honorable Robert Zoellick, United States Trade Representative, sent a joint letter to the Congress proposing the Congress to pass the bilateral trade agreement between our two countries. I very much appreciate and welcome the decision made by the United States Administration in support for granting the NTR status to Laos.

Laos is one of the ASEAN members, and has struggled many years remaining one of the world poorest nations, but a nation that is proud of its accomplishments and its plans for further achievements in the near future.

You may wish to take into consideration some points regarding the developments in Laos as well as the Lao-US relations.

1. Developments in Laos:

Reform:

—Laos started the reform of its economic system since 1986 by adopting the New Economic Mechanism shifting from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy.

Open-door:

—It has carried out an open-door policy toward international cooperation by enacting law on foreign investments since 1988. Laos has been a member of the UN and all other affiliate organizations as well as the IMF and World Bank. Laos joined ASEAN in 1997 in order to go along with the group for the promotion of regional economic cooperation, and trade as well as for the preservation of peace, stability and security in the region of Southeast Asia.

Rule of Law:

—It adopted the first Constitution in 1991 aiming at governing the country by the rule of law. Since then more than forty laws have been enacted for governing and regulating the economic, financial, administrative, social and cultural activities of the country.

2. Lao-US Relations:

Diplomatic relations:

—Despite a political change in Laos in 1975, the Lao-US diplomatic relations established since 1952 has never been interrupted.

Cooperation on MIA:

—In recent years, the United States and Laos have worked very hard to build a mutually beneficial relationship and understanding. The Government of the Lao PDR and its people have shown their goodwill and sincerity in humanitarian cooperation with the US Government, particularly, in the field of POW/MIA issues. As a result, to date 179 remains of MIA have been identified and repatriated to the United States. The Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, Department of Defense, and the National League of POW/MIA Families can be witness on this matter.

—The UXO clearing projects and the rural development in order to reduce the poverty going on very well.

Cooperation on narcotic drug control:

—The Lao-US cooperation in the field of narcotic drug control, which is the common concern for both governments, is also gradually expanding, and making the production of opium reduce year by year. The aim is to finish off this kind of narcotic drug in 2006.

Cooperation on counter terrorism:

—The Lao government condemned the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. In his message sent to President George W. Bush, on September 12, 2001, President Khamtai Siphandone, of the Lao PDR, reaffirmed his support to the international communities, especially the United States to fight against international terrorism.

—The Lao government has actively protected the American people, their interests and properties inside the Lao PDR.

Investment:

—Currently, the US investments in the country have amounted to US\$ 1,5 billion, which ranks the United States as the second largest foreign investor in the Lao PDR after Thailand.

Trade:

—At present, Laos faces a tariff rate over 45 percent. In actual dollar terms, Lao businesses paid US\$ 1.8 million to the U.S Customs Services in order to sell US\$ 3.9 million worth of goods in 2002. This tariff rate is the highest in the world.

—Granting NTR status to Laos would enable the country to develop its economy in a better fashion and help to expand the trade and investment in the country and strengthen the process of reform and liberalization already taking place. Importantly, it will contribute to eradicate the poverty and to improve the living standard of the people in the country.

—As mentioned earlier, Laos is one of the ASEAN members. Hence, granting of NTR to Laos would signal the United States' continuing interest in the ASEAN nations, and will fulfill the Trade policy of Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI), announced by President George W. Bush last year in Mexico.

As the United States is the foremost advocate of free trade, I do hope that it should treat Laos with the same trading privileges it granted to most of other nations in the world, especially to most of ASEAN countries. I really hope that when the economy of the country becomes strong and more integrated with its regional neighbors, Laos then will provide a strong market for the US goods, and increase trade.

Our economic reform and success will contribute to the strengthening of the economy in the region. The action of granting unconditional normal trade relations status to Laos will send a message to the people of Laos that the United States supports them in their endeavors to become a strong nation. It will put Laos on an even playing field with the rest of the world vis-&-vis trade with the United States. The active engagement of the Lao PDR will encourage the move toward a market-oriented economy.

We believe that Laos is on the right path. We also believe that the United States should treat Laos with the same trading privileges it grants to most of other nations, especially the other ASEAN members.

On behalf of the Lao government and its people, I would like to encourage the U.S Congress to expeditiously seek the granting of unconditional normal trade relations status to Laos.

Sincerely yours,

His Excellency Phanthong Phommahaxay
Ambassador
Embassy of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

PhonTong Handicrafts Cooperative
Vientiane, Laos
April 7, 2003

hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
cc: laontr@ffrd.org (please forward & FAX to appropriate offices!)

Dear Committee,

On behalf of PhonTong Handicrafts Cooperative in Vientiane, Laos, I am writing to ask you to approve the bilateral trade agreement signed by the United States and Laos in 1997. The agreement was submitted to Congress by President Bush as part of his trade agenda this year. I have been living & working in Laos for the past 20 months.

The lack of normal trade relations with Laos hurts people in both countries, including the needy artisans from PhonTong Handicrafts and our buyer, a non-profit organization, Ten Thousand Villages, in USA. TTV has been buying products from our Lao artisans, such as wood-carvings, baskets, and handwoven silk scarves and table runners, since the mid-80's.

After the Vietnam War, the US government imposed sanctions, including heavy tariffs on Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. In recent years, the sanctions on both Vietnam and Cambodia have been removed, and those countries now enjoy "normal trade relations" (NTR) with the United States.

Laos, however, continues to face the highest effective tariff rates in the world—an average of 45 percent last year. Combined with Laos' landlocked status, the high tariff rates make it nearly impossible to turn a profit on goods imported from Laos. Ten Thousand Villages sells Lao products, but must subsidize them.

A bilateral trade agreement, signed by the United States and Laos in 1997, would reduce these high tariff rates and grant Laos NTR status. More than a quarter century after the end of the Vietnam War, it is time to show a gesture of reconciliation to our brothers and sisters in Laos. The Lao people suffered greatly during the war, enduring more bombs than the US dropped on both Germany and Japan during WW II. Giving them an equal chance for economic development is the least we can do!

There are 200 fair trade stores across the US that primarily sell Ten Thousand Villages products. Many of these stores have expressed their appreciation of Laotian handicrafts and would benefit from selling Lao products.

Laos is one of a handful of countries which enjoy diplomatic relations with the United States, but still lack normal trade relations. Please work to grant normal trade relations and the implementation of the trade agreement as soon as possible!

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter!

Sincerely,

Kirsten Baynham

MCC LAOS Handicraft Designer for Ten Thousand Villages, USA

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Phontong-CAMA Handicraft Cooperative
Vientiane, Lao PDR
April 21, 2003

To: The Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Trade

Re: Request for the reduction of taxes on crafts made in the Lao PDR and exported to America.

I, Mrs. Kommaly Chanthavong, am the director of CAMA Crafts—Phontong Cooperative and Lao Sericulture Company. I, together with the company management teams of the Cooperative and Lao Sericulture Company, have worked closely with impoverished in the countryside, far from cities and civilization.

The Main Work of we are assisting villagers with:

1. Growing mulberry trees, caring for silkworms, and spinning high-quality silk thread.
2. Growing plants from which natural dyes can be made.
3. Weaving silk cloth to be made into various articles.
4. Weaving baskets.
5. Making wood carvings.
6. Sewing and embroidering Hmong folk art.
7. Training 500 farming families throughout all 12 provinces to grow & care for silk works.
8. Train in weaving and natural dye techniques.

Continuing objectives for working villagers:

1. Provide villagers with jobs and income for daily needs.
2. To encourage slash—and—burn farmers and opium farmers to manufacture silk and crafts instead.
 - Currently manufacturers number 60 villagers in 5 provinces, marking 500—1000 products per month. The project's duty is to encourage manufacturing and to find a market for the villagers' work, in order to continuously recover the capital funds.
 - Since 1990 until the present, the domestic and foreign markets have worked in cooperation with 10,000 villages The program of MCC in the USA.
 - The difficulty in sending our crafts to the USA is the import duty, causing us to lose 70—80 % and to sell very few products.
 - The usefulness of lessening the import tax for Laos would surely increase the profits to the Lao farmers. We would have the ability to sell more crafts than previously, to have greater income to cover daily needs, and reduce, the number of people selling narcotics, growing opium, of people selling narcotics, growing opium, and destroying the surrounding forests through slash—and—burn agriculture.

For these reasons, we respectfully bring this request to the Committee on Ways and Means, asking that you lower the American import tax on various handicrafts. We hope that you will consider our problem and arrive at an appropriate and timely solution.

Mrs. Kommaly Chanthavong
Director Phontong-CAMA Handicraft Cooperative

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Hinchinbrook, NSW 2168
Australia

The Honorable William M. Thomas
Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Sir,

As a Lao expatriate in Australia since 1986 and former Director of Economic Planning in Charge of Economic Cooperation in the Ministry of Planning and Cooperation of the Royal Lao Government, I would like to express my views regarding the NRT to the Lao PDR.

Laos has been suffering painful domination from aggressive neighbours and foreign colonisation since the last two centuries. From 1950, Laos has experienced the first and the second Indochina wars that have uprooted Laos' social and infrastructure development. The Unwanted wars or the Hidden war engaged by the US against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnam have left dreadful scars to be rehabilitated. The Lao PDR government has appealed to the international community, including the US to grant their precious supports for post war rehabilitation.

After the war in 1975, Laos had no opportunity to unite the country as a whole, instead it was left to the winning faction, the Pathet Lao to be master of the country. For 10 years (1975-1985) Laos relied mostly on the Soviet Bloc for reconstruction but as the Soviet Union collapsed, Laos had to depend again on capitalist countries and the international financial institutions. Laos took time because it has never been able to develop itself economically during the 50s, 60s and earlier 70s with US assistance.

Laos economy was affected by the Asian financial crisis in July 1997. Since the last two years, it is partly recovered and foreign investment has increased substantially. In terms of physical communication, roads within the country have been extended to almost capital cities and trade relations with Vietnam, China, Thailand are easier than 10 years ago thanks to the loans of the World Bank, the IMF, the ADB and the assistance from some western countries.

Landlocked Laos will play a regional role as land-link. Lao people would be able to enjoy the facilities of internal communication and access to neighbouring countries for trade and tourism. Lao PDR government is embarking actively on post war reconstruction to alleviate poverty. The damages caused by the US bombings were enormous. Lao people have to excavate and detonate the unexploded bombs to turn the affected areas into the rice-fields. The US have contributed a certain amount of money to UXO (Unexploded Ordnance Agency) for training but in my opinion the US should do more for humanitarian purposes to support the project. Every year more than 200 children and women are perished from the unexploded bombs.

The Lao people are cooperating with MIA research team to find remains of US soldiers missing during the war. They are gentle, helpful and generous people by nature. The generosity of the Congress to grant NRT to the Lao PDR would no more than benefit the majority of the poor and disadvantaged Lao people to enjoy trade exchange with the United States of America, the ASEAN countries and the rest of the world.

Laos PDR is the stage of dressing the wounds of the long and unwanted wars. If the US Congress authorizes NTR between the USA and the Lao PDR, it will not strangle the ailing Lao economy and Laos would be less dependent on its aggressive neighbours.

I sincerely hope that the US Congress would appose its stamp positively.

Respectfully,

Viliam Phraxayavong

Denver, Colorado 80239
March 27, 2003

Ambassador Hartwick

Subject: Granting Laos Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR)

As a citizen of the United States of American through natural legalization and a register voter here in Colorado, I would like to express my gratitude and say thank you to you, and the committee on the ways and means subcommittee on trade for allowing us to voice our opinions and share our views freely on the issue of granting Laos Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR).

I have to admit and be totally honest with the fact that I am not very enthusiastic about granting Laos PNTR due to the concern of human right issues and other basic democratic rights, and the authoritarian regime currently established in Laos and the oppression it uses against it's own people. Having said that, on the contrary I feel that the U.S. relationship with the country of Laos has not been very effective nor beneficial to either Nations especially through such a critical time and climatic substances that's escalating in our world politics. Granted, the U.S. does not need Laos, but having another country as friend who one day might share the democratic political ideology and become an ally to the common threat of terrorism. Having a trust worthy ally to fight global terrorists and it's activities might not be such a bad idea, don't you think? Laos as you know has been oppressed and its people have been at a disadvantage for an extensive period of time. Internal instability, colonialism, and authoritarian regime pretty much has been the sad history of Laos, a very small land lock country compliable to the size of the state of Idaho with the population of less than 6 million people, which you probably already aware of and not need me to go into greater length and waste more of your valuable time.

The Laos government, I believe have hit the wall and have been down on the wrong path for such a long time now has finally realized what it has to do in order to bring itself up to the standard of other developed Asian countries. I hope Laos now realizes that it has to be independent of other countries influences, and take control of it's national interest for the sake of it's own people and culture. Singapore for instance, should be used as an example for Laos to follow because it has proven itself and it is well known and recognized throughout the world for it's political stability and economic success. Three years ago, I have traveled to Laos and have seen the unlimited potential and possibility of Laos striving to become a successful countries like Singapore if given the NTR as a mean to jump start it's economic progress to prosperity. The untapped natural resources in Laos are still untouched and thus the possibility and competition of other country like Australia, China, Thailand and Vietnam investing in Laos has already started. If the U.S. does not form a relation with Laos, and approve the NTR relations then who knows what opportunities it might be missing out on. Potential Ally to combat terrorists treats to democracy, economic opportunities and investments, the fight over drugs, and over all promoting democracy to the people of Laos and Hmong who once helped the United States and CIA Special Forces fought against communism during the Vietnam War.

Over all, I feel that by allowing Laos to have NTR relations with America it will be beneficial to both Laos and America in term of economic opportunity and promotion of democracy. The people and government of Laos wants changes and are tired of being treated by it's neighboring countries as a puppet, and above all looked down upon as a country with little hope of success in developing it's own Nation. The U.S. can not allow the continuation of isolating and blocking out Laos economic development because of a few bad apples, which doesn't necessarily mean the whole basket is just as bad. Through stronger economic relations, I strongly believe we can better promote the idea of democracy, and bring the ideology of communism and such authoritarian regime to an end in Laos, and allow the people of Laos to enjoy what I have enjoyed here in this great country of ours (the United States of America). Communism does not work and with the collapse of the Soviet Union clearly prove my case. China and Vietnam wants to change and Laos is slowly awakening and following it neighbors, and thus by joining the ASEAN organization, it looks like Laos is committed and wants change to develop, and thus the NTR is a good starting platform for Laos. I'm just one voice who asking for your approval to please grant Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) to Laos. I know your decision will help the people of Laos more then you will ever realized. If NTR has been granted to China and Vietnam then why not Laos? By far, China's human right issues are more complicated then Laos. I am writing on behalf of the innocent people of Laos and businesses, and not in supporting of the Lao government. Through economic success and growth, I believe changes in Laos' political regime will eventually be-

come a reality for the millions of Lao people who have been oppressed and deprived from their freedom for such a long time now.

Sincerely yours,

Tom Pong

De Kalb, Illinois 60115
21 April 2003

Ways and Means Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Ref: NTR Status for Laos

Dear Chair and Members:

I would like to add my voice to that of Secretary of State Colin Powell and of United States Trade Representative Robert Zoellick in their letter of 23 February 2003 recommending that legislation be enacted to permanently strike Laos from General Note 3(b), thus extending NTR status to that country and thereby normalizing trade relations.

For most of the period 1995–2002, I resided in Vientiane with my family, employed as a freelance environmental consultant and as Team Leader of the Digital Conservation Facility Laos: a graphics design and software development company. This is an ongoing activity and I was back again in Laos from December 2002 through March 2003 completing our most recent project, the installation of trilingual interpretive panels at the Vat Sisaket museum. This work was funded primarily by the embassies of the France and the U.S., and was executed in cooperation with the Lao PDR Ministries of Education and of Information and Culture.

Over these years I have traveled widely throughout Laos as well as several neighboring countries, and before that I was an academic researcher in Viet Nam. I also am a decorated veteran of the VN war, and would hardly considerer myself naïve about human rights issues in Southeast Asia.

With all due respect for those outspoken opponents of trade normalization within the Lao-American community, I would point out that foreigners in Laos are essentially unrestricted in their movements and in their contacts with ordinary people. While onerous limitations on freedom of expression and assembly are certainly still in effect, it is outside my considerable experience there that the Lao PDR government is an oppressive Stalinist regime on the order of its severest critics claims. There can be no question but that political liberalization within the context of a general cultural opening has occurred in Laos within the last five years and with no obvious signs of slowing or reversal. The Internet is now widely and inexpensively available to Lao people, and there is little firewalling or user-monitoring comparable to the situations in Viet Nam and China.

In our museological work in Laos, we perceive a recent radical lessening of the ideological constraints on the discussion of historical events and religion, and on the traditional role of the former Lao kingdoms as protectors and patrons of Buddhism. In outlying provinces there may be some restrictions on Christian proselytization, as claimed, but there's no sense of that in Vientiane where the churches are evidently full, vibrant and confident.

The question of security, however, is certainly loaded when the lines between the legitimate demands for minority autonomy; the relicts of the defunct American-sponsored "secret war"; the traditional cultivation and use of opium; international drug trafficking; and the rankest banditry are as shadowy and ill-defined as they are still in Laos. Just this morning I received an unconfirmed report that another ambush took place yesterday along Highway 13 North, at the cost of some thirty lives—no doubt unsuspecting, non-combatant travelers, as were the victims of the last such massacre not far from there only a few months ago. Where, if anywhere in Laos, has legitimate law-enforcement become excessive to the point of "communist genocide"? I would second the U.S. Embassy's judgement that no evidence exists of chemical or biological attacks against uplands dissidents, or even of the Lao military's resort to disproportionate violence.

Let me close with Robert Kaplan quoting Samuel Huntington, from *Looking the World in the Eye*, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Dec 2001:

"The United States, Huntington said, has trouble understanding revolutionary ferment in the rest of the world because it never experienced a real revolution. Instead it went through a war of independence—and not even one "of natives against alien conquerors," like that of the Algerians against the French, but one of settlers

against the home country. Real revolutions are different—bad—Huntington made clear. Fortunately, they are rare. Even as the proletariat in Third World slums continues to radicalize, the middle classes become increasingly conservative and more willing to fight for the existing order. Writing in the late 1960s, Huntington was describing the world of the early twenty-first century. When a revolution does occur, continued economic deprivation “may well be essential to its success.” The idea that food shortages and other hardships caused by economic sanctions will lead to the overthrow of a revolutionary regime like Saddam Hussein’s or Fidel Castro’s is nonsense, in Huntington’s view. Material sacrifices, although intolerable in a normal situation, are proof of ideological commitment in a revolutionary one: “Revolutionary governments may be undermined by affluence; but they are never overthrown by poverty.” The Spanish and Canadian developers now building hotels in Havana may know better than the American government does how to undermine a revolutionary regime.”

Thank you for all due consideration.

Sincerely,

Alan Potkin, Ph. D.

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

RM Asia (HK) Limited
Vientiane, Lao PDR
18 April 2003

The Honorable Phillip Crane
Chairman, subcommittee on Trade
House Ways and Means Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC
USA

Dear Chairman Crane:

On behalf of RM Asia (HK) Limited, Lao Representative Office, I would like to urge you to move forward with vigor to pass Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos. Please read on because this is not a boiler-plate letter.

I am an American citizen and manage the Lao Representative Office of RM Asia (HK) Ltd., which in spite of its incorporation outside of the United States, is an American-owned and operated trading company operating in Laos and other countries of the Greater Mekong region.

We are well aware that NTR with Laos has been strongly endorsed by the Secretary of State Powell and US Trade Representative Zoellick. Laos NTR is important to our company for the following reasons:

- As a company representing Ford and Ingersoll-Rand, we believe we will receive tangible benefits and assistance from the Lao government regarding the supply of US-made Ford motor vehicles and Ingersoll-Rand heavy equipment into this market.
- Laos is a member of the ten country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) group—ASEAN is America’s third largest overseas market; our trade with ASEAN contributes nearly 800,000 high paying US export jobs; and, American companies have tremendous equity in the region as its top investor. As an American working for an American trading house representing American firms, I am much more prone to suggest US sources of equipment, supplies and materials.
- Passing NTR for Laos is a key step to building the foundation for moving forward with the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI) which was announced by President Bush on October 26, 2003 at AOPEC in Los Cabos, Mexico. Engaging ASEAN through the EAI is an important step for US Competitiveness in this key market. As you know, china is moving forward with negotiations for a China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and Japan and Europe are also beginning to implement similar frameworks with ASEAN.
- The Administration and US Embassy in Vientiane report that Laos is showing signs of moving forward on key areas of past concern as we enhance engagement with the country. These areas, including religious freedom, human rights and economic reform are highlighted in the Administration’s letter to you recommending moving forward on Laos NTR. I can say that I have seen with my

own eyes a very large truck carrying into Laos at one of the official ports-of-entry hundreds of volumes of books clearly destined to bolster Mormon efforts in this country.

- My company employ's a senior Lao national whose father (a senior military official) perished in one of the camps established after the fall of the previous regime 25 years ago. In spite of this personal tragedy, he returned to his native land from overseas ten years ago and has "turned the page" and moved forward. He refuses to fill the role of victim and wants to contribute to making the country "better" now rather than turning back the clock. He suffers no recrimination or discrimination due to his "history."
- The fact that this is still a "Communist" country plays into the hands of those urging the withholding of NTR status. However, on the ground, in the markets, at the business meetings and throughout the country, the move towards a market-oriented vibrant private sector is well and truly on the way. Passage of NTR will enhance this process and move it forward. The dynamics of private sector liberalism will soon quite naturally have an effect on the political systems in due course.
- My own personal analysis of American foreign policy over the past 35 years, suggests to me that the United States has had a far greater positive political and economic impact by engaging countries with different political and economic systems than by denying them access to markets or worse (Cuba is the best example).
- This legislation will allow US companies to have enhanced protection for trademarks and investment in Laos and ASEAN. This would be of major importance to the companies we represent.
- Passing NTR will assist the 5 million inhabitants of this small and rugged little country to lift themselves out of poverty more easily, by permitting entrepreneurs' better access to American markets, and thereby becoming more competitive.

For all these reasons, I hope that the House Subcommittee on Trade will move forward with NTR for Laos as soon as possible. This would be considered a positive step forward for US leadership on trade in Asia, and particularly in the ASEAN region.

Thank you for your consideration and support. With best regards, I remain,
Sincerely,

Michael Hamilton
Country Manager
RM Asia (HK) Limited

Aiea, Hawaii 96701
April 17, 2003

Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Trade,
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives,
United States Congress.

Honorable Neil Abercrombie,
Congressman (Hawaii)
House of Representatives,
United States Congress

Dear Congressmen Crane and Abercrombie:

My name is Pathana Rattanasamay, a Laotian-American community social worker in Hawaii where I have lived and worked for over two decades. I currently am the Executive Director of the non-profit community-based organization, Mutual Assistance Associations Center (MAAC), which assists immigrants and low-income families to become self-sufficient.

I am writing in support of the Bush Administration's recommendation to grant permanent Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to Laos (Lao People's Democratic Republic).

As a community social worker, I truly believe that NTR will not only promote socio-economic well-being for the Laotian population in Laos, but also build a strong and healthy relationship between Laos and United States in both the short and long

term. Moreover, NTR will provide decent employment, especially for Lao women and youth to strengthen their family ties and pride.

The current economic situation in Laos forces many women and children into dangerous and illegal money-making activities, such as prostitution.

For the above reasons, I urge your esteemed Committee to recommend the granting NTR to Laos.

Sincerely,

Pathana Rattanasamay, MSW
Executive Director, MAAC

Potomac Falls, Virginia 20165
April 17, 2003

—Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United States Senate.

—Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means.

—Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means committee,

Re: NTR for Laos

Of importance is the U.S. policy applied to Normal Trade Relations. If it is not applied with justice and logic, then it is punitive rather than reasonable. Laos meets the criteria for NTR. The Lao Embassy never closed its doors in Washington, and the U.S. Embassy remained open in Vientiane. In addition, Laos has agreed to, and supported, U.S. policy and programs for MIA recovery and Drug Suppression.

The U.S. granted NTR to both Vietnam (2002) and Cambodia (1996). Laos has not received NTR, and this must be viewed as an anomaly of U.S. policy. Withholding NTR from one of the world's poorest nations reflects badly on U.S. policy in the region—and the world.

The argument against NTR for Laos is most often made by a small but loud group of political exiles from the former regime:

- a. human rights violations,
- b. political /economic corruption,
- c. lacks a multi-party political system (socialist system), and
- d. lacks a stable monetary and economic infrastructure.

If this same criteria were applied to others who currently enjoy NTR, the list of NTR nations would shrink considerably.

The war is over. We are at peace. It is time to build for a better tomorrow. NTR will build better relations and stronger economic ties between the U.S. and the Lao PDR.

The granting of NTR for Laos is important to the future of U.S. relations in the region. Laos is one of the ten poorest nations in the world. It is also a key nation in South East Asia. Laos has been granted ASEAN status. Laos maintains economic and political relations with Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, and China. Politically, Laos does play a central role in U.S. relations in the area.

More importantly, NTR opens up the future to the Lao people. Positive change has occurred over the last fifteen years. I was in Laos in 1989 and in the years following. I have just again returned from Laos (Nov 2002). The changes from 1989 to present are phenomenal.

The question for the U.S. must be have the Lao made progress as a nation? The answer is a resounding yes. Further progress must now involve economic connection to the world. NTR for Laos will open a new era of political and economic relations.

If Vietnam, Mongolia, Nepal, and Cambodia can be granted NTR—than the U.S. must also take that position with Laos. To do so speaks volumes about who we are as a nation, as a people. It says we have not rejected those who are under-developed, those who are poor, or those in need.

Cambodia Before NTR, 1996 = \$ 3.7 million in exports to U.S.

After NTR, 1997 = \$ 101.7 million in exports to U.S.

Exports to U.S. in 2001: Land-Locked Asian Countries

Laos = \$ 3.9 million No NTR

Mongolia = \$ 143.4 million NTR

Nepal = \$ 200 Million NTR

Conclusion: NTR is critical for land-locked countries.

NTR is a valuable tool in assisting the poorest nations

NTR makes a broad statement on U.S. policy.

In this new era of geo-economic politics, we need to make a clear declaration to the poorest of the poor. NTR for Laos makes the right statement about who we are as a nation—who we are as a people.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerest regards;

Boune Ome Rattanaovong

New York, New York 10013

To: Representative Charles Crane, Chairman subcommittee on trade of the Committee on Ways and Means

Email: TO: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov

CC: laontr@ffrd.org

FAX: 202 225-2610

Congressmen:

I am writing to voice my support for Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos, one of the world's least developed countries. I ask that the legislature pass the necessary legislation to extend NTR to Laos and bring into force the bilateral trade agreements concluded in 1997.

NTR will benefit both the US and Laos. Increased trade between our two countries will lead to greater economic opportunities and swifter economic development in Laos, directly improving people's lives and living standards and also reinforcing the alternative economic development opportunities in anti-narcotics efforts. Greater cultural and human cooperation will encourage more openness, which I believe will accelerate the positive changes achieved over the past few years.

Laos is a member of ASEAN, an organization with which the US is working to strengthen regional stability as part of the ASEAN Initiative. As such, Laos should have the benefit of NTR as does its neighbors and fellow ASEAN members. And normalized trade relations with the US will be a big first step to further integrate Laos into the world trade system.

On a more personal note, I would like to add that the Lao people truly deserve the chance to participate in the world economy with their exquisite talents and handicrafts. My visits to Laos as part of a non-profit group called Aid to Artisans gave me a chance to see the wonderful traditions of a people who struggle patiently and steadfastly to achieve even the most basic steps forward. Bringing Laos into normalized trade relations would help entrepreneurs and craftspeople greatly as they seek to earn their livings and enhance and preserve their country's beautiful traditions.

Thank you.

Keith Recker

Arlington, Virginia 22209
April 6, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane

Re: Extension of Normal Trading Relations Status to Laos

Dear Congressman Crane:

I am writing to express my support for the United States extending normal trade relations with Laos. Doing so would be beneficial for both parties involved for a number of reasons. First of all, US businesses would have the benefit of offering their goods and services to a new consumer market that possess the money to buy these goods. Also, the people of Laos would have new job opportunities provided by US companies seeking to find cheaper sources of labor for their products. Providing these stable jobs would also help in giving people a viable alternative to the country's illicit drug market.

Finally, the issue of human rights abuse of the Hmong people is an important problem that should be address. However, this could be addressed separately and not affect the prospects of increasing the chances of creating a thriving economy in

Laos. I am hoping that you will seriously consider supporting normal trade relations with this country that is in great need of such a policy.

Sincerely,

Jonathan R. Rizalvo

Robin Stevens Consulting, Ltd.
New York, New York 10025

Dear Representative Crane:

I am writing to voice my support for Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos, one of the world's least developed countries. I ask that the Congress pass the necessary legislation to extend NTR to Laos and bring into force the bilateral trade agreements concluded in 1997.

NTR will benefit both the US and Laos. Increased trade between our two countries will lead to greater economic opportunities and swifter economic development in Laos, directly improving people's lives and living standards and also reinforcing the alternative economic development opportunities in anti-narcotics efforts. Greater cultural and human cooperation will encourage more openness, which I believe will accelerate the positive changes achieved over the past few years. I visited Laos in 2001 and was warmly welcomed by many people who live in very poor conditions. I hope that the US will take this step to help them achieve a better standard of living.

Laos is a member of ASEAN, an organization with which the US is working to strengthen regional stability as part of the ASEAN Initiative. As such, Laos should have the benefit of NTR as does its neighbors and fellow ASEAN members. Also, normalized trade relations with the US will be a big first step to further integrate Laos into the world trade system.

Thank you.

Robin C. Stevens

Washington, DC 20009
April 16, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

I would like to express my strong support for the extension of normal trade relations (NTR) to Laos.

Like many Americans who lived and worked in Laos in the late 1960s, I have mixed feelings about the role that the United States played there. I continue to be proud of what we did to help the Lao develop their country but pained by the impact of a long war. I am also keenly aware of how much the Lao people have suffered since 1975—both those who fled and those who remained. We cannot undo that history, but we can and must move beyond it.

I continue to maintain the same hopes that motivated my work as a Foreign Service officer in Laos—that Laos might rise from the ranks of least-developed nations; that the Lao people might enjoy a higher standard of living and greater freedom; and that there might be deeper understanding and broader cooperation between our two countries. I am convinced that extending NTR status would be a very important step toward achieving those objectives. The normalization of economic relationships is long overdue, particularly in light of the fact that neighboring Cambodia and Vietnam already benefit from NTR status.

I urge you and the Committee to give these proposals serious and positive consideration.

Sincerely,

Harlan F. Rosacker

My letter to Chairman Crane dated April 16, 2003 is from me as a private citizen. I am a retired federal employee who served in Laos between 1967 and 1969.

Woodside, New York 11377
 April 20, 2003

Congressman Philip M. Crane
 Chairman, subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on
 Ways and Means

Mr. Chairman,

My name is William W. Sage. I am currently a resident of New York City. For 34 years, I have either worked in Laos or been an observer of developments in this Southeast Asian country of 5.5 million people. Since 1998, I have been Adjunct Professor in the Program for Southeast Asian Studies at Arizona State University. I give annual lectures on Laos for the Program and have worked with the Program to establish a greater interest and study of Laos as part of Southeast Asia Program. I am co-author of *Laos: A Bibliography* and contributor to the conference proceedings of *New Laos, New Challenges* held at Arizona State University in June 1996. I contribute occasional articles to "*Suwanabhumi*", the ASU Program for SEAS newsletter.

I am writing this letter in support of the Administration proposal to grant Normal Trade Relations with Laos. I believe the time has come to grant Laos NTR.

My association with Laos began in 1969 when I served as a volunteer with the International Voluntary Services and then became an employee of the United States Agency for International Development until 1975 when the country was taken over by the Communist Pathet Lao. I was among the last Americans to be evacuated from Laos.

Following the Communist takeover of the country, there followed a massive flight of refugees from the country. I was the administrator of the US Refugee Program headquartered in Bangkok from 1977 to 1981. During my four years as director, over 100,000 refugees, the majority being refugees from Laos were processed by my office for resettlement to the US. Those refugees who were resettled in the US, fled the regime for well founded reasons of persecution as well as gross violations of human rights. It was during this period of time that thousands of Laotians were rounded up and forced into re-education camps around the country. Many of those who were kept in the camps were not released for years while others perished in the camps.

From 1981 until 1983, I worked with Laotians in this country in their resettlement process. I have worked with many communities around the US and continue to maintain contact with most of these communities.

In 1983 until 1985 I worked for a US non-profit organization which was implementing drought relief programs in western India. I returned to the US in 1985 to begin a 15 year period of assisting refugees around the world including Africa, Bosnia and Kosovo. In 2000 I retired from this US non-profit organization to take up an assignment with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in New Delhi India where I worked for the resettlement of Afghan and Burmese refugees.

On September 11, I was asked to administer a recovery program for the families of the victims of September 11 here in New York City. I continue to work in the capacity at present.

Because of the Communist takeover in Laos in 1975 until 1994, I like many other Americans, was not able to visit Laos. I returned for my first visit in 1994 and have continued to visit Laos each year and in some years twice a year. My purpose, a personal mission, was to observe the changes, if any, that were taking place in Laos. I read everything I could find in reports about the human rights conditions in the country as well as economic reports published by international monetary lending institutions financing development projects in Laos. I also traveled to many parts of the country to personally observe developments and talked with personnel of the foreign embassies accredited to Laos, in Vientiane. I am a fluent speaker of the Lao language. My last visit to Laos was March 2002 following the elections for representatives of the National Assembly.

In my view, Laos has gone from some of the most deplorable human rights abuses in the late 70's to the end of the 80's to a current era of improved human rights record. The improved record does not reveal that the record is perfect but it does reflect considerable improvement in particularly the last few years. Still, there is some way to go before the record can be assessed as good. In my view, Laos is no where as abusive towards its people as the other countries which do not have NTR, North Korea and Cuba.

A number of reasons have been put forward as to why NTR should be granted to Laos. I am aware of those reasons but in my view the most important reason

for granting NTR is so that citizens of that country can market and export their goods, particularly handicrafts, to the US with out the excessively high import taxes faced by those goods. In my view, it would be better for citizens of that country to earn income from the goods they can sell abroad rather than relying upon the remittances sent by relatives and friends in this country. By some estimates, as much as 25% of the residents of the capital, Vientiane, receive remittances from relatives in the US as an annual income. The 2000 census indicates that there are as many as 478,000 Laotians (ethnic Lao, Hmong and other tribal groups) now in this country. Rather than remitting millions of dollars to relatives in Laos, it seems to me that the goods that relatives in Laos can sell abroad to earn an income, would be a primary reason for granting NTR and thereby reducing the high import tax.

Laos a moved from a centrally planned economy to a free market economy. NTR will benefit not only citizens of Laos with their incomes but will also continue to move the ree market economy forward as we have seen with its neighbors Cambodia and Viet Nam.

I support granting Laos Normal Trade Relations.

Signed,

William W. Sage

Washington, D.C. 20001

Congressman Philip M. Crane
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Fax (202) 225-2610

Dear Congressman Crane:

I am a Lao-American who is deeply concerned of the future relations between the United States and that of Laos. In response to the public comment period, I am writing you to urge you and the Congress to ratify the Bilateral Trade Agreement signed between Laos and the United States, and thus giving Laos normalized trade status along with Cambodia and Vietnam.

I, like many Lao-Americans, still have family and friends in Laos who are struggling and would benefit greatly with the opening of trade between the two countries. Ratifying the Bilateral Trade Agreement will give our families in Laos a chance for a better life by opening new markets with little or no duties levied on Lao products and crafts to the U.S. Also, granting Laos normalized trade relations will only strengthen U.S.-Laos relations and encourage the rule of law and create situations conducive to political accountability and transparency. The benefits of open trade and engagement outweigh any perceived disadvantages. U.S.-Laos relations is at a crucial junction in history where you and the Congress are charged with the solemn duty to make the right choice for the American and the Lao people. I urge that the Congress make the right decision.

Very truly yours,

Kongphanh Santivong (KP), Esq.

Arizona 85302

Honorable,

As an American citizen, I wholeheartedly support the joint proposal of Honorable Colin L. Powell, State Secretary and Honorable Robert B. Zoellick, US Trade Representative in granting the Permanent Normal Trade Relations to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The Lao PDR is the only country in the area that haven't got such facility yet although its politico-social situations are far better than others.

I should appreciate if you could take the said proposal and my noble wish in consideration and render to Laos the fairness and real touch of the US generosity towards a country that maintaining good relations and cooperation's with the Unites States.

Once again I thank you very much for your kind cooperation

Sincerely yours,

Kwanchit Sattanak

Takoma Park, Maryland 20912
27 March 2003

The Honorable
Philip M. Crane, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Trade,
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

It is my pleasure and privilege to submit this document to the Subcommittee on Trade to express my full support for granting the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) Permanent Normal Trade Relation (NTR) Status.

As you are aware, the only action required to grant permanent NTR status to Laos and to enact the previously negotiated US-Lao PDR 1997 bilateral trade agreement is for Congress to enact legislation amending the Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) to strike Laos permanently from General Note 3(b). On February 24, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell and United States Trade Representative Robert Zoellick sent a joint letter to Congress expressing the Administration's support for extending NTR status to Laos and for bringing into force the 1997 agreement.

Since 1999 I have lived and worked in the Lao PDR, advising the government on tourism development policy under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). During this period, I have witnessed the country slowly but steadily open up and pursue a policy of cooperation and integration with regional and world institutions. There has also been a serious push towards alleviating poverty and raising the standard of living of the country's multi-ethnic society. As one of the world's least developed nations, economic hardship and limited human resources have seriously limited these efforts. Granting the Lao PDR NTR status will have far reaching implications for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development, while accelerating the country's integration into the world economy. Granting NTR can also result in substantial financial benefits for US citizens, especially for the some 380,000 Americans of Laotian descent. This pool of technical and entrepreneurial talent is well placed to initiate and sustain US-Lao trade and investment, supported by Lao government policy that encourages "overseas Lao" to invest in and trade with the country. Granted, the Lao PDR's market is small at around 5 million consumers, however, mutually beneficial investment opportunities exist across a range of sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, agro-forestry and infrastructure development.

I expect that there will be arguments presented to the Subcommittee that do not support granting Lao PDR NTR based on the country's human rights record and form of governance. In my experience working closely with both the Government and people of the country, I have seen a trend towards increasing transparency in the political process and a policy of peaceful reconciliation with the Hmong and other ethnic groups that sided with the U.S. Government during the Indochina War. Granting NTR status will be followed by increased international engagement and liberalization of the Lao economy that is likely to expedite this process.

In conclusion, I thank you for recognizing this document in support of granting the Lao People's Democratic Republic Permanent Normal Trade Relation Status. Doing so will both promote U.S. interests through engagement and assist the country to improve its economy and raise the standard of living for its citizens based on U.S.-Lao trade and investment which has thus far been suppressed by inaction by the Congress to amend the HTA and strike Lao PDR from General Note 3(b).

Sincerely,

Steven Schipani

Troy, Michigan 48084
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Phil Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
House Committee on Ways and Means
Hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov

Dear Congressman Crane:

I am writing to recommend to the Subcommittee on Trade that Normal Trade Relations be extended to Laos. Only three countries in the world do not have normal trade relations with the United States. Laos does not even fall near the same cat-

egory in terms of human rights violations and political differences. It seems to me that extending NTR to Laos will assist in changing political and security differences in ways that are consistent with the interests of the United States.

The common people of Laos will benefit from being able to produce competitive goods and services for the American market. "For example, since Cambodia gained NTR Status in 1997, its private sector exports to the United States have grown from about \$6 million worth of natural resource products to \$1.1Billion worth of clothing, furniture and other products per year. These export sales now employ about 200,000 Cambodians. The same benefits should be given to the people of Laos, which would raise their standard of living."

1/31/2003

[Http://www.vientianetimes.com/Stories/w003/02012003_public_remarks_hartwick.html](http://www.vientianetimes.com/Stories/w003/02012003_public_remarks_hartwick.html)

Through NTR the people of Laos, who have modest skills today, would be able to develop skills, which produce high quality silk and other handicrafts. With lower tariffs they would be able to sell their silk and build a huge market for their goods. In turn they would be able to buy products from the United States.

NTR would promote other changes as well. Doing business with Americans would promote a stronger rule of law: commercial, environmental, treatment of workers and even human rights. The Lao government would need to make changes to its system to take advantage of American markets, which will ultimately result in greater economic and political freedoms in Laos.

All of these changes will provide an improved climate for the resolution of the fate of Americans still missing and unaccounted for in Laos. For example, in my brother's case, refno 1541, his crash site was identified for excavation in October, 1998. At that time I was told that it would be seven years before we could expect the excavation to take place. It is now 4 and ½ years later and it is still seven years before we can expect an excavation due to the inability of the Lao to field larger teams. Perhaps our recognition, through NTR, would encourage them to move more swiftly to accomplish what they have already agreed to. In comparison with Vietnam their willingness to work with the United States has been far greater than in Vietnam, who has repeatedly agreed to cooperation and still doesn't do what they could have. Laos has tried to work with us. They deserve the recognition that NTR brings as a country who is working to join the international arena.

Opening Laos to world markets also opens their people to understanding differing political options as more businessmen from the United States travel to Laos. The positive spiral these opportunities would begin is unlimited in its scope and serves the interests of the United States.

Thanks for this opportunity to make my ideas known as you consider Normal Trade Relations with Laos.

Sincerely,

Sue Scott

Sister,

Capt. Douglas D. Ferguson, USAF

Missing: 12/30/69

Washington, D.C. 20006
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to express my support for granting normal trade relations (NTR) for Laos, the only country with which we have full diplomatic relations but not normal trade relations. This is an anomaly that should be corrected.

Granting NTR will help promote the integration of Laos into the international economy, and will give the United States the means to promote a better business climate and develop business opportunities through the provisions of the bilateral trade agreement. It will help generate jobs in one of the world's poorest countries, promote transparency in business practices, and encourage achievement of international standards in quality. Moreover, it will facilitate strengthening economic re-

lations with ASEAN as a whole, including advancing President Bush's innovative ASEAN Enterprise Initiative.

We have had a difficult relationship with Laos for a number of years, principally on human rights and religious tolerance. However, I believe that extending NTR will encourage the Government of Laos to adopt policies consistent with internationally acceptable standards for human rights and religious tolerance. In addition, extending NTR to Laos will promote ever better cooperation between our two countries as we seek to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans from the Indochina war and continue our work together to combat narcotics. Laos has also been supportive of international and regional efforts to fight international terrorism in the wake of September 11.

I note that both Secretary Powell and Ambassador Zoellick have expressed full support for the granting of NTR to Laos. I fully concur with their arguments and hope that the United States Congress will see fit to grant Laos normal trade relations this session.

Sincerely,

Brent Scowcroft

St. Davids, Pennsylvania 19087
March 26, 2003

Memorandum

To: *Committee on Ways on Means, Subcommittee on Trade*

Subject: *Laos*

The following represents my submission to the House Ways and Means Committee, together with my strong recommendation that the country of Laos be given normal trade status with the United States.

I. Personal Credentials:

I have just completed my eighth visit to the country of Laos. My first came as the head of World Vision, the largest international relief and development agency in the world. I also conducted a number of visits to this country as the first U.S. Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom in the years 1998–2000. I am now the president of the Institute for Global Engagement, an NGO dedicated towards creating sustainable environments for religious freedom in some of the most difficult parts of the world. In the course of these visits I have relationships developed and nurtured at the grassroots, throughout the NGO community in Laos, and in the government itself. I have been on the ground in most of the provinces from north to south. I have met face-to-face with government officials at the state, province, district and village levels. I have talked extensively with members of the indigenous churches in a variety of faith expressions. I have met with people who have suffered because of their faith. In the summer of 2002, the Institute for Global Engagement sponsored the first high-level delegation of members of the Lao National Front to the United States. The invitation was extended through Congressman Joseph Pitts. This delegation of six individuals spent 15 days in the States, meeting with all of the relevant government agencies, different Lao-American groups from all parts of the political spectrum, and, in general, was exposed to a country that respects religious freedom, viewing this freedom as one of the core values of our country's history.

II. Updating the Snapshot:

It is very important that you look at information emerging incrementally from 1999 to the present. In 1999 we were experiencing forced renunciations of faith, the closing of churches, and the jailing of a number of individuals. This was somewhat prevalent throughout Laos but especially true in Savannakhet Province. That situation has improved immeasurably. The issue of religious freedom has been intentionally promoted from the outside. Dialogue has taken place with key government officials, especially members of the Lao National Front. IGE has worked in tandem with the American Embassy in Vientiane, supporting one another in an effort to cement this human right in both governmental structures and personalities throughout Laos. Progress has been steady. Although that progress has been, and will continue to be, uneven, there have also been points of dramatic change. I have already referenced the visit of the Lao National Front to the United States in the summer of 2002. The following month we witnessed the release of 34 of the 37 known Christians jailed because of their faith throughout Laos. The impact of this prisoner re-

lease cannot be overstated. It is not always easy to get cooperation from local officials for these releases. Communication is difficult in a country that suffers because of a limited infrastructure. The releases came about through a very intentional move on the part of the government to demonstrate good faith, to acknowledge the importance of good relationships with people of faith, and to demonstrate to the international community that this issue was becoming more important to the Lao government. Given the major endemic problems within Laos such as a 70% illiteracy rate, 40% of the population living below the poverty line, and so on, the attention given to this issue in the past couple of years has been truly remarkable.

The most difficult province for religious freedom has been Savannakhet. I have visited this province twice in the last three years. In February 2003 we were there again, visiting with the governor as well as various other officials at the district and village level. Even in Savannakhet, with all of its history of repression, we have seen positive progress. We have worked hard to cement the notion that the international community is very much aware of what is happening in Savannakhet. For the first time I feel we have the attention of the key government officials there, with some assurance that positive progress will continue to be realized.

I cannot stress enough the need to see beyond the past, look at the direction that the Lao government is going, and measure the progress that has been made in the last few years, all of which projects legitimate optimism for the future.

III. Visitors To The United States:

During this trip in February 2003, for the first time, I felt that there was a clear indication that the government of Laos was looking with intentionality towards the West. Part of what is happening in Laos today is the increasing number of government officials visiting the United States. In February, there were four provincial governors in the States. As mentioned above, we had six members of the Lao National Front with us last summer. Key government officials have had time to reflect on the values in America, why we feel the issue of religious freedom is so important, and how religion, practiced at its best, poses no threat to any government. These visitors have also had the opportunity to talk to numerous Lao-American groups. In these discussions, invariably the knee-jerk hate-mongering that has characterized some of the stereotypes of the past quickly disappear and an honest exchange of views takes place. Every one of these conversations has resulted in a more positive understanding of what is taking place in Laos today. I think that this critical mass of opinion that is being generated through these visits has been extremely helpful to the human rights agenda. Certainly this issue is now more than politics, and our Lao counterparts increasingly realize that Americans are passionate about their beliefs, those beliefs are deeply held, indeed they are imbedded in our historic values.

IV. Major Obstacles Confronting The Lao:

I have mentioned the huge problem with illiteracy in Laos. The educational system is desperately in need of help. The legal system is also operating at a rudimentary level. Rule of Law definitely has to be strengthened, but I found a number of personalities who understand this and are working hard to build an appropriate legal system. The point here is that if one were to rank the problems that Laos needs to solve, from a Laotian point of view, human rights would not be very high on the list. The fact that this issue is getting more and more attention today is a tribute to moderates in the government who see the value of a better human rights record in the context of governmental stability and international acceptance. In this context, Normal Trade Relations are absolutely essential. As Laos works on its endemic issue, we cannot allow the country to fall further behind the curve in a world that is changing at an exponential rate.

V. An American Response:

We can prevent Laos from slipping further behind on the world stage. We should encourage the steps that they have already taken, specifically the very positive progress that we have seen in religious freedom issues these last few years. Laos very much needs to have a level playing field with respect to trade. This initiative on our part will provide them with one. It would also enhance their own initiatives to reduce poverty and illiteracy in the country. Laos has taken a big step forward. We have the ability to sustain that step by creating this economic enhancement for them. In my mind, we have absolutely nothing to gain by denying this trade status. Indeed, we would only play into the hands of the hardliners and the benefits that many of them receive by maintaining the status quo. For all of us working on the issues of human rights, Normal Trade Relations with the West would be a most encouraging sign. It is one that we can do. I recommend most strongly that Laos be granted this trade status.

Ambassador Robert A. Seiple

I feel a need to update the facts of my testimony for ntr and laos, NOT to change my recommendation. I used a situation in the village of Keng Kok in southern Laos as the basis for a positive testimony. That situation has now taken a turn for the worse. I can provide details if desired. The bad news is that the district official in Keng Kok created additional oppression on the Christians in that village; the good news is that we were able to get the attention of the central officials, from the Deputy Prime Minister on down, to intervene. As is often the case in countries like Laos, "two steps forward, one step back." Again, this is simply to correct the facts. I have never thought that NTR should be used as either a reward or a punishment but rather as another arrow in our engagement quiver. For me, NTR is only a point of leverage ONCE it exists because of the additional access it provides in dealing with a situation like the one referenced above. I continue to strongly support NTR for the country of Laos. Please contact me if there are any questions.

Brooklyn Park, Minnesota 55445
April 16, 2003

Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade
Ways and Means Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Fax: 202-225-2610

Dear Chairman Crane:

I am writing to voice my support for Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos. As a Laotian-American I would like to recommend the approval of the bilateral trade agreement with Laos, which would normalize trade relations with a country that has been denied fair treatment as a trading partner due to the legacy of the Vietnam War. I feel strongly that the trade agreement would be a catalyst for economic development and social and educational progress in Laos.

I came to the US in 1978 as a refugee. Unfortunately my father, who worked for the royal Lao government prior to 1975, became a political prisoner and spent five years in re-education camp. After his release from re-education camp in 1980, he chose to rebuild his life in Laos, rather than join us in the United States.

Despite my experiences, I have held a desire to return to Laos for various reasons: one, the desire to rekindle a relationship with my father; second, to contribute my personal knowledge and experience to the development of Laos; and to rediscover and learn about my cultural and social heritage.

From personal experience, there are many Laotian-Americans, who like myself who feel strongly about making positive changes and contributing to the development of Laos.

A positive step in this direction would be for the US government to sign the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). The BTA is necessary to enable Laos to participate in the global economy.

I first returned to Laos in 1989. Little has changed since 1975. Since 1989, Laos has developed at an extremely slow pace compared to its neighbors, such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Much of the country still lacks basic services such as potable water, electrical and telephone service, farming irrigation, and paved roads.

The BTA between the United States and Laos is not a panacea to the economic development of Laos, but it will stimulate hope. Thus I strongly recommend that the United States establish normalized trade relations with Laos and begin by signing the BTA with Laos. The BTA will also promote cultural, social, and educational dialogue and exchanges between Laos and the US.

Finally, the BTA will encourage Laotian-Americans to participate in the development of Laos through trade and commercial exchange and technical assistance.

Thank you,

Narin Sihavong

Chicago, Illinois 60601

Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman
 Subcommittee on Trade
 Ways and Means Committee
 House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515
 Fax: 202-225-2610

Dear Chairman Crane,

I am writing to voice my support for Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos. I ask that the legislature pass the necessary legislation to extend NTR to Laos and bring into force the bilateral trade agreements concluded in 1997. I believe that the citizens of the United States (especially Laotian-Americans like myself) and Laos will benefit greatly from the NTR.

As you may already know, Laos is one of the world's least developed countries. However, increased trade between our two countries will lead to greater economic opportunities and swifter economic development in Laos, directly improving people's lives and living standards and also reinforcing the alternative economic development opportunities in anti-narcotics efforts. Furthermore, greater cultural and human cooperation will encourage more openness, which I believe will accelerate the positive changes achieved over the past few years.

I am mindful that trade agreements negotiated by the Executive Branch and approved by Congress are only the first stage of stronger and more mutually beneficial ties. And I am also well aware that it is incumbent upon the government of Laos to provide American companies and their own state and private enterprises with the legal framework and operational authority they need to pursue successful trade and investments.

After 1975, the United States and Laos maintained official ties when relations with Vietnam and Cambodia had been completely severed. It is time to remove discriminatory tariff barriers and to take this last major step toward the normalization of relations. I look forward to working with you to achieve this. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Sadachanh Sinantha

Rogers, Minnesota 55374

To: Honorable Philip M. Crane; Chairman; Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee.

This letter is in strong support of granting normal relation status (NTR) to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos).

More than twenty years in the U.S, I and many Laotian-American still have a need for goods and services that used to be part of our daily lives back in our motherland. These goods, which include arts and craft, agricultural products and canned food items, are unavailable to us here in the United States. As a Laotian-American and a small Business owner, I see this as a promising job and business opportunity. Granting NTR status to Laos will allow me and others entrepreneurs to pursue our ideas. Thanks.

Thomas Sisaket

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

SE-11264 Stockholm, Sweden
 14 April 2003

To Honorable William Thomas, Chairman
 Committee on Ways and Means,
 House of Representatives
 Washington DC. 20515

Dear Honorable William Thomas,

May I introduce myself. My name is Bounlom Sithammavanh, lao student in Sweden. I am very glad and honoured to have the opportunity to send my letter to you.

I am aware that the American Congress will pass the hearings of the agreement on Trade Relations (NTR) between USA and Laos soon. I am sure that you and your American Congressmen will give this support to the Laos so that our Government and people could receive the NTR.

Being back to Lao-American relations in the past time, our two countries have never cut the diplomatic relations before. Our relation of friendship and cooperation is normal. The Lao side has given the good cooperation to the USA, for example, the MIA and drug cooperation in Laos, but the American side has supported the numbers of projects on the rural development and human resource development, etc— However, our both countries must strengthen the bilateral cooperation in the interest of two countries.

Of course, granting this NTR agreement to Laos will benefit not only Lao people but also it can protect the interests of American business people working in Laos. Furthermore, the official adoption of this agreement at the Congress will improve and strengthen the relations of friendship and economic and trade cooperation between our two countries. The Lao business people will enjoy the rights to trade and investment with the Americans. The volume of trade and investment between our two countries will be increased after the Congress adopt this agreement.

In addition to this, Lao and American markets will be expanded in both countries. At the same time the products of our two countries will be also increased for the interests of our two countries.

Dear William Thomas, Chairman,

I do hope that with the efforts of American Congressmen the Lao people will get the NTR soon. The positive decision by the Congress helps my country get rid of the poverty. It will also contribute to developing and promoting the reform, human rights and democracy.

Faithfully,

Bounlom Sithammavanh
Lao student in Sweden

Spring Valley, California 91977
April 21, 2003

Honorable Philip M. Crane,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
of the Committee on Ways and Means,
House of Representatives. USA
E-mail: hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov

Honorable Philip M. Crane,

My name is Anourack Soukhaseum, a U.S. citizen living in California.

I have learned with great satisfaction that a letter jointly signed by H.E. Mr. Colin Powell, State Secretary, together with H.E. Mr. Robert Zoellick, US Trade Representative, has been sent to the Committee on Finance, United States Senate, and to the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, to request the approval of an Agreement between the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the United States of America on Trade Relations containing a disposition on NTR.

I therefore would like to express my great appreciation and sincere congratulation to the US Government for its appropriate decision to support the approval of the bilateral Agreement on Trade Relations.

I understand very well that our countries, the USA and Laos, have enjoyed a diplomatic relation for more than half a century. Today, we can observe with pleasure that our bilateral relations are moving on the right direction, gradually developed and broadened in many fields including a trade and investment promotion.

In this regard, we would like to point out one important issue relating directly to the memory and spirit of the Lao and American people such as the Missing In Action issue which remains a painful and unforgettable aftermath of the very long and destructive war in our country. At the present time, we are witnessing a very fruitful co-operation on this sensitive issue. One Hundred Seventy Nine MIA's remains have already been returned to the US Government. The last hand over ceremony was held recently on February 19, 2003 in Vientiane.

I am firmly convinced that the bilateral Agreement on Trade Relations will not only give advantage to Lao people in Laos and in USA, but also will contribute to the enhancement of bilateral relations and the deepening of the people understanding of our two countries.

NTR will serve as a strong incentive for positive change for the people in Laos in gaining more independence economically from her neighbors. Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia who are currently benefiting from NTR are moving forward economically in the right direction. I am confident that providing similar opportunities, Laos will have similar results.

I therefore support and strongly request that an Agreement between the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the United States of America on Trade Relations be approved by the Senate in the near future.

Sincerely yours,

Anourack Soukhaseum

Spyder Active Sports
Boulder, CO 80301
April 17, 2003

To: House Committee On Ways And Means
Subcommittee On Subcommittee On Trade

Re: Extension of Permanent Normal Trade relations Status to Laos

To Whom It May Concern:

Spyder Active Sports is one of the leading ski apparel companies in the world based in Boulder Colorado. We are the exclusive suppliers of ski racing apparel to the United States Ski Team. We have been doing business with factories in Laos, and would do considerably more business there if Laos were granted Normal Trade Relations status. We strongly support NTR for Laos and feel that it would increase business opportunities for US companies. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

B. Jake Jacobs
*Vice President of Merchandising
Spyder Active Sports*

Cc: William Houston

Glendale, California 91206
19 April 2003

Honorable Congressman Phillip M. Crane (R-IL)
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the committee on Ways and Means

Dear Mr. Crane:

I just want you to know I protest our country giving any financial aid to the country of Armenia and/or to allow normal trade relations.

Recently Mr. Adam Schiff (D) presented to you and the House and ways appropriations committee his arguments as to why our country should give more aid to Armenia.

First of all; Armenia does not support our war on terror, does not support the war against Iraq, and they are against our relationship we have with Turkey and Israel.

Mr. Adam schiff has also claimed that Armenia is a strategic country, a democracy surrounded by hostile neighbors, and that Armenia has gained their independence from the Soviet Union.

In our city of Glendale, California we have the largest Armenian immigrant population anywhere in the United States. Everyone in our city and in any other Armenian community knows. Armenia just a few years after they obtained there independence from the Soviet Union, signed an Agreement with Russia to become a federation. Armenia is not in anyway shape or form an independent country.

Mr. Adam Schiff also contends that Armenia is a democracy. I would have to say; this is also incorrect. Just recently, Armenian immigrants that live in the United States, were allowed to vote in the recent Armenian presidential election. What Armenian immigrants quickly learned to their dismay. How Armenia is anything but a democracy.

What I believe you should do? Give this money to the families of our coalition forces. These men and women have actually done something for our nation, and are the kind of people that made America what it is today (The Greatest nation on earth).

If that is not an option, give this money to the countries that formed the coalition. In spite of world opinion, these countries stood behind America. Whether or not they were able to fight along side Americans, or could afford to contribute financially etc., they were at least there for us. Armenia was not and is not, behind America.

Any aid we give to any country should go to the countries that actually have proven they are our allies. Otherwise our country will continue to repeat history. Thank you.

Sincerely,

John E. Stevenson

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

S-223 62 Lund, Sweden
15 April 2003

Honorable Philip M. Crane,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee
on Ways and Means, House of Representatives
Washington D.C. USA.

I have heard that on the 27 February 2003 Mr. Colin Powell, a State Secretary of the United States of America and Mr. Robert Zoellick, Head of US Trade Representatives of White House sent a joint letter to the Financial Committee, Congress and Subcommittee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives in order to submit an agreement between the United States of America and the Lao People's Democratic Republic on trade Relations (NTR). I appreciate the decision by the US government to support the agreement.

As you know, among the ASEAN countries the NTR with the USA has not been granted to the Lao PDR yet, because of misunderstanding the facts about Laos by individuals and small groups of people in America being against the NTR granting.

In reality, Laos and USA have had the normal diplomatic relations for 53 years. The Lao PDR and the USA must make the NTR agreement materialised to meet the need of cooperation and promotion of trade and investment between our two countries.

On the Lao-US cooperation, in the Lao PDR there is a very successful and close cooperation between our two countries on searching the remains of the American soldiers missing in the Indochina war. Up to now the Lao government has given 179 cases of the American soldiers back to the American Government and families. These activities are carried out successfully and highly appreciated by the number of Congress and delegations of the United States of America who have visited Laos. The Lao-US drug cooperation is also implemented successfully and the opium cultivation in Laos will get rid in the year of 2005. At the same time, the Lao PDR strongly condemn the attack by terrorists in America on the 11 September 2001. The Lao Government have supported their cooperation with the International Community particularly with the Government of the United States of America to fight against terrorism.

Laos is a full member of ASEAN and the USA is also their dialogue partner. The ASEAN-US trade cooperation is increasing and leading to the opening of free trade market in the two regions. Recently, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America declared that the USA would support American enterprises for the ASEAN initiatives, promotion of the investment creating the capacity for American free trade area with the ASEAN countries.

The Lao PDR who lacks the NTR with USA is an obstacle for ASEAN to open the ASEAN-US free trade in the future, it makes the USA also live behind their trade competitors in the region particularly the people's Republic of China, because China has already set up the China-ASEAN trade area. If the USA delays the granting of NTR to Laos the USA will miss the opportunity to cooperate with Laos in trade and investment.

Granting the NTR to Lao Government will promote the number of trade and investment of the USA in the Lao PDR. The USA is a second largest foreign investor in Laos. This step will contribute to promoting the reform, market economic mechanism, particularly promoting administration of laws, human rights and democracy.

The granting NTR will help Laos open the domestic market for the US products and services. It will also protect the intellectual property rights of the US.

This step will help Laos reduce the poverty and the USA must give the priority to Lao PDR, because Laos is a peace-loving country who has no any conflict with

its neighbouring countries. The Laos people are hospitable and friendly and Laos is an attractive place for tourism.

So, Laos and their people must receive the NTR. It will bring the benefit not only to the Lao people in the country but also to a hundred thousand of those Lao Americans who are expecting the promotion of trade and investment with their own country.

Hopefully, the United States of America as a superpower country must be optimistic by taking positively the NTR issues into consideration.

Faithfully,

Damrong Tayanin
*Ph.D.,
Research Assistant.*

Ten Thousand Villages
Akron, Pennsylvania 17501
April 16, 2003

Fax to:
Hearing Clerk
House Ways and Means
202-225-2610

Chairman Philip Crane
House Subcommittee on Trade
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane,

On behalf of Ten Thousand Villages, a fair-trade organization that sells handicrafts from Laos, I am writing to ask you to approve the bilateral trade agreement signed by the United States and Laos in 1998. The agreement was submitted to Congress by President Bush as part of his trade agenda this year.

The lack of normal trade relations (NTR) with Laos hurts people in both countries, including Ten Thousand Villages and the artisans from Phontong Handicrafts, the cooperative we have been buying from for the past 20 years.

Laos is at a serious disadvantage surrounded by Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia, all of whom have NTR. With tariffs up to 90 percent on some of the goods we import and an additional 60-80 percent in freight costs due to Laos being a land-locked country, we are limited in what we are able to purchase from Laos. If we were to take a direct mark-up according to costs as any normal for-profit business would do, these products would be overpriced for our markets and we would not be trading with Laos.

As a non-profit organization, Ten Thousand Villages is a business with a mission, helping to create jobs in places like Laos, where there are many skilled artisans that desperately need income-making opportunities. By applying mark-ups based on average costs we are able to keep prices for Lao products competitive, and successfully market some of them.

However, this is only possible because our purchases from Laos are currently such a small percentage of our total purchases, about 5 percent (compared to 23 percent from India, our largest supplier). The approval of normal trade relations and subsequent reduction of our importing costs would allow us to increase our purchases from Laos.

There are 200 fair trade stores across the United States that primarily sell Ten Thousand Villages products. Many of these stores have expressed their appreciation of Laotian handicrafts and would benefit from selling Lao products.

Laos is one of only a handful of countries which enjoy diplomatic relations with the United States but still lack normal trade relations. Please work to grant normal trade relations and the implementation of the trade agreement as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Paul Meyers
Executive Director
Stacy Spivak
Buyer, SouthEast Asia

This statement made on behalf of:
Ten Thousand Villages

Akron, PA 17501

Contact Persons: Paul Myers, Executive Director and Stacy Spivak, Buyer for SouthEast Asia.

Washington, D.C. 20011
April 21, 2003

Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman
 Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways and Means
 House of Representatives
 United States Congress

Dear Mr. Chairman,

We join others in the Hmong-, Khmu-, Lao-, Mien-American and other Laotian American communities (all referred to as Laotian Americans throughout this letter) to submit comments for the possible granting of Normalized Trade Relations (NTR) status to Laos. Under your leadership, we understand the Committee on Ways and Means will embark on a historic process that may shape the future of Laos and her people. We want to add our perspective to this most important act which we believe may have profound consequences beyond the decision itself. We know that Laos is the last of the three "Indochinese" countries under consideration for this critical inclusion in the U.S.'s international trade agenda. We thank you for not forgetting this small country which has played a pivotal role in U.S. history in that region. We understand that the granting of NTR can open doors, paving a road towards igniting formal cooperation on international trade engagement and discourse on other issues such as human rights and democracy. In our eyes, this symbolic step will set the necessary foundations, enabling both countries to build a promising structure for economic growth and prosperity.

First, we want to make clear that our primary interests are to find ways for people within our communities to heal and find some closure as they mourn the losses they experienced after the Vietnam War. Granting NTR to Laos can be one step towards this healing process. The manner in which this discussion takes place will determine the level of challenges for future progress and U.S. engagement in Laos. For the U.S. it is a technical step. For members of our community and family, this is an incredibly emotional issue. As the children of that generation, our primary role is to seek diplomatic engagement with anyone who may share a similar vision of healing and moving towards a future which might free us from past conflicts. Our purpose is to help build trusting bridges with communities and the people of Laos through constructive and transparent engagement. Also, as Americans who value and believe in the humane treatment of all people, we also aim to ensure that U.S. policies protect the rights of ordinary people in developing countries such as Laos.

It is a well known fact that Laotian Americans were close allies with the U.S. during the Vietnam conflict. To put it bluntly, Laotian Americans saved American GIs' lives and sacrificed their own lives so that Americans can come home to their families. Today, more than 500,000 Laotian Americans have rebuilt their lives and made the U.S. their home. Based on the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), more than 241,956 Laotians entered the U.S. as refugees between 1975 and 2000 to seek safe haven for resettlement. Also as a result of the war, we must not forget that Laos was one of the countries most heavily bombed during the War by the American military.

After more than 25 years, we believe Laos holds tremendous potentials for the U.S. market. At the same time, Laotian Americans have also built American neighborhoods and society with our hard work, ideas and rich cultures. For these reasons, we understand that people whose roots can be traced to Laos, on both sides of the ocean deserve ours and your attention and support now more than ever.

This agreement is a major step in the process of healing, reconstruction and long over-due commitment by the U.S. It also signals the willingness of the Lao government to open its country to international engagement. Most importantly, it should serve as a signal by the U.S. to expand its economic ties and obligation for development aid to the people of Laos. What is most unique is that Laotian Americans can be a part of this process.

Although NTR promises engagement and opening Laos for other developments, we fear that on the contrary, these kinds of agreements can also allow transnational corporations more freedom to exploit workers and to shape the national and global economy to suit their interests. Beyond the general boilerplate of what is included

in a bilateral trade agreement, of which we are not permitted to review, my colleague and I recommend the following:

- **Worker Rights and Environmental Protections:** Labor rights and environmental protections should have the same status as the protection of investors. Working conditions must comply with international recognized core labor standards by the ILO and binding on all member countries, including the U.S. and Laos. These labor standards are the right to freedom of association, to organize and bargain collectively and to be free from child labor, prison, bounded or indentured labor and discrimination in employment. Any agreement with Laos should consider factors which will be conducive to equal distribution of wealth and therefore equitable development. Agreements similar to the U.S.—Cambodia Apparel Agreement should be instituted prior to enforcing the BTA and or integrated into steps towards NTR.

- **Development and Human Rights:** Trade can be a powerful tool for development. However, for trade to be a strategy for development, it must strengthen the democratic institutions that move developing societies toward the rule of law. Many Laotian Americans continue to battle with the question of human rights concerns in Laos. To help resolve and formalize constructive engagement on this matter, we propose establishing a commission on human rights similar to that of the U.S.—China agreement. This entity would serve as a monitoring mechanism to address specific incidents or to craft policies which may allow intervention and assistance.

In addition to our specific concerns for realistic steps to ensure that investment will lead to full integration into a global free market economy, economic growth, the reduction of poverty, increased living standards and employment opportunities, we amplify our perspectives further by supporting the five principles of Unity on Trade and Investment proposed by the AFL—CIO to guide U.S. policy-making. They are attached below:

AFL—CIO: A Call for Global Fairness

Millions of people across this country and around the world have lost jobs, been poisoned, watched their farms foreclosed and suffered other indignities from corporate globalization. Today, they are rallying around campaigns for global fairness, for reining in the excessive political and economic power of global corporations and for setting rules to ensure that trade and investment support sustainable human development, a clean environment and dignified work. As the nation debates proposals for “Fast Track” trade authority and the expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement into a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), we unite behind the following five principles that should guide U.S. policy:

1. **Democracy, Transparency and Accountability:** Broad-based citizen participation in trade negotiations must be ensured through genuinely democratic mechanisms of consultation and participation. The procedures under which Congress considers trade agreements must include opportunity for full debate and amendments. Negotiating texts, including the full negotiating position of the U.S. government, should be made public at regular and timely intervals (not less than every six months), and trade agreements under negotiation must be subject to thorough environmental and social reviews, including a review of their impact on women, people of color and indigenous communities. Trade dispute resolution must be open to the public. We will oppose any trade agreement that is not negotiated under such democratic mechanisms.
2. **Workers’ and Human Rights:** Workers worldwide are disadvantaged by a global economic system that encourages countries and corporations to compete by violating workers’ fundamental human rights. U.S. workers have lost high-paying jobs and have seen their wages and working conditions eroded by trade policies that fail to address this problem. Workers in poorer countries have found it next to impossible to protect their rights and raise standards because corporations will shift their jobs to countries where rights and standards are lower. Agreements should recognize the primacy of the economic, environmental, social and political rights of all people, including women (who often bear a disproportionate burden from corporate-led globalization) and indigenous peoples. Trade agreements must ensure that all workers can freely exercise their basic rights as laid out by the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work: the right to organize and bargain collectively, to refuse forced labor, to reject child labor and to work free from discrimination. These rights must be included in trade agreements and covered by dispute resolution and enforcement mechanisms sited in the appropriate forums that are fair, reduce inequalities, encourage compliance and sanction violators directly.

3. **The Environment and the Public Interest:** Trade agreements must not undermine environmental standards. In particular, trade rules must ensure that domestic environmental or other public interest laws and regulations cannot be challenged by private investors before international tribunals, and they must ensure the availability of strong and clear exceptions to trade and investment rules for laws and regulations that protect health, the environment and other public interests. Trade agreements should also encourage environmental progress by including initiatives to raise environmental performance, binding obligations to enforce environmental laws and not lower environmental standards, citizen review mechanisms and obligations for investors to disclose basic information on environmental practices. International trade and investment systems must safeguard the global and local commons and respect the rights of local communities to protect and sustainably develop their natural resources. Trade agreements must not undermine public services, nor encourage privatization or deregulation as a condition of market access. Finally, trade agreements must not obstruct developing countries' right to address HIV/AIDS and other health crises through public access to essential medicines.
4. **Agriculture:** Agricultural policies must support sustainable livelihoods for family farmers and ranchers, and reduce the power of agribusiness to manipulate global food supplies and farm prices. Governments must retain the ability to provide economic safety net programs and other economic assistance to producers as compensation for the negative impact of unfair trade practices by others. Consumers must be ensured the right to know and choose food produced in a sustainable manner. And countries must be ensured the right to protect family farmers and producers in rural communities and to produce a safe and affordable food supply to meet adequate nutrition levels domestically.
5. **Debt and Development:** Trade agreements have not focused on enabling countries to invest in the building blocks of sustainable development, and increased trade flows alone have not led to shared and stable growth or to significant poverty reduction in developing countries. The debts claimed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank from impoverished countries must be canceled and the proceeds used to meet social and environmental needs; cancellation must be delinked from "structural adjustment" conditions such as user fees for health care and education that disadvantage people who are impoverished, women and working people. International trade and investment systems must respect the legitimate role of government, in collaboration with civil society, to set policies regarding the development and welfare of its people. Governments should also have the right to regulate capital flows to shield their economies and people from the destabilizing impact of speculative capital.

History has shown that expanded trade leads to more prosperous U.S. businesses, more choices of goods and lower prices for consumers, and more opportunities for American farmers and workers leading to higher wages, more jobs and economic growth. We hope that through this process, the U.S. can take a lead by providing appropriate AID, technical support, and harnessing the leadership and expertise of the Laotian American community to support the people of Laos so that they will eventually enjoy the prosperity that some Americans have enjoyed.

Finally, this historic step must include the voices of Laotian Americans. Together, we represent a generation that is the direct legacy of the Vietnam War and America's involvement in Indochina or the Southeast Asia region. We advocate for policies that respect the mutual interests of all parties, no matter how extreme the positions may be. This interest lies in the simple belief that we possess the right to shape our future and possibly the destinies of our families still living in Laos. Because of this grand responsibility, we urge you to seek sincere and thoughtful steps to finding solutions that might begin to help those still wounded by the ravages of war so that we can all heal together. We owe that much to the people of Laos as well as those who have sacrificed their lives for a taste of freedom.

You may reach us at the contact information below. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Bo Thao
KaYing Yang



Vienna, Virginia 22182
April 21, 2003

The Honorable
 Philip Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways and Means
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

I served as United States Ambassador to Laos from 1993 to 1996. Then, as now, our highest national priority in Laos was securing the cooperation of Lao authorities in accounting for missing American servicemen from the period of the Vietnam War, a conflict in which Laos figured prominently. During my tenure, we were able to make significant progress on this important humanitarian issue, thanks in no small measure to the cooperation of the Lao government. In general, that cooperation has continued to the present day, a fact that is reflected in the numbers of remains of servicemen who died in combat in Southeast Asian that continue to be identified and repatriated to their loved ones here at home.

This was not our only interest in Laos, however. In the late 1980s, the Lao government initiated a program of reform designed to move Laos away from the failed Marxist economic policies the country had followed after 1975 and toward an economy based on market principles. By the early 1990s, a number of American companies had come to Laos to take advantage of the opportunities the government's reform program appeared to offer. Not surprisingly, their efforts were not always successful, in part because the government had little experience in operating a market economy and was only beginning to develop the legal structure necessary to support one.

It was in this context that our embassy in Vientiane began discussing with the Lao government the conclusion of a bilateral trade agreement. We felt that such an agreement would be an important building block in the development of the legal framework needed in Laos for the creation of a viable market economy and the success of Americans seeking to participate in it. Progress came slowly, however, because Lao authorities had little experience with the world outside the socialist bloc in which they had operated for so many years. I left Laos in August of 1993 disappointed in my failure to persuade the government of the need for and the benefits to be derived from a trade agreement. It took another year of negotiation to secure the government's concurrence in a draft agreement.

The conclusion of this agreement, and the extension of normal trading relations (NTR) to Laos, will produce a number of short term benefits, including to American companies doing business with and in Laos. However, I also believe strongly that there will be longer term consequences which should be welcomed both here and by the Lao people themselves. To endure, non-democratic regimes such as the current Lao government need to keep out the ideas, institutions and influences that have led to the development of liberal democracy elsewhere. Important among these is the rule of law. Being forced to play by a set of rules embodied in a bilateral trade agreement and required by NTR will, over time, have a corrosive effect on the power of the ruling party in Laos to govern by fiat and without regard to the popular will.

No one should assume that NTR is a panacea or that a democratic millennium is at hand in Laos. For the time being, the group that has dominated Lao politics since 1975 remains in control and is without significant political opposition. But punitive actions, such as denying NTR to Laos, will not change the situation for the better. On the contrary, such an approach serves to strengthen the relative power of the regime vis-&-vis the Lao people. Obliging the authorities to play by a set of rules, even those as mundane as the rules governing international trade will, in due course, have the opposite effect. For those who hope for a better future for the Lao people—and I count myself among them—the proper response to the current situation in Laos is not isolation and ostracism. Rather, the most effective challenge that can be mounted to the unrepresentative, undemocratic current government will come from exposing Lao society to alternative possibilities, including those that come through international trade and business.

Accordingly, I urge you and your Congressional colleagues to grant normal trading relations to Laos. Doing so will serve important national interests of the United States. And it will also serve the interests of the Lao people who deserve better than what they have known for nearly three decades.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Victor L. Tomseth

U.S. Chamber of Commerce
 Washington, D.C. 20062
April 11, 2003

The Honorable Phillip Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 House Ways and Means Committee
 1102 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington D.C. 20515

Re: Comments on the Normal Trade Relations with Laos

Dear Chairman Crane:

This letter is submitted in response to the advisory from the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade of March 5, 2003 (TR-1) requesting written comments on extending Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status for Laos. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce strongly supports the extension of NTR with Laos, and urges the Subcommittee to introduce the appropriate legislation for this to occur as quickly as possible.

Laos is the only Southeast Asian country without NTR status, despite its continuous diplomatic relations with the U.S. since its founding in 1975. Passing NTR for Laos is a critical step towards building a foundation for economic growth and openness in one of the poorest countries in the world. It would also bring into force the U.S.-Laos Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), which was concluded in late 1997 but was never signed by the Administration nor ratified by Congress. When implemented, the BTA will offer expanded trade and investment opportunities for U.S. companies and obligate Laos to enforce intellectual property protection for U.S. products in that market.

Building trade relations with Laos will also help solidify U.S. competitiveness in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. ASEAN is America's third largest overseas market and has been identified as a strategic region for economic engagement by the Bush Administration under the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI).

For the above reasons, the U.S. Chamber strongly supports the extension of NTR for Laos and urges the Subcommittee to move forward promptly after completing this review. If you would like to discuss the issues contained herein, I can be reached at (202) 463-5455, or by email at wworkman@uschamber.com.

Best Regards,

Willard A. Workman
Senior Vice President, International Affairs

cc: Rolf Lundberg, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

United Hmong International, Inc.
 (Non-Profit Organization)
 Fresno, CA 93727
April 1, 2003

The Honorable Phillip M. Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade and
 all Members of House Ways and Means Committee
 U.S. House of Representatives
 1104 Longworth House Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear The Honorable Chairman Phillip M. Crane and all Members of the Committee.

We the Hmong representatives propose to the United States Government, the United States Department of State, the United States Congress and the United Nations to provide food, medications, clothing and other necessary supplies to support our Hmong people in the jungle of Laos, who are starving from food, medications, clothing, and other necessary supplies, because they suffered from the Lao communist government and Vietnamese troops who surrounded, chased and kill them with chemical attacked, artilleries, bombs, helicopters, missiles and etc., since September 2002 to the present time, many hundreds of Hmong people died.

Many thousands of Hmong people are located at Phou Kong Qua, Phou Yai, Teng Bong, Vientiane Province. Nam Taung, Pha Si, Pha Ngu, Phou Bian, Special Zone

Xaisomboun Province. Phou Nam Noua, Nam ma, Mounxang, Moun Mok, Borikhamxai Province. These Hmong people are allies of the United States of America and the free world countries, because during the Vietnam War, these Hmong people paid an enormous price to the United States of America and other free world countries. Today is time for the United States of America and other free world countries to consider your allies, the Hmong people as an enormous price to them.

The communist Lao government of Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) and Vietnamese government were committed of war crimes, crimes against peace and crimes against humanity in Laos. There are no peace, no freedom, no democracy, no freedom of religions and no human rights in Laos.

The Radio Free Asia-Laos Service reported on February 25, 2003, that many hundreds of people demonstrated in Vientiane, Laos on March 25, 2003, VOA Radio-Laos Service also reported that more than ten thousands people demonstrated in Vientiane, Laos, too. They opposed the policy of the United States government toward Iraq. Those demonstrators in Vientiane called to support the Iraqi government and they were anti-foreign policy of the United States government toward Iraq. Therefore, the Iraqi government and communist Lao government and communist Lao government of LPDR are strong connections in the political, military and other fields.

The Lao communist government and the North Vietnamese should have a connection with Al-Qaeda or Ossama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, because they used biological and chemical mass destruction to kill the Hmong people for twenty eight years in the jungle of Laos. The LPDR is supported Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. Laos could be a possible place for Ossama Bin Laden to hide.

We also propose to the United States government, the United States Department of State, the United States Trade Commission, the United States Congress and the United Nations to stop Normal Trade Relations and assistance to the Lao communist government of Lao People's Democratic Republic and Vietnamese, because the Normal Trade Relations and assistance from the world will become the cancers as biological and chemicals mass destructions to kill the Hmong people in the jungle of Laos forever. The more Normal Trade Relations and assistance to the Lao communist government of Lao People's Democratic Republic will cause danger to the Hmong people in Laos. In the past twenty eight years, the United States, Australia, Japan and government of Lao People's Democratic Republic with billion of dollars, but Laos is still un-developed, because the LPDR used assistance supported from the world to buy artilleries, tanks, helicopters, bombs, ammunitions, biological and chemical weapons of mass destructions to kill the Hmong people in the jungle of Laos. We are pleading to the world to stop the Normal Trade Relations and assistance to these two dictatorship governments. Your support and trade with the Lao communist government of Lao People's Democratic Republic will never change Laos to free society and democratic systems.

We would like to request the United States government, the United States Department of State, the United States Congress and the United Nations to provide food, medications, clothing and other necessary supplies to help the Hmong people in the jungle of Laos. Hmong people in the jungle of Laos are no different from innocents Iraqi, Afghanistan and other people around the world.

According to S. RES. 240, "(1) respect international norms of human rights and democratic freedoms for the Lao people, and fully honor its commitments to those norms and freedoms and international agreements, and in the 1962 Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos and its protocol and 1973 Vientiane Agreement on Laos. (2) issue a public statement specifically reaffirming its commitment to protecting religious freedom and other basic human rights; [and] (3) fully institute a process of democracy, human rights, and openly-contested free and fair elections in Laos, and ensure specifically that the National assembly elections-currently scheduled for 2002-are openly contested [.]; and (4) allow access for International human rights monitors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross to Lao prisons, and to all regions of the country to investigate allegations of human rights abuses, including those against the Hmong people, when requested."

There was also a H.Con.Res. 406 to recognize the Hmong and other groups who were 'Secret Army' for the United States of America during the Vietnam War. As this resolution is recognizing the importance, those Hmong people in the jungle of Laos are important, too, because they are a part of this resolution.

The times is coming for the United States government to investigate and stop the ethnic cleansing war, biological and chemical warfare and genocide against the Hmong people in Laos as soon as possible. Mr. Chairman and all Members, we support the United States policy toward Iraq and we need you to stop the war in Laos as soon as possible.

Considering the Laos issue as our proposal has address as soon as possible would bring peace, freedom, democracy, freedom of religions and human rights for the Lao people.

Hopefully, you will make the considerations for this proposal to bring peace, freedom, freedom of religions and human rights to the Hmong people in Laos that who are allies of the United States of America.

Respectfully Yours

Vang Thao
President of the United Hmong International, Inc.

United Lao/Hmong Congress for Democracy
Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54702
April 17, 2003

Honorable Philip Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
1104 Longworth House Office Building
House Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

As the United States-led coalition forces action, which includes my young son among the American troops, against the Iraqi's regime is winding down, we must keep in mind that the communist Lao regime is not much different from the Iraqi regime. With this in mind, I am submitting this letter of opposition to the Extension of Permanent Normal Trade Relations Status to Laos due to the grave concern of human rights abuses and atrocities committed by the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR).

On behalf of the suffering Laotian people including ethnic Hmong in Laos, we oppose the granting of NTR to Laos based on the following evidence.

Evidence

1. In 1975, the communist Pathet Lao regime and the government of the Socialist Republic Vietnam (SRV) seized the Kingdom of Laos by armed force and established the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) in violation of the 1962 Geneva Declaration on Neutrality of Laos and its protocol, as well as the 1973 Vientiane and Paris Peace Agreements on Laos and Indochina.
2. Since 1975, the governments of Laos and Vietnam have waged a campaign of reprisal, repression, massive human rights violation, and ethnic cleansing war against the freedom-loving Laotian, particularly the ethnic Hmong who served the United States loyally during the Vietnam War.
3. Since the beginning of 2000, the Lao PDR, with the collaboration of Vietnamese forces, has stepped up their military campaign using all types of modern weapons including artillery and helicopters with chemical poison, as well as land mines directly against the Hmong in remote villages in the provinces of Xiengkhouang, Xaisomboun-Special Zone, northern Vientiane-Vangvieng, and Borikhamsai, causing the death and wounds in the thousands including women and children.
4. Since the signing of the anti-terrorism treaty on Aug. 1, 2002 in Brunei, by ASEAN, which Laos and the U.S. led Secretary of State, Colin Powell, as co-signers, Lao PDR treated the treaty as an excuse for its government to clean up the Hmong. The Lao PDR called the Hmong terrorists, so they could exterminate the Hmong. Video footage of killing ethnic Hmong and some Laotians by the Lao PDR will be delivered to you on April 21 for your review. As you will see on the video, the Lao PDR regime is the real terrorist. They are real evildoers. Khantai Siphandon, leader of the Lao regime, is not much different from Saddam. If what the Lao PDR did to our people in Laos is not evil, then evil and human value have no meaning as President George Bush stated in his State of The Union Address. In his State of The Union Address, on January 28, 2003 in regard to Saddam Hussein's human rights record, he stated, "If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning." Furthermore, the Lao PDR is a strong supporter of Saddam Hussein's regime and other evil nations. Clear examples were the two state-sanctioned demonstrations held against the U.S.-led war with Iraq in Vientiane, the Capital of Laos, on February 25 and March 23, 2003, by thousands who were encouraged by the leaders of the Lao PDR. Such rallies had never happened by the commoners under the Lao regime in the last 28 years. How could the American

government so willingly grant NTR and aid to such horrible repressive regime in this modern time?

5. The disappearance of two Hmong-Americans-Houa Ly of Appleton and Michael Vang of Fresno in the summer of 1999 in Bokeo, Laos.
6. The arrest of pro-democratic student leaders and teachers who peacefully rallied for freedom, democracy, and economic reform in Oct. 26, 1999.
7. The arrest of five European Members who staged a peaceful protest in front of the Presidential Palace calling for human rights, justice, and freedom in October 26, 2001.
8. In a new report on March 19, 2003, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom concludes, "the government of Laos has engaged in particularly severe violations of freedom of religion, and merits designation by the (Bush) Administration as a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Act of 1998".
9. The millions of dollars and other foreign aid and loans granted to Lao PDR by the United States and other countries as aid and assistance, have not benefited the Lao people or met the expectations of the donors. Today, Laos remains to be one of the poorest countries in the world. Indeed, these grants only make the leaders rich and reinforce the power of the Lao PDR by imposing harsher crackdowns on its citizens and the freedom-loving people.
10. One would argue that granting NTR to Laos would bring it a step closer toward economic reform and openness, but in reality in the communist world, it does not. Have we seen improvement in Vietnam, Laos's biggest supporter? After the U.S. granted yearly NTR to Vietnam in 1988 and permanent NTR in 2000, Vietnam's human rights abuse has not changed. The NTR may ease some tension between the U.S. and Vietnam and at the same time benefit the Vietnamese elites and some U.S. business tycoons, but all aspects of Vietnamese lives are still controlled by the same communist party. Human rights violations of individuals and Christians in Vietnam are on the rise. Laos would not be much different.

Therefore, we recommended three actions to be taken as follows:

1. We call on the United States Congress to press the Lao PDR to immediately cease attacking the Hmong in the remote areas, and dramatically improve its human rights record in general by allowing international human rights organizations to monitor its human rights practices before NTR can be considered.
2. The United States should take a leadership role to immediately coordinate a Fact-Finding Mission to Laos to investigate on-going massive human rights abuse and ethnic cleansing in Laos before NTR can be discussed.
3. We humbly ask the Trade Committee to cease considering NTR to Lao at this time because we believe that NTR can only benefit the communist Lao elites and empower them to suppress the Lao/Hmong citizens. NTR and other financial aid and loans can only be considered when the Lao PDR is willing to deal with true human rights, the rule of laws, freedom and democracy before the eyes of the international community.

Sincerely,

Stephen Vang
President of United Lao/Hmong Congress for Democracy

United Laotian Americans (ULA)
Brooklyn Center, Minnesota 55429
April 17, 2003

Honorable Philip M. Crane Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade
Ways and Means Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Fax: 202-225-2610

Dear Congressman Crane:

This is our letter of support for extending Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to Lao P.D.R. The United Laotian Americans (ULA), a non-profit organization of Minnesota has the honor of representing the Laotian American individuals, Associations and Organizations in Minnesota.

On January 14, 2003, I had the opportunity to meet with Mr. One-sy Bouthsivongsakd, Chair of the Board of LNCCI, a Representative of Employer's Organization and the Deputy Chairman of Society Security for Enterprises. We discussed the Laos' Normal Trade Relation (NTR) and realized the essential of what it can do for the citizens of the Lao P.D.R. Mr. Bouthsivongsakd had pointed out labors force as follows:

Lao P.D.R. has population of 5.7 millions. There are 80 factories in the country, which only 54 export their products. They have a total of over 22,000 work forces, in which 86% are women, 70% are from the rural areas, 50% had finished elementary school, 30% have some Junior High School education, and 5% have High School diplomas. They produce of over 40,000,000 of fabric products per year, which equals to revenue of \$110,000,000 U.S. Dollar.

35,000,000 of the items are sold to 52 countries around the world. Over 80% are supplied to Europe market, and less than 10% are supplied to the United States.

From 1997 to 2000, Lao P.D.R. had trade with the United States with the revenue of \$17,000,000 U.S. Dollar. Since then it has declined to \$2,600,000 U.S. Dollar in the year of 2001. The decline was in many ways due to the lack of N.T.R. status. There were promising numbers of companies intended to built in Laos in 1997 due to an anticipation that NTR for Lao P.D.R. would not have encounter any obstacles as the comprehensive bilateral trade agreement that the United States was concluded. Since then, many had left the country due to the long waiting of the N.T.R. Many of the products that were intended for production in Lao P.D.R., are now being produced in Cambodia where NTR was granted in 1999. This has increase export revenue for Cambodia from less than \$17,000,000 in 1997 to \$850,000,000 in 2002. It projects that export revenue will increase to \$1.2 billions in 2003. This clearly indicates how NTR can help Lao P.D.R. with its economic development.

The following organizations have also expressed their support for NTR for Lao PDR.

Lao PTA of Minnesota
 Laotian American of Worthington Association
 Lao Niyom of Minnesota Association
 Lao Champhone Association
 Indochina Children Organization
 Lao Washington State Association
 Sincerely,

Laxa Yabandith
Executive Vice President of ULA

United Laotian Community
 Oakland, California 94601
April 15, 2003

Honorable Congressman Philip M. Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of the Committee on Ways and Means
 Capital Hill
 Washington DC
 Fax (202) 225-2610
 Subject: US NTR for Laos

Dear Honorable Congressman Philip M. Crane

The **United Laotian Community** is a community base organization bases in the City of Oakland, California wishes to express our support to the statement of Laotian-American National Movement to support the Bush Administration's policy toward Laos.

Sincerely,

Phaeng Toommaly Andersen
President

Respectfully Yours,

The Voice of the Laotian American National Movement
In support of
The Bush Administration's Trade Initiative
To extend Normal Trade Relations to Laos

We believe that:

Widespread and rapidly growing unemployment among youth in Laos has driven tens of thousands of them to flee to Thailand and other neighboring countries where they fall prey to exploitative and inhumane treatment by their employers and criminals; while the land-locked Laotian economy continues to weaken due to decline in foreign investment and its weak capability to compete with its neighbors in the export markets. The situation is further aggravated by the continued denial of US NTR while such privilege is enjoyed by its stronger immediate neighbors, including Vietnam and Cambodia.

US NTR for Laos is not a panacea for its social economic problems, but it will put Laos on a level playing field with its neighboring countries on which to compete for a share of the U.S. markets. This in turn will stimulate domestic and foreign investment in Laos and give the country a fair chance to provide decent jobs for its youth and thereby help reverse the current ill treatment and suffering they have had to endure, both in Laos and in neighboring countries.

We realize that Laotian communities across the U.S. are not unanimous in their views about the current Laotian Government and its policies, and that the majority of Laotian Americans still wish to see more political reforms and changes. But we believe that a stronger Laotian economy will improve living conditions of the Laotian people who, in turn, will then become real stakeholders and, eventually catalysts for change. Experience in Asia has amply demonstrated that the democratization process has been economically driven.

While understanding and respecting the views of those opposing the granting of US NTR for Laos, we ask that they also understand and respect our views and positions on this important matter. As American citizens, we have the obligation to respect each other's rights and freedom to express our views in accordance with our belief and conscience.

The majority of Laotian Americans have reconnected with their homeland. Most of them have returned to Laos for visits and have relatives who are still there and wish to see that they be given a fair chance for a better living. Most Laotian Americans believe that promoting economic development is the best way to promote peaceful and sustainable change in Laos.

We wholeheartedly applaud and share the position taken by the Bush Administration on the issue of US NTR for Laos. Ambassador Hartwick is trying to encourage discussion and favorable consideration of this initiative.

Laotian Americans and friends of the Laotians who share our views should exercise their right of freedom of speech by voicing their views to their respective Congressional representatives, especially members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The opposition to the US NTR to date seeks to isolate and impoverish Laos for their own ambiguous political agenda. They have organized and financed aggressive lobby efforts to prevent hearings on this matter. Some of them continue to believe that poverty will force change in Laos. Recent history in Asia shows otherwise. People in isolated and poor North Korea have no means to ask for change, they starve in silence; while in relatively rich South Korea and other parts of Asia (Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines etc.) growing affluence of the peoples have created economically strong and well educated middle class who in turn have proven to be the real incubators and guardians of the growing democratization process.

A constructive engagement approach is a better alternative for the U.S. to promote change in Laos; and that promoting change through peaceful socioeconomic development is far more effective and humane than deliberate impoverishment of our fellow Laotians in Laos. Laos needs to adopt international standards and strengthen the rule of law. We should voice our collective efforts to urge the U.S. Congress to grant Laos the US NTR.

Laotian American National Movement will try to coordinate and in some cases help to campaign for US NTR for Laos. Our American friends can certainly help to do the same. Let's not leave out any body that can help.

For more information, please contact:

The US-Lao NTR Coalition
C/o Laotian-American National Coalition
 120 Broadway, Suite 4
 Richmond, CA 94804

(510) 235-5005, (510) 235-5065
 Website: Laotianlink.com
 Email: Laotianlink@USA.com

**Statement of Bounthanh Rathigna, President
 United League for Democracy in Laos, Inc., Virginia**

First of all, we would like to express our appreciation to the Trade Subcommittee and Members of Congress for their concern about Laos—one of the smallest and poorest countries of the world. We appreciate opportunity to present our views—which are held by the vast majority of Laotian-Americans—in strong opposition to granting Normalized Trade Relations (NTR) status to the Communist Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) at this time.

At the outset, we are very concerned that Ambassador Douglas Hartwick, after his nomination had been rightly been frozen by the Senate for 18 months, solemnly made a statement before the Committee on Foreign Relations on June 29, 2001, that if confirmed he would set . . . (a number of) goals as a top priority: "improving human rights and human rights awareness are integral aspects of our bilateral relationship with Laos. America's steadfast commitment to advance the protection of human rights around the world is a beacon of hope for many who seek positive change in Laos." However, Hartwick has clearly violated and broken his promises. In fact, by January 2003, Hartwick appears to have already proudly become a lobbyist for the Lao Communist Government by vigorously campaigning for NTR for Laos. In Ambassador Hartwick's shameful and unpopular speech to the Lao Community in Richmond, California, on January 25, 2003, and Seattle, WA on January 26, 2003, had said that he: "Needs another tool to promote change in Laos "and he "believes one of the most important tools for changing is establishing a normal trade relationship with LPDR."

In an open letter to the members of the Bush Administration and the U.S. Congress, the so-called

"The Lao American National Movement in support of . . . (the) trade initiative to extend NTR to Laos", said "US NTR will put Laos on a level playing field with its neighboring countries on which to compete for a share of US markets." We respect their views, but also would like them to hear ours and the voices of the vast majority of the Laotians who unfortunately had to leave their beloved homeland, which became a killing field after the communist takeover in 1975. Lao-Americans, by an overwhelming majority, are strongly oppose granting NTR Status to the LPDR regime.

In the petition to the U.S. Congress in January 2003, the United Lao Action Center wrote:

"ULAC believes that without internal political and economic freedom, external free trade will not work, it will not promote economic growth as intended. It will definitely, not benefit the people of Laos. Without the necessary fundamental preconditions—political as well as economic—NTR, if granted as its stand now, will be counter-productive . . . and an enormous cost to American taxpayers."

In a statement to Ambassador Hartwick in January 26, 2003, representatives of the Lao-American Community of the Northwest said:

"By granting NTR status, at this point, the US government would inadvertently send the wrong message to the Lao people—that it is willing to reward a dictatorial government (the LPDR), which consistently ignores its own constitution and its international obligations to uphold and comply with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It would dash any hopes and dreams the Lao people still have, and hold so dear to their hearts, that one day, this country, through international pressure, would enjoy true liberty and democracy that we, Americans, have been taking for granted for so long."

In an open letter to Mrs. Paula Dobrinsky, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs and Mr. Lome Craner, Assistant Under Secretary of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), the Lao Movement for Human Rights and Forum for Asia Democracy had expressed their solidarity with all those who oppose the awarding of NTR status to the Lao Communist Regime (while the leaders of state party of LPDR have not provided tangible, significant—and above all—verifiable proof of their efforts in field of democracy and respect for human rights and liberty).

In addition to the hundreds of letters, petitions and announcements, there are also thousands of e-mails from Lao people around the world expressing opposition to granting NTR status to the Lao communist regime.

Our point of view on Laos' situation, especially on the issue of the US-Laos relationship is very clear; we distinguish between the Lao people and the Communist authority, which is in reality a Vietnamese puppet regime in Laos. However, we do not believe that a policy of appeasement of the American government to entice political change in Laos—through economic concession or a blank check of financial assistance to the Communists—will work. To the contrary, it will only help the Lao Communist regime to continue its human rights abuses, religious persecution and other injustices. Free trade might help improve the living conditions of the majority of the people—but only in a country governed by the Rule of Law. It will not yield its benefits as intended as long as economic decisions are dictated by a small group of old guard “elite” of the communist regime. The basic economic problem of the LPDR rests not only with the natural constraint of being landlocked and high tariff on exporting goods to America, but from a political system that is obsolete and hinder growth because of a climate of lawlessness and arbitrary practices which further deter direct private investment, both domestic and foreign. The productivity of Laos is corroded by mismanagement and corruption—and further handicapped by a dire lack of competent, qualified and skilled-human resources. To place total focus on NTR as a singular solution is to oversimplify the Laos problems. It is not only misses the mark, but could backfire and prove costly for investors and donors.

In the view of many Lao-Americans, NTR will not benefit the Lao people and will simply serve as a moneymaker for the communist leadership. The Lao Communist leadership places a high premium on it as a symbolic triumph, which will shore up their sagging credibility with the people. Once it is granted, they will “show case” it as an affirmation of their otherwise corrupt regime. For Laotian-Americans and other freedom loving-people, it is tantamount to rewarding a brutal dictatorship and its terrible oppression of the people. NTR should be an instrument for promoting political change in Laos. It should be granted only after the communist leadership in Laos makes a real change in attitude and behavior. It does not make sense to just give it to them and sit back and hope.

For lack of a better analogy, the idea of dangling the carrot before the donkey—not put it in his mouth and then try to tell it to do what you want—applies to the NTR trade issue regarding Laos. Moreover, with regard to the Communist regime in Laos, the carrot alone will not do the job. We also need the stick—in terms of economic sanctions and moratoria on bilateral and multilateral financial flow to the Lao communist regime. This would not make any difference to the Lao people, most of whom have subsisted in abject poverty for decades now, despite the billions of dollars that have been poured into the country. Sanctions, on the other hand, would pressure the communist regime, which as we know, is already strapped for cash, into thinking and making serious changes.

In view of the annual report published by the Department of State on the situation of human rights in Laos (published March 31, 2003), there is no need to remind one of the dictatorial nature of the Pathet Lao regime that has ruled the country since 1975, nor to list the numerous, serious and repeated violations of the political, economic, social and religious rights of the Lao people.

Has the international community not already given too many “gifts” to the communist, in terms of hundreds millions of dollars in loans, aid, debt relief, etc.? The award of NTR status to neighboring countries—in particular Myanmar, and Vietnam—has not brought real and verifiably beneficial effects in the field of human rights or democracy.

This is why we believe that the Vientiane regime must first make a significant “gesture” to deserve NTR status—in particular by releasing, immediately and unconditionally, the prisoners of opinion whose only “crime” is to have denounced, in peaceful manner, the iniquity or even simply the general drift of the regime, and to have called for the respect of fundamental rights, social justice as well as the introduction of a multi-party system.

For these reasons, and the questions outline above, which remain a matter of grave concern to us, we respectfully urge the U.S. Congress to deny NTR to the Lao Communist regime until such time as it can be ascertained and verified that Lao government has taken specific, concrete and significant steps to redress the human rights situation, religious persecution—and to institute real change toward openness, transparency and democratization.

A useful step in this direction, we believe, would be to hold an in-depth, and broad-based, Congressional hearing on this issue, involving all sides, at political, as well as, economic levels.

Thank you for your consideration,

Bounthanh Rathigna
President United League for Democracy in Laos, Inc.

United States Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel
New York, New York 10003
April 21, 2003

Comments In Support of Normal Trade Relations With Laos

The United States Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel, USA-ITA, whose members include textile and apparel manufacturers, distributors, retailers, importers and related service providers, such as shipping lines and customs brokers, and account for as much as \$100 billion in U.S. apparel sales annually, strongly support Normal Trade Relations (NTR) with Laos.

The absence of NTR duty status has greatly limited the viability of Laos as a supplier of apparel to the U.S. market. The one U.S. quota on Laos, covering cotton and man-made fiber men's and boys' woven shirts, has not had a single charge against it this year, demonstrating that the imposition of Column Two duty rates renders Lao manufacturers uncompetitive. Unless Laos is given an opportunity to develop an apparel manufacturing and exporting business before December 31, 2004, it is unlikely to be able to establish a competitive industry in a post-quota era environment.

Opening up trade with Laos will not have any negative impact on the U.S. domestic textile industry. Laos is a minor supplier to the U.S. market. It ranks 128th of all countries selling to the U.S. market, and sold only \$2.6 million worth of textile and apparel products to the United States during the most recent twelve months.

Approving NTR for Laos serves United States' trade policy and economic objectives, providing a means for Lao manufacturers to compete in the U.S. market. Moving forward with this aspect of the normalization of relations also would have a positive impact on other matters of concern, including the promotion of human rights and other freedoms. These are inevitable consequences of the presence of American firms, who bring with them American standards, including stringent Codes of Conduct, and American values when they place orders in overseas factories.

USA-ITA member companies also see the establishment of NTR status for Laos as an appropriate and essential step toward achievement of the Enterprise for the ASEAN Initiative, announced by the Bush Administration last year. Laos is a member of the ten country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which provides an important forum for economic reforms and integration and global trade liberalization. Trade initiatives with the ASEAN, including Laos, also offer a means for promoting U.S. security interests, a particularly important issue in today's world. The ability of the United States to move forward with its goal of reciprocal trade liberation with the ASEAN nations also compels normalization of relations with Laos.

USA-ITA member companies also look forward to the accession of Laos into the World Trade Organization. Establishment of NTR status for Laos would provide momentum for that achievement.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura E. Jones
Executive Director

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
Washington, D.C. 20002
April 17, 2003

Members of the Subcommittee on Trade
Ways and Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane and Members of the Subcommittee,

Please find attached the executive summary and recommendations from the 2003 report on Laos by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. As the subcommittee considers the extension of permanent normal trade relations treatment to products from Laos, the Commission asks that the attached materials be included in the record. (A complete copy of the Laos report can be found on the Commission's web site at www.uscirf.gov.)

The Commission is charged with reviewing the facts and circumstances of violations of international religious freedom. By law, a key function of the Commission is to submit to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress its findings and recommendations for U.S. policies with respect to foreign governments engaging in or tolerating violations of religious freedom.

In its report findings, the Commission has determined that the government of Laos has been engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom, as defined in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. These violations include the arrest, prolonged detention, and imprisonment of members of religious minorities on account of their religious activities.

While the Commission has no position on whether permanent normal trade relations treatment should be extended to Laos, it does urge the United States government to make clear that the cessation of practices which abuse religious freedom is essential to an improvement in and an expansion of U.S.-Laos relations. The Commission is hopeful that the subcommittee will take the Commission's findings and recommendations into account as it considers increasing trade relations with Laos.

Sincerely,

Joseph R. Crapa
Executive Director

Laos

Executive Summary

Since the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) assumed power in 1975, there has been extensive government interference with and restrictions on all religious communities. In more recent years, the government has focused its repression on religions that are relatively new to Laos, including Protestant Christianity. During this time period, the government of Laos has engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom as defined in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA). These include the arrest, prolonged detention, and imprisonment of members of religious minorities on account of their religious activities. In addition, Lao officials have forced Christians to renounce their faith. At the same time, dozens of churches have been closed. Given the seriousness of religious freedom violations in Laos, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (Commission), in both 2000 and 2001, recommended that Laos be designated as a "country of particular concern" (CPC), pursuant to IRFA. In February 2002, the Commission sent a delegation to Laos on a fact-finding mission.

In July 2002, the Lao government promulgated a new decree on religious affairs that provides a legal basis for control of and interference with religious activities by government officials. Although some religious detainees have reportedly been released after July 2002, others remain in detention. In the light of these circumstances, in 2002, the Commission once again recommended that Laos be designated as a CPC.

Laos is a one-party, authoritarian state, which has suppressed the human rights of its citizens and foreigners alike. The inability of the government of Laos to rule effectively, in combination with a culture that resists change, has contributed to serious underdevelopment, making Laos one of the poorest and least educated societies in the world. The ineffectiveness of the current government has also compounded the difficulty of assuring religious freedom and other related human rights in Laos. For example, central government officials have limited ability to investigate alleged human rights abuses in remote parts of Laos due to poor road conditions and limited transportation equipment. Moreover, there are virtually no legal protections for human rights, as Laos has an underdeveloped legal system with only 48 laws to govern all aspects of life and there are few lawyers in the country. Finally, another challenge to advancing the protection of religious freedom in Laos is the historically close linkage between Buddhism and the Lao state, which has contributed to the government's suspicion of non-Buddhist religions that are relatively new to that country.

Since September 11, 2001, Southeast Asia has become an increasingly important arena in the U.S.-led campaign against terrorism. Laos' importance to U.S. interests has also increased by virtue of its status as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its support for the international counter-terrorism effort. Meanwhile, the government of Laos has continued to engage in serious violations of religious freedom and related human rights. Yet, Laos has not received much attention from U.S. foreign policymakers, including the Congress. Laos is at an important crossroad, and U.S. attention to Laos at this time may advance protections for religious freedom and promote U.S. interests. Indeed, while some Lao officials have advocated Vietnam and China as models for Laos' future, others have expressed a desire to modernize the country by learning from the experiences of the United States and other developed nations in the West. In particular, Lao officials perceive the United States to be influential in the provision of international aid for Laos' development and some have thus demonstrated a willingness to address U.S. concerns, including human rights concerns raised by this Commission, the State Department, and non-governmental organizations. This suggests that the present is a pivotal moment in the history of Laos and U.S.-Laos relations. The United States has a unique opportunity to engage the government and people of Laos in a process of reform that would end the suppression of religious freedom and other related human rights, and relatively small measures of attention and assistance could accomplish a great deal. Therefore, the Commission makes the following recommendations to the U.S. government:

1. The President should designate Laos as a CPC to make clear U.S. concerns over particularly severe violations of religious freedom in Laos, thus engaging the U.S. government in a process to promote changes that would advance legal as well as practical protections of freedom of religion and related human rights in that country.

2. The U.S. government should urge the government of Laos to take specific steps to improve respect for religious freedom, including the possible establishment of a bilateral human rights dialogue that would also address the broader range of human rights concerns such as torture and other forms of ill-treatment. In addition, the U.S. government should make clear to the government of Laos that any such dialogue or other improvement in U.S.-Laos relations must be based on the immediate cessation of practices that abuse religious freedom, including arbitrary arrest and detention, forced renunciation, and church closings.

3. The U.S. government should provide assistance to Laos to take genuine steps to reform its practices, policies, laws, and regulations that contribute to religious freedom violations. In this regard, the State Department should undertake an assessment of human rights needs in Laos in order to identify specific areas where the United States could provide support and assistance for establishing human rights protections. The assessment should address, among others, technical legal assistance, dissemination of information about human rights, human rights training programs, educational efforts targeting all Lao citizens, and exchange programs.

Commission Recommendations

The Commission has found that the Lao government continues to engage in particularly severe religious freedom violations. At the same time, the Lao government has begun to take steps that, if continued, could lead to improved protection of religious freedom.

If the Lao government is committed to taking further steps, the U.S. government has the opportunity to encourage and support reforms that could lead to the establishment of a legal basis for religious freedom, affirm the equal legal standing of all religious beliefs and communities, clarify the rights of religious groups and individuals, and end violations that have continued to occur. The revision and implementation of the new decree in a way that is consistent with international human rights law is critical to demonstrate the central government's commitment to improving the protection of religious freedom. Officials in the Lao central government assert that the new decree will put religious activities on a legal footing and help discipline abuses by local leaders, such as detention, forced renunciation, and church closing.

During the Commission's visit to Laos, it was apparent that the Lao government has expressed a genuine interest in opening up to the outside world. Many observers have pointed out that Laos is now faced with the decision of either becoming more oriented toward the West or moving closer to China and Vietnam. Although a number of senior Lao officials may support the latter option, the Lao government is interested in international development assistance and perceives that the United States is an influential member of the international donor community. The Commission thus believes that the U.S. government should be prepared to exercise that in-

fluence, and to offer assistance to Laos if necessary, to advance the protection of religious freedom and other human rights in Laos, if the government of Laos is genuinely interested in undertaking the necessary reforms and ending abusive practices.

1. The President should designate Laos as a country of particular concern, in accordance with provisions of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

Under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), the President or his designee, the Secretary of State, is required to designate as countries of particular concern (CPCs) those countries the government of which has engaged in or tolerated “particularly severe violations of religious freedom,” as defined in the law.^[i]

As noted earlier, the Commission has found that in the past year the government of Laos continues to engage in particularly severe violations of religious freedom, thus meeting the statutory criteria for designation as a CPC. As discussed above, the Lao government has recently released religious prisoners. The release of imprisoned individuals, while welcome, does not represent the kind of systemic improvements that are necessary to strengthen the protection of religious freedom and bring Laos’ laws and practices into conformity with international law. It therefore remains to be seen whether the Lao government will take additional steps that lead to sustained improvements in the protection of the right to freedom of religion and significantly reduce particularly severe religious freedom violations. Such additional steps include the actions specified in recommendation 2 below. If that becomes the case, the Commission might during the year ahead review its recommendation on CPC designation.

Designation of CPCs is an important aspect of IRFA, but it is only one aspect. IRFA requires policy responses, both for CPCs and for all other violators of religious freedom. IRFA does not, however, dictate what the precise response must be in every case. Sanctions are not the only option, as the statute provides an extensive list of policy tools of varying intensity from which to choose.

2. The U.S. government should make clear to the government of Laos that the cessation of practices which abuse religious freedom is essential to an improvement in and an expansion of U.S.-Laos relations. In this context, the U.S. government should urge Lao officials to:

2.a. halt the arrest and detention of persons on account of their manifestation of religion or belief;

2.b. release from imprisonment or detention persons who are so restricted on account of their manifestation of religion or belief;

2.c. end abusive practices such as the ill treatment in prisons and other places of confinement against such persons;

2.d. cease practices that coerce individuals to renounce any religion or belief, including detention, imprisonment, or forcible displacement from one’s home for the failure to renounce one’s faith;

2.e. cease the arbitrary closing of churches, schools, and other religious facilities;

2.f. refrain from implementing those elements of the recent prime ministerial decree on religious activities that are inconsistent with international human rights law and to revise the decree to bring it into conformity with international standards;

2.g. respect and fully implement the freedom of individuals and organizations to engage in religious activities in accordance with their own beliefs or doctrines and free from government interference;

2.h. provide access to religious persons (including those imprisoned or detained) in all parts of Laos by foreign diplomats, humanitarian organizations, and international human rights and religious organizations; and

2.i. ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and other relevant rapporteurs to visit the country.^[ii]

^[i] See *International Religious Freedom Act of 1998* (IRFA), § 402 (b)(1)(A), 22 U.S.C. § 6442 (b)(1)(A). “Particularly severe violations of religious freedom” are defined in IRFA § 3 (11), 22 U.S.C. § 6402 (11) as:

“systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom, including violations such as— (A) torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; (B) prolonged detention without charges; (C) causing the disappearance of persons by the abduction or clandestine detention of those persons; or (D) other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of persons” (emphasis added).

^[ii] Since the 1970s, the Lao government has either ratified, acceded to, or signed a number of international human rights treaties that contain obligations to protect freedom of religion and

3. The U.S. government should initiate a bilateral human rights dialogue with the government of Laos that would establish measurable goals and practical steps, such as the actions listed in Recommendation 2, to eliminate violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief. This dialogue should also address the broader range of human rights concerns in Laos, many of which are related to religious freedom violations, such as torture and other forms of ill-treatment, unlawful arrest or detention, absence of due process, and violations of the rights of freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

To ensure a comprehensive approach to promoting religious freedom, the U.S. government should undertake to establish a bilateral human rights dialogue with the government of Laos. This would initiate an ongoing forum to identify benchmarks for improvement and specific steps to be implemented by the government of Laos to protect human rights, including religious freedom. During the process of establishing such benchmarks and steps, the U.S. and Lao governments should incorporate the specific actions recommended by the Commission. A binding agreement between the United States and Laos to cease practices that constitute particularly severe violations of religious freedom, as authorized under IRFA, could provide a framework for addressing these abuses as part of the official dialogue.

If a human rights dialogue is established, the State Department should invite the Commission to participate in it as a demonstration of the U.S. government's concern for promoting religious freedom in Laos. Moreover, the State Department should consider ways within the context of the dialogue—in addition to its formal sessions—that religious freedom can be addressed and improved. For example, the State Department should, within the context of the dialogue, facilitate regular exchanges between Lao government officials and religious leaders and their U.S. counterparts, including U.S. congressional members. This type of informal exchange provides an opportunity to discuss religious freedom concerns, and should be encouraged by the U.S. government.

4. The U.S. government should provide assistance to advance human rights in Laos if the Lao government demonstrates a genuine commitment to implement legal and other reforms to end violations of religious freedom and associated human rights in Laos. In this regard, the State Department should undertake an assessment of human rights needs in Laos in order to identify specific areas where the United States could provide support and assistance for establishing human rights protections, particularly through support for nongovernmental organizations and initiatives. A concrete plan based on this assessment should be developed and implemented. The areas that should be addressed in this assessment include, but are not limited to, technical assistance in the drafting and implementation of laws and regulations; provision of information on human rights to the people of Laos; exchange programs designed to encourage the creation of institutions of civil society that protect human rights; third-party human rights training programs for Lao officials; and education to combat intolerance.

The difficulty of fully implementing human rights, particularly religious freedom, in Laos is compounded by the twin challenges of a traditional popular resistance to change and the communist government's suspicion of religious activities not under its control. The situation is exacerbated by the low level of education among the people of Laos, as well as underdeveloped and poor communication and transportation facilities that have resulted in limited access to many parts of the country where religious freedom abuses have occurred. Furthermore, the absence of a legal tradition is an additional obstacle to the types of reforms that are necessary to bring laws and practices into conformity with international standards.

It is with these difficulties in mind that the Commission recommends that the State Department undertake an assessment of the human rights needs in Laos in order to identify the means by which the United States could support and assist the government of Laos in addressing those needs. In view of the poverty in the country and the lack of political or economic development, relatively small amounts of assistance could have a significant impact on the effort to improve respect for human rights and religious freedom in Laos. The assessment should take into account efforts by others in the international community, including governments as well as international and nongovernmental organizations, to support human rights protections in Laos. The assessment should address, among others, the following areas:

belief; the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (acceded to in 1974); the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified in 1981); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (acceded to in 1991). Laos signed the ICCPR in 2000, but has yet to ratify it.

- **Technical legal assistance:** Some Lao officials told the Commission delegation visiting Laos that its government would welcome U.S. assistance in the formulation of legal codes. In this vein, the assessment should consider concrete actions that could be taken by the U.S. government to advance the establishment, in both law and practice, of institutional protections of individual human rights, including religious freedom. These institutions should include mechanisms for holding officials to account for any violation of human rights, preventing further abuses, and providing redress for victims of rights violations. Appropriate mechanisms to address this problem would have to be assessed in light of the current nature of the legal system, including the administration of justice, in Laos.
- **Information on human rights:** The assessment should examine means by which information on human rights could be provided to the people of Laos, including via international broadcasts, other forms of information dissemination in the Lao language, and appropriate educational efforts. Currently, both Radio Free Asia (RFA) and Voice of America provide daily broadcasts in the Lao language. The Lao service chief at RFA informed the Commission that the bulk of RFA programs are focused on issues related to human rights and democracy. The U.S. government should continue to support and, where appropriate, expand these efforts to disseminate information within Laos about the importance of human rights, including religious freedom.
- **Human rights training programs:** The combination of a culture that is resistant to change and a very poorly developed legal system have contributed to extensive underdevelopment in Laos, which has resulted in the existence of an uninformed local population whose knowledge of the outside world is limited. These factors must be addressed effectively in order to advance the protection of religious freedom and associated human rights in Laos. In the process of addressing those factors, however, an important step toward meeting the human rights objectives in Laos would be the creation of human rights training programs for specific leadership sectors, such as government officials, religious leaders, and others. Such programs could be conducted by representatives of international organizations and NGOs. Through these programs, trainees could be provided such information as the basic concepts of human rights, including religious freedom; international human rights conventions and standards as well as relevant foreign laws and regulations that protect religious freedom and associated rights; and the means by which laws and regulations could be formulated and implemented to ensure the protection of religious freedom and other human rights.
- **Other educational efforts:** Human rights education should not be limited to government officials and other leaders. To establish a foundation for the protection of religious freedom and associated human rights throughout Lao society, the U.S. government should consider supporting efforts to combat intolerance, including religious intolerance, through the development and implementation of general education curricula that provides information on the importance of human rights, including religious freedom.
- **Exchange programs:** The U.S. government, through the U.S. Embassy in Laos, has sponsored cultural, legal, and educational exchanges. The continuation of these bilateral exchanges is important to the successful implementation of the aforementioned programs and efforts to protect religious freedom and associated human rights. Therefore, the U.S. government should continue to support these exchanges and ensure that future exchanges will include Lao religious affairs officials, religious leaders, and others.

Unocal Corporation
Washington, D.C. 20036
March 31, 2003

The Honorable Phillip Crane
Chairman, Trade Subcommittee
Committee on Ways and Means
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
By facsimile: 202 225-2610

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of Unocal Corporation, I am writing to urge you to approve Normal Trade Relations with Laos.

Although Unocal Corporation does not currently do business in Laos, we are long time investors throughout ASEAN and recognize that the ultimate economic prosperity of the region will be enhanced by moving the 4 newer, undeveloped members of ASEAN forward. Laos is the only member of ASEAN which does not currently enjoy NTR status. Granting NTR to Laos would remove one of the last remaining barriers to harmonized exports, and could help facilitate further integration in ASEAN.

Granting NTR will also help reinforce economic reforms now underway and encourage the government to liberalize remaining parts of the economy. These are needed and important steps in helping the Lao economy grow.

A strong and growing ASEAN market is good for U.S. companies, and particularly for energy companies like Unocal which have a strong and longstanding presence in the region. US energy companies have competed very well in ASEAN markets and will continue to do so as our governmental policies keep pace with those of Europe, China and Japan—all of which are undertaking new initiatives to compete for this market.

For all these reasons, I encourage you to move forward with legislation approving NTR for Laos.

Sincerely yours,

William Ichord

US-ASEAN Business Council
Washington, D.C. 20036
April 3, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Crane:

On behalf of the US-ASEAN Business Council and its 150 member companies doing business in the ASEAN countries, I am writing to express our support for the extension of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) to Laos. The Council has been on record in support of NTR for Laos since the negotiation of a bilateral trade agreement between the United States and the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1997. We agree with the Committee Advisory's March 5, 2003 statement soliciting comments that ratification of the agreement "will represent an important step toward economic reform and openness, key U.S. priorities in Laos."

As we noted in our third annual submission of recommendations to the Executive and Legislative branches of the U.S. Government, the importance of the ASEAN region to American political, economic and security is increasing. US policy must continue to recognize our growing interests in the region, and do more to expand our engagement of ASEAN and its member nations. In our most recent paper of February, 2003 we specifically listed the establishment of NTR with Laos as an achievable and important accomplishment for 2003.

We note with appreciation that the Administration is fully supportive of NTR for Laos as the joint letter of February 24, 2003 from Secretary of State Colin Powell and United States Trade Representative Robert Zoellick attests. Granting NTR to Laos would also be a step forward to achieving the laudable goals set out by President George Bush during the October 2002 APEC meeting in Los Cabos, Mexico. At that meeting, President Bush announced the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI) and pledged to work with countries like Laos in their quest to meet the requirements for WTO accession.

Laos is one of the poorest countries in the world, but thanks to its lack of normal trading relations with the US is subject to the highest average tariffs. According to an analysis by the Progressive Policy Institute, Laos faces the highest average tariffs in the world (45.3%), higher even than North Korea's (35 percent) and Yugoslavia's (27.7 percent). Typical rates are 8–10 percent. Laos now exports garments, gems and jewelry, agricultural products, hydro-electricity, timber, labor and narcotics (illegally). As a matter of US national interest, if we would like Laos to export less in the last three categories, we have to help them export more in the first four. Extending NTR is a key to achieving that goal.

The Lao Government is taking steps toward free market reforms. Agreeing to the bilateral trade agreement with the United States in 1997 is certainly an important

indication of a willingness to open the country up to the outside world. We at the Council are fully aware that trade agreements negotiated by the Executive Branch and approved, hopefully, by the Congress are only the first stage of stronger and mutually beneficial economic ties. It is imperative that the Government of Laos provide American companies and their own state and private enterprises with the legal framework and operational authority they need to pursue successful trade and investments. Additionally, the Lao Government needs to continue its commendable work on addressing POW/MIA issues and stemming the flow of narcotics.

We commend you and the Committee for considering taking this long overdue step to normalize economic relations between the United States and Laos. We look forward to working with you to achieve this. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Ernest Z. Bower
President

cc The Hon. Colin Powell, US Department of State
The Hon. Robert Zoellick, Office of the US Trade Representative
The Hon. Douglas Hartwick, US Embassy—Vientiane

Attachment: Recommendations to the Bush Administration & 108th Congress from the US ASEAN Business Council (Feb. 2003)

**The ASEAN Region and its
Growing Importance to the United States**

1101 17th Street NW
Suite 411 Washington, DC 20036
<http://www.us-asean.org>
US-ASEAN Business Council, Inc.
February, 2003

**ASEAN's Growing Importance to the United States
February, 2003**

OVERVIEW

Over the past two years, the United States Government has significantly increased its engagement of ASEAN and its member nations in Southeast Asia. But the importance of the region to American political, economic and security interests is increasing—and there is more to be done.

This paper identifies five major objectives that we believe are the keys to advancing US interests in the region.

- Implementation of US initiatives taken in 2002 to strengthen its relations with the ASEAN region to include the “Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative” and the “ASEAN Cooperation Plan”.
- Establishment of a regional security environment that supports trade and investment flows and US access to ASEAN markets.
- Strengthening of ASEAN economic growth through enhanced regional integration.
- Encouragement of economic, financial, regulatory and judicial reforms in ASEAN.
- Increased Congressional awareness and engagement in the region.

These major objectives are discussed in detail below and each is supported by a set of specific recommendations.

While all of these objectives are not achievable in one year, we believe that the following specific objectives can be accomplished in 2003.

A visit by President Bush to selected countries in the ASEAN region and participation in APEC 2003 in Thailand that includes a separate meeting with US companies active in the region.

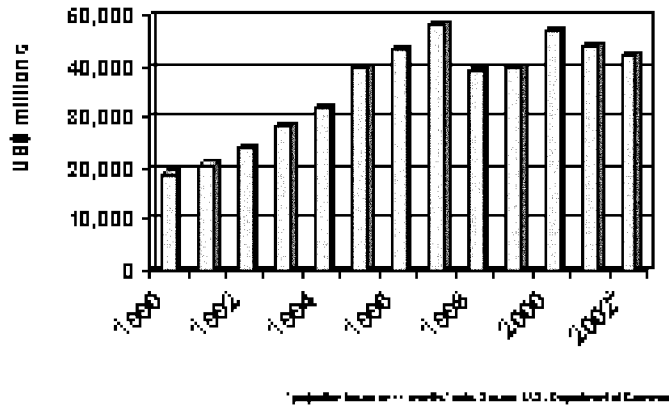
- Congressional passage of the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement.
- The start of negotiations of a US-Thailand Free Trade Agreement.
- Completion of a US-Malaysia Trade and Investment Facilitation Agreement (TIFA).
- Establishment of Normal Trading Relations with Laos.

- Cambodia accession to the World Trade Organization and substantial progress on Vietnam's accession in 2004.

The Growing Importance of Southeast Asia:

ASEAN's importance to the United States reached historic levels after the terrorist attacks of 2001. The region, which includes leading moderate Islamic countries, was quick to join the worldwide war against international terrorism and will continue to play an extremely important role in the effort. Its leaders understand the need to fight terrorism to achieve stability and economic growth, but will come under increasing pressure in the coming year, particularly if there is more terrorist related violence in the region. ASEAN will also be critical to the achievement of secure trade—between ASEAN and the US and also worldwide.

U.S. Exports to ASEAN, 1990 - 2002

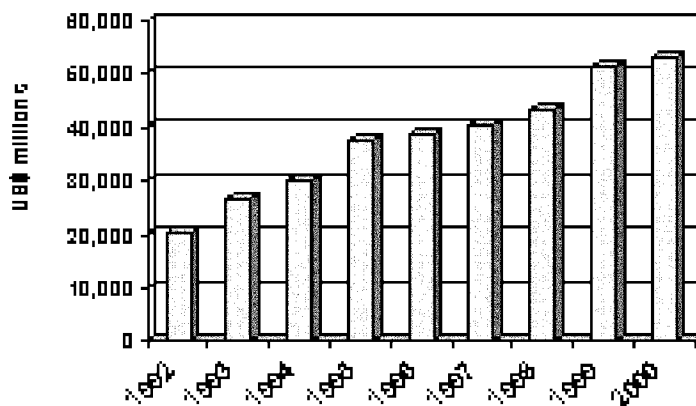


Projections based on 11 months data

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce

The region will also play a critical role in helping strengthen the US economy in 2003. Two-way trade between the US and ASEAN last year totaled \$120 billion, with US exports to the ASEAN region reaching \$44 billion. US exports to ASEAN are more than twice as large as our exports to China and ASEAN is America's fifth largest export market (behind only Canada, the European Union, Mexico and Japan). Last year, US direct investment in the five major ASEAN markets reached more than \$50 billion. This is five times US direct investment in China; larger than our investment in markets such as Mexico and Brazil; and comparable to our investments in Japan. American access to and participation in ASEAN markets is therefore important to the economic futures of both the US and Southeast Asia.

U.S. Investment in ASEAN, 1990 - 2001



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce

The political landscape in ASEAN has changed dramatically since the late 1990s and national elections will soon be held in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and possibly Singapore. In the run up to these elections, we should expect increasingly nationalistic, protectionist and perhaps even anti-American rhetoric. The challenge will be to keep these developments in perspective and build strong relationships with any new leaders that may emerge. It will also be important for the US Government and private sector to reach out to the newly emerging legislative branches in the region.

Finally, China's increased involvement in the region—and that of Japan, Korea and Taiwan—has important implications for the US. Today, ASEAN conducts annual Leaders Summits with China, Japan and Korea (ASEAN +3) and has engaged in the third round of negotiations of a Free Trade Agreement with China. American companies should benefit from Asian economic integration, linking ASEAN's 550 million citizens with 1.3 billion Chinese. Adding Japan and Korea will create a market of well over 2 billion people and an economy whose value would approach \$5 trillion. It will be increasingly important for the US Government and private sector to monitor these developments to ensure these efforts are WTO consistent and include US and other foreign investors who will provide the capital, technology and talent to fuel future growth.

Progress to Date:

The Bush Administration began to strengthen its engagement with ASEAN prior to September 11, 2001. This point is critical, because it represents early recognition of the importance of the region to US national security on the merits of its economic partnership and its role in the security and political balance in Asia. In the wake of 9/11 the importance of ASEAN to the US has grown, as has the Administration's outreach to the region.

In October 2002, President Bush announced the "Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative" (EAI), a far-reaching program of economic cooperation under which the United States will open the door to prospective free trade agreements with any interested ASEAN country. It also provides for US support of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in meeting the requirements for accession to the WTO.

Earlier in the year, Secretary of State Colin Powell proposed a very proactive "ASEAN Cooperation Plan" (ACP) that involves a comprehensive partnership between the US and ASEAN and its members in a number of critical areas to include capacity building; human resource development; and, the transfer of skills and technology.

The Administration has also proposed changes to the FY 2004 International Affairs Budget. Security Assistance is targeted for countries supporting the United States war on terrorism. In addition, it launches the Millennium Challenge Account which ties increased development assistance to performance in areas to include improving rule-of-law and implementing market reforms as well as fighting hunger and aids and supporting social and economic development.

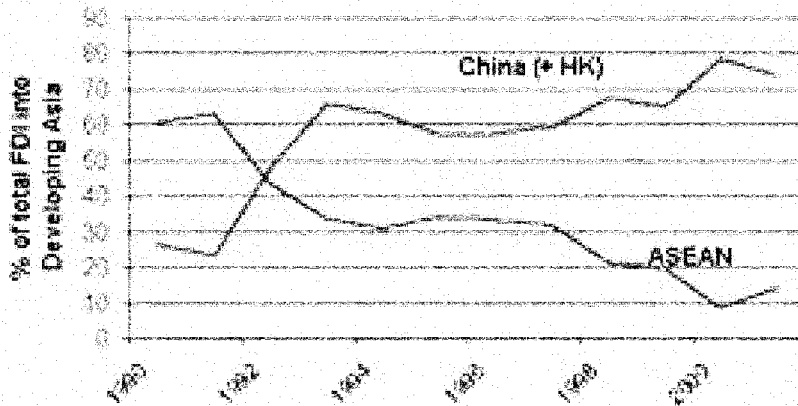
ASEAN has responded positively to the US on counter-terrorism issues. On a regional basis, the ASEAN Leaders, at their annual meeting in November 2002, renewed their earlier pledge to take cooperative action against terrorism. This followed individual actions by several ASEAN states that resulted in the arrest of several suspected terrorists.

There have also been other US actions supporting increased engagement with the region. For the past two years, Secretary of State Powell has participated in the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conferences and the ASEAN Regional Forum. US Trade Representative Zoellick has played a leading and proactive role in promoting trade liberalization in the region and in support of the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement. He also met twice with the ASEAN Economic Ministers, something that had not been done for more than a decade. Finally, the US-ASEAN Dialogue was conducted in Washington, DC in November 2001, the first time it had been held in the US in several years.

ASEAN has also taken steps towards greater integration. With some exceptions, the timetable for establishing an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) has been observed. Tariffs have been reduced and customs modernization is in progress. However, it is critical that progress on implementing AFTA continues and that special attention be paid to services and the need for food and agricultural regulatory harmonization and consistency in the region.

An ASEAN Industrial Cooperation scheme is being implemented and the framework for an ASEAN Investment Area (AIA) has been established. However, ASEAN is losing the battle for new Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to China.

FDI Flows to ASEAN & China, 1990-2001



Source: UNCTAD

To assist in countering this trend, ASEAN has commissioned a study on ASEAN competitiveness. The study recommended the acceleration and deepening of ASEAN economic integration. It also encouraged the ASEAN countries to develop a stronger, more independent set of institutions to drive integration.

Finally, economic growth in ASEAN has begun to rebound, despite the continued downturn in the US economy, its principal market and trading partner. Concurrently, there has been a slow down in the implementation of the economic, fiscal, regulatory and other reforms promised during the height of the Asian economic crisis.

Shared Goals—The US Government and Private Sector:

Enhanced US-ASEAN relations and continued American access to ASEAN markets is a common goal of the US Government and the US private sector. We believe that this goal is also shared by the members of ASEAN, who see extensive benefits in US engagement in the region and the presence of US companies.

The US government and private sector also share the goal of maintaining a security environment in the region that supports the global war on terrorism without impeding trade and investment flows. This is not an issue of balance. Security and trade are mutually reinforcing objectives and both are requisites for economic growth. Given this interrelationship and the extensive two way trade between the US and ASEAN, the goal of a secure regional environment that facilitates the expansion of trade and investment is also shared by the nations of Southeast Asia.

Finally, we believe that ASEAN economic growth, political stability and social progress toward stable, free market democracies are also goals shared by the US government and the US private sector. Economic growth needs to be based on internal development at the national and regional levels as well as through trade and foreign investment to ensure that this growth continues over time.

Overarching Objectives and Supporting Recommendations:

While recognizing the progress that has been made in the past two years, we believe that there is much more that the US Government and the US private sector can do in partnership to achieve these shared goals. Specific objectives and supporting recommendations are discussed below.

Objective #1: Implementation of the “Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative” (EAI) and the “ASEAN Cooperation Plan” (ACP).

American credibility will be gauged by ASEAN in part by the implementation of the U.S. initiatives that were announced last year. Without clearly identified deliverables, America’s recent gains in the region may be challenged by the increased involvement of China, Japan and other nations in the region. The converse is also true—implementation and follow-through will enhance US engagement in the region, strengthen US-ASEAN relations, and ensure closer cooperation by the members of ASEAN.

Recommendation: Congress should approve the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement at the earliest possible date and on a bipartisan basis in order to signal that the US wants liberalized trade regimes in Asia.

Recommendation: The USTR should begin negotiations of a US-Thailand Free Trade Agreement (FTA). In support of this effort, the US and Thai private sectors should work together to support and fund a joint study on the benefits of a US-Thailand FTA. The US Government should also support efforts in capacity building to help Thailand achieve the resources necessary to negotiate and implement a comprehensive FTA. Finally, in preparation for these discussions, the Thai Government should be encouraged to implement promised improvements in intellectual property right protection to include early passage of effective optical media legislation.

Recommendation: Congress should approve Normal Trading Relations (NTR) for Laos.

Recommendation: A US-Malaysia Trade and Investment Facilitation Agreement (TIFA) should be concluded in accordance with the “Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative”.

Recommendation: The US government should support Cambodian, Vietnamese and Lao preparations for accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) through the use of US Technical Assistance Programs.

Recommendation: Indonesia and the Philippines should be added to the list of countries eligible for participation in the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). The US Government should preserve its flexibility in the use of MCA funds to ensure that they provide the greatest advantage to the targeted countries as well as the US private sector. The US private sector should assist in developing MCA programs focused on rule-of-law and market reforms to be implemented in these countries.

Recommendation: The US Government, World Bank, Asia Development Bank and the US private sector should support and participate in capacity building programs as provided for under the “ASEAN Cooperation Plan” to include trade capacity building.

Recommendation: The US Secretary of State should again participate in the ASEAN Post Ministerial Forum and ASEAN Regional Forum. He should use this opportunity to announce specific deliverables supporting the ASEAN Cooperation Plan.

Recommendation: The US-ASEAN Dialogue should be continued with US participation at the Under Secretary level.

Recommendation: The US Trade Representative should again meet with the ASEAN Economic Ministers with the objective of advancing progress under the “Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative”.

Recommendation: Humanitarian assistance and Peace Corps activities in the region should be increased.

Objective #2: Establish a Secure Regional Environment That Supports Trade and Investment Flows.

Security, trade and economic growth are inextricably linked. The US Government has recognized this linkage in announcing its “Secure Trade in the APEC Region (STAR)” initiative. Since US-ASEAN two-way trade totaled \$120 billion last year, we believe that the importance of “secure trade” is especially important in the US-ASEAN context.

Recommendation: Cooperative action against terrorism is key to achieving a secure regional environment and the US and ASEAN governments should work together in achieving the dual objectives of security and trade.

Recommendation: In promoting its STAR initiative, the US Government should focus on gaining the support and involvement of the ASEAN countries.

Recommendation: The US Government should increase its outreach to the ASEAN countries on transportation security issues. This includes increased dialogue and explanation of the US initiatives; i.e. the Container Security Initiative (CSI), Port Security programs, C-TPAT, etc.

Recommendation: US assistance to the ASEAN countries will also be required in the areas of skill transfers, capacity building and technology transfer as the ASEAN governments seek to address their transportation security needs.

Recommendation: The US Government should encourage the ASEAN governments to continue to work with industry to streamline customs clearance procedures for cargo. New security measures should be implemented in a way that does not impede the flow of goods.

Recommendation: Ensure that US visa and immigration policies are implemented in a transparent manner and that clearance processes are efficient and timely so as to not adversely affect tourism and the movement of business persons. Congress should provide supplemental funding for additional resources as necessary.

Recommendation: The Administration should ensure that State Department Travel Advisories are not overly broad in their application and unnecessarily impede business travel and US investment in the region. Specifically, distinctions should be made between casual travelers and business travelers. In addition, ASEAN governments should be given clear guidelines and objectives to be met in order to have these advisories lifted.

Recommendation: US technology licensing requirements and export controls should be reviewed to ensure that they do not unnecessarily impact US trade and investment.

Recommendation: Expansion of US Government engagement with ASEAN security agencies and police forces to include the provision of training and equipment as necessary.

Recommendation: Strengthen US-ASEAN military-to-military ties in the region, to include increasing International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs, as a means of addressing terrorism, piracy and other security issues.

Objective #3: Strengthen ASEAN Economic Growth Through Enhanced Regional Integration.

ASEAN economic growth leading to stable, free market democracies is a goal shared by the US Government and the US private sector. ASEAN has also recognized the need for increasing regionalization if they are to improve their economic growth rates, remain competitive in world markets and be successful in attracting additional foreign investment.

Recommendation: The US Government should encourage ASEAN to complete the establishment of the ASEAN Free Trade Area on schedule and without derogation.

Recommendation: The US Government should support and encourage ASEAN’s customs modernization programs to include clarification and standardization of rules of origin consistent with international practices. Both the US Government and the US private sector should support conferences and seminars on “international best practices”.

Recommendation: ASEAN should also be encouraged to address non-tariff barriers that impede regional integration and international trade in areas such as food and agriculture policies and standards.

Recommendation: Appropriate US Government agencies should provide technical support and training to ASEAN programs involving standards and mutual recognition agreements as a means of speeding integration and trade.

Recommendation: ASEAN and its member states should be encouraged to provide a high standard of intellectual property right protection and effective enforcement measures in order to alter the perception that ASEAN countries are centers of piracy and counterfeiting and to advance internal development as well as attract foreign direct investment.

Recommendation: The US Government should establish a good working relationship with the ASEAN Secretary-General, strengthen its support of the ASEAN Secretariat and recognize, encourage and support ASEAN Ministerial initiatives.

Objective #4: Encourage Economic, Financial and Other Reforms in ASEAN.

In recent years, the members of ASEAN have committed to a series of structural, economic, financial and regulatory reforms in response to the Asian economic crisis and as a means of attracting foreign direct investment. However, progress has been uneven and has fallen short of expectations in several areas to include regulatory reform where the lack of harmonized standards consistent with international standards impede trade and investment in areas such as food and agriculture. Finally, in some areas reforms have actually been reversed. It is critically important for ASEAN to regain the momentum in this area if it is to successfully face the challenges ahead.

Recommendation: The US Government should encourage the ASEAN governments to follow through on promised structural, economic, financial and regulatory reforms. In addition, they should be urged to undertake judicial reforms as a means enhancing the rule of law and eliminating corruption. US support should include visits by US officials from appropriate US government agencies to discuss the importance of such changes and to offer suggestions and assistance. The US private sector can play a key role in support of such visits by providing specific background information and recommendations to advance such reforms to include regulatory regimes and standards.

Recommendation: Review US assistance programs with the objective of increasing US support for these reforms through capacity building. Specifically, US government support should include training as well as technical and financial support.

Recommendation: The US Government should pursue bilateral "open sky agreements" with those ASEAN governments interested in such agreements for cargo and/or passenger traffic. In addition, US and ASEAN leaders should study the feasibility and benefits of a "regional open sky arrangement" that would greatly facilitate trade and communications among ASEAN members.

Recommendation: The ASEAN governments should be encouraged to return to private ownership those assets acquired by them during the Asian economic crisis. This should be done expeditiously and in a fair and transparent manner. In addition, they should be urged to avoid the adoption of national policies that would restrict the ability of US companies to invest in their countries. Specifically the ASEAN Governments should be encouraged to liberalize their investment policies to include eliminating or reducing limits on foreign participation.

Recommendation: Intellectual property right legislation has been pending in several ASEAN states to include Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. These governments should be urged to expedite passage of updated legislation that will afford a high level of intellectual property protection.

Recommendation: The US Secretary of Energy should re-engage Indonesia in a bilateral energy dialogue. Suspended during the economic crises, these talks have provided a useful exchange between US and Indonesian energy officials and the private sectors of the two countries.

Recommendation: The US private sector, through the US-ASEAN Business Council's Center for Technology Cooperation, should conduct private sector seminars and training on customs reform, international accounting standards, commodity trade rules, corporate governance, biotechnology to include food and agriculture applications, intellectual property right protection, regulatory reform, etc. US government speakers should participate in these programs as appropriate or they could be done in partnership under the auspices of the EAI or ACP.

Objective #5: Support the Expansion of Congressional Engagement in ASEAN.

Congress has always had a key role in US security, trade and economic policy. With the growing importance of the ASEAN region, Congress can be expected to in-

crease its involvement in the region. The US private sector is supportive of that effort.

Recommendation: The US private sector supports the formation of Congressional Caucuses for selected ASEAN countries and stands ready to provide information and briefings as well as support hearings as requested.

Recommendation: The members and staff of both the Senate and the House of Representatives should increase their visits to the region with the support of the US private sector.

Recommendation: APEC 2003 will be conducted in Thailand and members of Congress and their staffs are encouraged to participate in this important event.

Recommendation: Encourage, plan and implement visits to the US by Legislative/ Parliamentary groups from ASEAN in recognition of the growing importance of the legislative branches of government in countries like the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand.

Summary and Conclusions:

The Administration and Congress have made significant progress in improving US engagement in Southeast Asia. This includes the passage of Trade Promotion Authority, as well as the announcement of the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative and the ASEAN Cooperation Plan. This foundation of US engagement with ASEAN provides an excellent basis to address the growing challenges and opportunities ahead as American security, political and economic interests in the region increase.

In this paper, the US-ASEAN Business Council has identified five specific objectives and supporting recommendations on what the Administration, Congress and the US private sector can do together.

We look forward to working with you on these issues in the coming months.

US-Lao Trading Corporation
San Pablo, California 94806
April 7, 2003

The Honorable Congressman Phillip M. Crane
Chairman of Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Honorable Chairman

As a Laotian-American businessman, I am writing to support the US NTR for Laos. I am interested in the business opportunities between the two countries.

I am currently engaging in the retail businesses that import many commodities from the Southeast Asian countries. The extension of NTR to Laos will provide more business opportunities to many American businesses and to create more jobs.

Best Regards,

Gary Tatpaporn
President US-Lao Trading Corporation

Silver Spring, Maryland 20906

Dear Honorable:

I am Daungyewa Utarasint, a U.S. citizen who live on 2301 Glenallan Ave, Apt 611, Silver Spring, MD 20906. I wholeheartedly support the position taken by the Bush Administration on the issue of US Normal Trade Relation (NTR) for Laos because I believe that NTR would not only bring the well-being to people in both countries, but also promote more democratic governance in Laos.

US NTR will bring about prosperity to both Laotian and the American peoples. For Laotians, it will open up many new economic opportunities to tens of thousands of Laotian workers who are hard working and deserving of a better life but lack employment opportunities. NTR will provide Laotians exposure to the world, higher living standards as villages are more able to sell food and traditional products, probably some international investment, some more ability for the Hmong and Lao community in the United States to see families and to bring their experience in business.

For Americans, NTR would bring benefits to American consumers. As NTR allows Laos to export more products into the United States, American consumers would be

able to buy unique Laos' products such as hand-made textile, coffee, silk and handicraft at affordable prices; therefore NTR for Laos could also contribute in improving American people's life too. Moreover, since NTR provide the basis for trade and investment, it would contribute to developing emerging private sector and investment in Laos, the American companies would be able to sell more goods and services in Laos once the buying power of people and investors has been raised to a certain level. Particularly, if investment in mining and hydropower sectors has increase it will provide export opportunity to American companies, which manufacture heavy equipment or if tourism sector in Laos has increase, the window of opportunity of exporting aircrafts of U.S. aircraft manufactures will be open wider.

As an American citizen, I believe that it is morally wrong for the U.S. to single out poor little Laos (the poorest and least known, and most often forgotten victim of the Vietnam War) for harsher treatment/judgment on NTR issue while the U.S. continues to cater to Laos' much larger neighbors such as Vietnam and China whose political system is no more "perfect," by U.S. standards, than that of Laos. Yes, Laos needs more reform on all fronts (but so do China and Vietnam).

Therefore, I request that the U.S. Congress ratify a trade agreement that has been waiting for five years and grant NTR to Laos.

If you have any questions, I can be contacted by e-mail at GinHong@aol.com. My Work phone: (301) 926-9199

Sincerely,

Daungyewa Utarasint

North Saint Paul, Minnesota 66109
April 15, 2003

To:

Honorable Charles Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance, United State Senate.

Honorable William M. Thomas, Chairman, committee on Ways and Means.

Honorable Philip M. Crane, Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade of Ways and Means Committee.

Honorable,

As an American Citizen, I am asking for your support for granting normal trade relation status to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Laos is landlocked country, unlike other nations in Southeast Asian, that has access to the sea to better economic.

Therefore, I totally support the joint proposal of Honorable Colin L. Powell, Secretary of State and Honorable Robert B. Zoellick, US Trade Representative, for granting the Permanent Normal Trade Relations to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is the only country in Southeast Asian that has not got such facility yet although its Politico-Social situations are far better than others.

I would appreciate if you could take the said proposal and my noble with in consideration and render to Laos the fairness and real touch of the United States generosity.

It is my sincere hope that you will support the said proposal and help granting Normal Trade Relation to Laos.

Sincerely yours,

Tsuchue P. Vang

General Assembly of Delegates of Latians Abroad
 Scottsdale, Arizona 85258
 United Lao Action Center
 Sterling, Virginia 20164
April 15, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
 U.S. House of Representatives
 233 Cannon House Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

**Lao-American Opposition to
 NTR for Lao People's Democratic Republic**

Dear Congressman Crane:

It has come to our knowledge that our government is once again seeking Congressional legislation to grant favored status of normal trade relations (NTR) to the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR), one of a few remaining communist regimes in the world. As Lao Americans, we are disturbed by this prospect.

As taxpayers and constituents, we are deeply concerned about any haste to approve it without an adequate debate involving the Lao American community as a whole. We are worried that it might end up taxing Americans to reward a brutal Stalinist state.

In its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, the State Department itself chronicles the LPDR government's perennial poor record on human rights. They continue to restrict freedom of speech, the press, assembly and association. Citizens do not have the right to change their government. Police uses arbitrary arrest, lengthy detention without charge, and surveillance. Prisoners are abused and tortured, and prison conditions generally are extremely harsh and life threatening.

In addition, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Report of the Department has noted that while the Constitution of the LPDR provides for freedom of religion the government restricts this right in practice. In February 2002, a fact-finding delegation of the Commission found that the LPDR government 'continues to engage in particularly severe religious freedom violations' including arrest, prolonged detention, and imprisonment. In addition, Lao officials have forced Christians to renounce their faith. Churches have been closed and remains closed. In its latest report issued in February 2003, the Commission recommends that the LPDR be designated as a 'country of particular concern' (CPC).

Sir, Lao Americans do not object to free trade and NTR per se. On the contrary, as people who sought and found freedom in America and have seen how it has miraculously transformed and elevated our very own economic condition, we would be the first to promote and defend free trade. But NTR is not a key that fits every lock. It has to be geared to the specific needs and conditions of a country, particularly where political dictates do not allow the full free flow of economic forces.

We believe in fact that NTR could play a key role in generating economic growth for Laos. But we also believe that to hand it over to the LPDR at this point without a more methodical study and thorough broad-based discussion would be premature, ineffective and counterproductive. Fundamental questions raise doubts in the minds of a great many Lao Americans about the benefits of NTR. These are:

What's in the deal?

The Lao American community, at the grass-root as well as leadership levels, has not been given any real opportunity to contribute our views on the particular NTR package that is being earmarked for the LPDR. We don't have the text of the protocol and we don't know the details of its content. How can we be expected to address it properly?

What are we, American taxpayers, being asked to give away to the communist regime in Laos?

We understand that NTR will mean reduced U.S. duties on imports from LPDR, in other words foregone revenues, which will need to be redeemed by increased internal taxation. Are we also to make financial concessions as part of the NTR package? Lao American taxpayers are anxious and prepared to help our families and friends in Laos escape the scourge of mass poverty. But we need to know up front the magnitude of our tax dollars to be given up and the extent to which the people of Laos will actually benefit from NTR under the current political system.

What are the expected reciprocal benefits of NTR to the U.S.?

Not much economically or financially. Laos is not China or even Vietnam. Given its small population and limited purchasing power, the opening up of the Lao market will have negligible impact on either U.S. export income or employment. Similarly, opportunities for U.S. firms to invest in the LPDR are limited by a basic lack of physical and human infrastructure in all sectors: production, distribution, banking, marketing, legal and others. Have we secured the LPDR's enforceable commitments to protect U.S. commercial and investment interests? Have they promulgated any specific laws covering these areas?

What is the likelihood of NTR attaining its political objectives?

As we understand it, the Administration believes that NTR, as an 'engagement' policy instrument, will facilitate the resolution of the MIA issue. Lao Americans couldn't agree more with this noble cause. Thousands of our fellow Laotians, police and military officers, civil servants, and ordinary citizens, are also among the MIA's and unaccounted for. To this day, the Vientiane government still has not returned the remains of the King, the Queen and the Crown Prince to the Lao Royal Family for a proper burial in accordance with our tradition.

But, we don't believe NTR by itself will do a complete job in a timely manner. What is to guarantee that any cooperation by the LPDR government on the issue of MIA's will not cease after the passing of NTR? Are there specific written agreements linking the granting or extending of NTR to their performance on MIA's? Is a monitoring process of this performance in place? Can we immediately and unconditionally withdraw NTR in the event of unsatisfactory MIA performance?

In the long run, the Administration believes that NTR will promote political reform and change towards democracy in the LPDR. What is the basis for this belief? How does the process work? Do we have an actual blueprint to ensure that it will work? It is hard for us to envisage that an economic tool can bring about a change of the political system. Historically, as the recent experience of East Europe has shown, democratization brings economic progress, not the other way around, and quicker too.

Are there specific written agreements linking the granting of NTR to the grave problem of human rights violations and religious persecution of Christians and other minority religions in the LPDR?

The Lao American community is deeply concerned about the situation in the Lao PDR relating to the abuses of human rights and religious freedom. We firmly believe that NTR should be used as a leverage to help redress those issues. At the very least, we must obtain concrete commitments up front by the LPDR government to initiate and institute reforms in these areas prior to granting NTR. Again, a monitoring system should be established to verify compliance with those commitments after NTR has been granted.

Why the haste to grant NTR?

Sir, the questions outlined above weigh heavily in the minds of Lao Americans. We believe they are legitimate questions of real concern to all sides including Laotians in Laos, Lao Americans, the Administration, and the U.S. Congress, who value democracy and share a common vision of Laos as a free and prosperous nation. It is precisely because we recognize the potential contribution of free trade to the realization of this vision that we believe we should take the time necessary to consider the complex issue of NTR in greater depth and within a broader participatory framework in order to find ways and means to enhance and ensure its effectiveness in achieving its objectives.

To this end, we are appealing to you, your good offices and your Subcommittee on Trade to consider deferring any legislative action on the issue of NTR for the Lao PDR. This will give us an opportunity for discussing it on a multi-sided interdisciplinary basis which will lead to an NTR package that is mutually satisfactory to all concerned. For your reference, I am enclosing a document containing our views in greater detail plus the profiles of the two organizations I represent.

Please accept our deepest appreciation for your attention and consideration.

Respectfully:

Sin Vilay
Under-Secretary
General Assembly of Delegates of Laotians Abroad
Executive Director
United Lao Action Center

**THE CASE AGAINST GRANTING
NORMALIZED TRADE RELATIONS (NTR)
TO THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (LPDR)**

Many Lao-Americans, individuals and organizations who are working to promote human rights, freedom and democracy for Laos, firmly believe that unless all the necessary economic and political preconditions are met the granting of favored trade status to the LPDR will not effectively foster economic growth for Laos. Certainly, in the context of the current political regime and of the mindset and practices of those in control, it will not benefit the people of Laos. On the contrary, it is very likely to prove counter-productive.

We are given to understand by the policy of 'engagement' that if the communist oligarchs in Vientiane are treated reasonably they will behave reasonably. Hence, as the policy assumption goes, if we grant them NTR they will think about changing their political system towards a more democratic one. This idea is regarded as unrealistic at best by Lao-Americans. The experience of granting NTR to a number of countries in Asia has not shown any major change in the oppressive political system in those countries. Nor is there any evidence that their peoples have benefited from NTR. The government and those who run it may benefit. But not the people.

We are deeply concerned that, because of the lack of decision-making power of the people, any monetary gains in increased export earnings due to the opening up of the U.S. market and financial concessions as a result of NTR will go to reinforce the hands of the Lao communist party in repressing any opposition and keeping the population in check.

A number of fundamental questions relating to the issue of NTR for the LPDR remain unanswered in the minds of Lao-Americans, namely but not exhaustively:

1. Reducing or eliminating import tariffs in favor of the LPDR is not without a cost. It means a reduction in revenue to our Government which in turn entails cuts in our public services and/or increases in our personal and other taxes. Either way, Lao-Americans as citizens and taxpayers are affected. For this reason and the fact that we have a direct interest in the well-being of our families and friends in Laos, we are concerned that we have had no significant part in the official discussion of this important issue. In particular, we feel that there is a need to determine that the return is worth the cost. We need to ensure that we can enforce mechanisms which will guarantee that the benefits of external free trade will go to the people.
2. We have learned of our Government's policy of 'engagement' to entice political change in LPDR through economic concessions. But it is not clear exactly as to how this would work. If we are to support such a policy, it is only rational that we should know what its goals and objectives are. At the end of the road, what do we stand to gain? The end of human rights abuses, of religious persecution, and other injustices? Beginning of the rule of law, free elections and democracy? By when? What if engagement does not work or takes too long to work?
3. External free trade works on the basis of free market forces that are unfettered by tariffs and other barriers. By the same token, it will not work without a free domestic economy. NTR will not yield its benefits as intended as long as economic decisions are dictated by political motivations whereby producers are not free to choose what, how, when and where to produce. The most overlooked and yet critical problem is the government's restriction of the flow of information including economic information, a necessary condition for market forces to work.
4. The fundamental problem of the Lao economy does not lie on the demand side. It is not so much a question of restricted foreign markets for Lao exports. It is a question of producing and exporting the products in which Laos has comparative advantage and which meet with the quality and standards required by world markets.
5. The basic economic problem of the LPDR rests with the supply side. Other than the natural constraint of being landlocked, the economy suffers from lack of physical, institutional and human infrastructure in all sectors (transport, distribution, banking, marketing, legal). It is shackled by a political system that is obsolete and a drag on growth, by a climate of lawlessness and arbitrary practices which further deter direct private investment, domestic and foreign. The productive process is corroded by mismanagement and corruption and handicapped by a dire lack of competent, qualified and skilled human resources.

6. There are potential dangers of granting NTR without safeguards and guarantees that are unconditionally and immediately enforceable. What mechanisms can be built in to ensure that the LPDR government will not 'tax' any increased export earnings and use it for such political purposes as paying the salaries of government workers and soldiers and financing other control apparatus? How to prevent other leakages through the abuse and violation of the rules of origin? Given that Laos is landlocked and exports have to pass through neighbors and given the proclivity for corruption, what is there to guarantee that foreign products will not be labeled as exports from Laos destined for free US markets?
7. To place total focus on NTR as the singular solution is to oversimplify the Laos problem. It not only misses the mark but could backfire and prove costly. In the considered view of many Lao-Americans, besides NTR's role as a money maker the LPDR leadership places a high premium on it as a symbolic triumph which will prop up their sagging credibility with the people. Once it is granted, they will showcase it as an affirmation of their regime. For Laotians in the free world and other freedom-loving people, it is tantamount to rewarding dictatorship and oppression. If it is misapplied, it could end up, as Congressman Dana Rohrabacher has succinctly put it, "taxing Americans to pay a communist regime". NTR carries with it a substantial opportunity cost. Once squandered, it not only loses its own leverage but will also limit other policy tools. Nor is it a tenable argument to say that NTR can always be taken back if the LPDR does not 'behave'. Such an option is a non-starter from the PR point of view. The US will be portrayed as the heartless rich walking out on the poverty-stricken people of Laos. Besides, by the time we decide to withdraw it, the LPDR will already have made political and monetary mileage out of it.

Lao-Americans see NTR as a key policy instrument in promoting political change in the LPDR. The communist leadership will have to earn it, by making a real change in attitude, behavior and practice, not just paper policy and lip service to donors. It does not make sense to just give it to them and sit back and hope. For lack of a better analogy, the idea is to dangle the carrot before the donkey, not to put it in its mouth and then expect it to do what we want. Moreover, the carrot alone will not do the job. We would also need the stick, like sanctions, reduction, suspension or cessation of bilateral and multilateral financial flows into the LPDR. This would pressure the communist leadership which, as we know, is already politically strapped for cash, into thinking and making change.

In sum, relying solely NTR as an agent of change will at best yield trickle-down economics, and, worse, trickle-down democracy. It is simply too little and too long to help millions of our fellow Laotians who have endured dire economic and political deprivations for almost three decades now. NTR cannot be viewed in isolation by ignoring the political conditions in the LPDR. And if it is to be applied under the current system, it has every chance to fail.

NTR must be considered within the framework of an overall economic and political development which is conducive to the free play of market forces. The collapse of the Soviet system and the experience of the countries in East Europe after that collapse shows that democratization leads to the maximization of benefits from free trade, not the other way around.

Until it is recognized that the existing political system in the LPDR has not just failed to develop the Lao economy but is one of the root causes, throwing NTR at the problem will be a costly waste. There is a real need to recognize this and to start working towards real change. Engagement could be useful if it works both ways. There is an opportunity here for the State Department to use its influence to get the LPDR to engage overseas Laotians under State's own auspices or under joint sponsorship of the relevant international agencies.

It will of course involve a long and complex process. But it can start from a few simplified pragmatic steps. If the objective of engagement is to change their perception and attitude, why not, as a starter, consider a program of forums, seminars, or workshops sponsored and organized by the U. S. and other governments in the free world in which all sides will participate to exchange ideas and discuss development issues of Laos. These will take place in the United States and other parts of the world which will give LPDR leaders and administrators an opportunity to see for themselves how political and economic freedoms have lifted overseas Laotians to the highest standards of living in the world. At the same time, they will see that most of the half-million Laotians overseas have no desire for political power in Laos and that their collective intention is to be able to lend their substantial multi-faceted knowledge and skills to systematically rebuild Laos and help their fellow Laotians escape the ravages of poverty.

For these reasons, we the under-signed Lao-Americans respectfully urge the Administration and the Congress to put a freeze on the approval of NTR for the Lao People's Democratic Republic until such time as it can be ascertained and verified that its government as a sign of good faith has taken specific, concrete and significant steps to redress the human rights situation and religious persecution and to institute real change towards openness, transparency, marketization and democratization.

Respectfully at your disposal:

United Lao Action Center
U.L.A.C.

E-Mail: bm2b@yahoo.com lukxay@cs.com
Fax: 509-753-6680 630-839-3312

GENERAL ASSEMBLY DELEGATES OF LAOTIANS ABROAD, USA

Phone: 602-499-5285 Fax: 630-839-3312 Email: WteParasol@cs.com

PROFILE

This Organization was established to support and assist the Royal Institution of Million Elephants and White Parasol (Rasavong Lanxang Homkhao) in its quest to restore freedom and democracy to Laos.

The Assembly which operates in the United States, Europe, Australia and Oceania and Canada serves as a forum for Laotians worldwide, individuals and associated groups alike, to discuss issues and exchange ideas relating to the Laos problem. It meets periodically in different countries to raise awareness about the political and economic plight of the people of Laos and to forge a unified approach to policies which could find wide support among the world community, including in particular the United Nations, the European Parliament and the US Government.

While we are concerned about the long-standing issues of human rights, justice, the rule of law, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and other basic freedoms and civic rights, we do not believe in recriminations. Our focus is positive, constructive and forward-looking. We firmly believe, however, that there can be no prosperity without freedom, as demonstrated by the demise of the communist system worldwide. The stagnation of the economy in Laos over the last quarter-century which ended up placing it on the World Bank's list of least developed countries was due in large part to the lack of a free market system based on a democratic foundation.

With mutual understanding and recognition of the root causes of the country's current problems, we believe that all the Laotian people, together, can bring about political and economic change which will return Laos to a free and open system. Billions of dollars in development aid have been futile without the necessary qualified human resources to implement programs and projects. Half a million Laotians abroad who have acquired more than a quarter-century of precious knowledge, skill, experience, and technical know-how in all sectors of the economy can fill this gap. In this framework, we can hope to rebuild and develop the Lao nation, to deliver it from mass poverty, and to lay the foundation for a secure and prosperous future to the benefit of all Laotians.

**UNITED LAO ACTION CENTER
U.L.A.C.**

PROFILE

In October, 2003, some twenty Lao Organizations from different countries in the free world came together at the "International Policy Conference on Democracy and Development for Laos", in Washington, DC. Their main aim was to join hands and co-ordinate their efforts to restore freedom and democracy to Laos.

They achieved a complete unity at the Conference and unanimously adopted a collective Plan of Action relating to the Laos problem focusing on three sectors: human rights and free elections; economic development; and political development. Three corresponding Action Groups, consisting of representatives from the participant Organizations, were established to implement the Plan.

In order to co-ordinate the activities of the Action Groups, an operational center was set up to be located in Washington, DC. It is called the "United Lao Action Center" or ULAC.

ULAC's principal mission is to help promote overall unity among all the Lao Organizations in the free world. Its functions are:

- to strengthen and expand the basis of unity already achieved by the Conference;
- to facilitate the efforts of all Lao Organizations in conducting work in the United States, particularly in the Washington, DC area;
- to establish contacts and working relationships with US government agencies, international agencies, NGO's, and other allied democracy organizations;
- to raise, maintain and enhance world awareness about the issues of Laos through research and analysis for radio/TV broadcasts and outlets, press/news releases, bulletins, communiqués, official correspondences, position papers and others;
- to provide logistical, operational and organizational services as well as substantive support and assistance to all Lao Organizations as appropriate e.g. scheduling appointments, arranging meetings, conferences and other events, maintaining a data base, enabling use of office facilities and others.

It is hoped that those of us, Laotians overseas, who value freedom and democracy and who feel the misery of millions of our brothers and sisters who are suffering in abject poverty under tyranny in the Lao PDR, will join ULAC to do our part in finding constructive and peaceful ways and means to lift them from that dark abyss.

Contact: E-Mail: bm2b@yahoo.com luxxay@cs.com manisinh@hotmail.com

Fax: 509-753-6680 630-839-3312

Village Focus International
Portland, Oregon 97204
20 April 2003

hearingclerks.waysandmeans@mail.house.gov
Fax 001-202-225-2610

The Honorable
Congressman Philip M. Crane, Chairman,
Committee on Ways and Means,
House of Representatives.

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We, the Lao and American staff of Village Focus International, an American based non-governmental organization working in Lao PDR, seek your support for extension of normal trade relations (NTR) to Lao PDR and to bring into force the comprehensive Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) agreed to between the United States (US) and Lao PDR in 1997. Representing hundreds of households in the communities where we work and supporters and donors in the US, we urge you to submit the BTA to Congress for prompt consideration and passage to enable the US Administration to bring the Agreement into force to enable individuals and businesses in both countries to benefit greatly from the NTR.

As you know, Laos is one of only seven countries under non-NTR or embargo-type policies in US foreign policy, along with Iraq, Libya and others. Moreover, the denial of NTR to Laos in light of normal trade relations recently granted to Vietnam and Cambodia makes little sense, especially since the US Government has kept continuous diplomatic relations with Lao PDR when such relations were severed with Vietnam and Cambodia after 1975. Ratification of the BTA forms part of President George Bush's trade agenda. President Bush recently cited Lao PDR as one of the countries included in the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative, with the aim of helping Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam integrate into the international economy. Lao PDR began economic reform in 1986 under the "new economic mechanism," and has become more integrated with its neighbors since joining ASEAN in 1997 and negotiating membership into WTO. Under recent ASEAN agreements, Lao PDR will reduce all tariffs to a minimum of 5% by 2005 and eliminate them by 2010. Moreover, bilateral efforts between the US and Lao PDR to address POW/MIA issues and stem the flow of narcotics continue to be productive.

We are mindful that trade agreements negotiated by the Executive Branch and approved by Congress are only the first stage of stronger and mutually beneficial economic ties. It is incumbent upon the government of Laos to provide American companies and their own state and private enterprises with the legal framework and operational authority they need to pursue successful trade and investments. It

is time to remove discriminatory tariff barriers and to take this last major step for the normalization of the relations. We look forward to working with you to achieve this. Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Todd Sigaty
Co-Founder and Executive Director, Village Focus International

Rick Reece
Co-Founder and SE Asian Program Director, Village Focus International

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Stockholm, Sweden
16 April 2003

U.S House of Representative
Washington D.C. 20515.U.S.A.

Dear Sirs,

With reference to the letter of State Secretary, Colin L. Powell and Robert B. Zoellick, US Trade Representative to the Chairman, Committee on the Finance, E. Grassley and William M. Thomas, Chairman, Committee on Ways and Means on the 24th February, 2003, concerning the agreement on Permanent Normal Trade Relations Status to the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (LPDR). This significant agreement is giving the way to the free trade exchange between the two countries. It means that the American bussiness men can go to Laos for investment or doing bussiness in Laos and the Laos people can sell their products to America without tariff barrier on trade. After 27 years of National liberation, Laos is developing towards democray and political stability. The human righths situation is improving and economy is growing the people living standard is much better now than 20 years ago. In 1986, the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic has introduced the Open Market Economy's policy. Since then, foreign investment has been increased and Laos economy is expanding. It is of a great responsibility for a big nation such as U.S.A. to grant Nomalized Trade Relations to the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic in accord- ing to the agreement of the Government in both countries.

Sunthorn Vongnongvar

Hilton Head Island, South Carolina 29928

Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman
Subcommittee on Trade
Ways and Means Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Fax: 202-225-2610

Dear Chairman Crane,

This is to encourage your committee to extend Normal Trade Relations status to Laos.

I do not know much about trade relation agreements, but I am interested in any attempt to better the lives of people in that country. The Laotians have certainly suffered at our hands during the long Vietnam War. The people are industrious and if normalizing trade relations is needed to make their goods competitive with those of their neighbors Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, I urge you to extend those relations.

Thank you,

Julia H. Weidman
Just an interested citizen.

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

WILKRIS & CO AB
 Stockholm, Sweden
April 16, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
 Chairman
 Subcommittee on Trade
 Committee on Ways and Means
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515
 U.S.A

Dear Chairman Crane,

On behalf of WILKRIS & CO AB, a company doing business in the ASEAN countries and China, I am writing to express my support for the extension of normal trade relations (NTR) to Laos.

A Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) was negotiated in 1997 between the United States and the Lao People's Democratic Republic but was never ratified by the Congress nor signed by the Administration.

The ratification of the Agreement forms part of President Bush's trade agenda and represents an important step in bringing Laos' integration into the international world economy and new market economic reform.

Laos is the only remaining country in Southeast Asia without NTR. The fact that NTR have been granted to Vietnam and Cambodia can only give more support toward the normalization of trade relations with Lao PDR.

On February 24, 2003 US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and Secretary of State Colin Powell were very supportive towards the normalisation of trading relations between the United States and Lao PDR by sending an official request to the Congress to grant NTR to Laos.

Laos has maintained unbroken diplomatic relations with the United States since 1955. Laos has always cooperated in issues such as counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism, POW/MIA accounting.

Laos is rated as one of the poorest developing countries in the world but due to the discriminatory tariff barriers with the United States they are subject to the highest average tariffs.

Granting NTR to Laos can only bring fairness and mutual benefits to the United States and Lao PDR. Furthermore it will even help to achieve other key priorities beyond the trade and investment relations: commercial and environmental law, tourism, anti-narcotics cooperation, POW/MIA recovery, economic assistance to small and medium business, human rights, etc.

As you know, Lao PDR has joined ASEAN since 1997 and is working very hard to meet the requirement for WTO in the near future. It is in the interest of the United States to assist Laos to be part of the network of free bilateral trade agreements.

Myself I have led and coordinated last month a high level Swedish trade and investment delegation visit to Laos and we can assure you they are open to business and the outside world. The granting of NTR to Laos is the natural step.

Dear Chairman,

It is high time for this Committee to consider the normalisation of trading relations between the United States and Laos and we urge you to submit this BTA to the Congress for prompt consideration and passage. I am aware that this is the first step to new opportunities and promising bilateral relationship.

Thank you for your consideration.

Truly yours,

Willy Hsieh
Managing Director
 WILKRIS & CO AB



Wisconsin Lao Veterans of America, Inc.
Menomonie WI 54751
April 11, 2003

The Honorable Philip M. Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
and the Honorable Sander M. Levin
Ranking Member of the Subcommittee
All Members of the Committee on Ways and Means
and all Members of the U.S. Congress
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Crane and Ranking Member Levin, and all Members of the U.S. Congress:

We would like to request that you include the following statement in the printed record of the written comments on NTR to the LPDR.

The Wisconsin Lao Veterans of America, Inc., has more than 2,000 members who are former CIA soldiers during the Vietnam War. We would like to request you and other Members of the U.S. Congress to oppose and to reject the proposal on Normal Trade Relations (NTR) for the communist Lao government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) because of the following reasons:

- The communist Lao government of the LPDR and communist Vietnamese government have killed "over 300,000 people in Laos" from 1975 to 2003 because of the legacy of Hmong-U.S. government connections and relations during the Vietnam War. Of this figure, about 46,000 victims were former CIA soldiers and their family members, officials under the Royal Lao government and their associates (Sources: Reports from Mr. Yang Toua Thao and Moua Toua Ter in Laos on March 14, 2003).
- The communist Lao government of the LPDR and communist Vietnamese government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have used "biological and chemical weapons" to kill many thousands of Hmong and Lao people and former CIA soldiers in Laos since 1975 until today in 2003.
- The communist Lao government of the LPDR has committed "war crimes, crimes against peace and crimes against humanity" in Laos.
- The Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia reported on March 25, 2003 that more than 10,000 people demonstrated in Vientiane, Laos, on March 23, 2003 against the United States because the U.S. government sent troops to attack the Saddam Hussein government in Iraq. The Ambassador of the LPDR to Thailand, Hiem Phommachanh, also stated that the U.S. policy toward Iraq is a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. As a result, the communist Lao government of the LPDR supported the Saddam Hussein government and international terrorism against the United States and other nations in the world.

As a result, the U.S. Congress, the White House and the U.S. Department of State must not reward NTR to the communist Lao government of the LPDR because this communist government is the "enemy" of the United States and the enemy of peace, freedom, democracy, justice, liberty, and human rights.

Therefore, we the members of Wisconsin Lao Veterans of America, Inc., urge and request the U.S. Congress to oppose and reject the proposal of NTR to the communist Lao government of LPDR.

Therefore, we the members of Wisconsin Lao Veterans of America, Inc. would like to request the U.S. government:

- to send international inspectors to investigate and to stop the use of biological and chemical weapons against Hmong and Lao people and former CIA soldiers in the Xaisomboun Special Region and many other provinces in Laos.
- to urge the communist Lao government and communist Vietnamese government to stop the "ethnic cleansing war, genocide and biological and chemical warfare" against former CIA soldiers and other Hmong and Lao people in Laos.
- to bring a true peace, freedom, democracy and human rights to people in Laos.
- to bring food, medicine and other basic human needs to save the lives of former CIA soldiers and other Hmong and Lao people in the Xaisomboun Special Region and other provinces in Laos.
- to call upon the governments which signed the Paris Peace Agreements on Indochina on March 2, 1973, to stop the war in Laos and to bring a true peace to Laos as soon as possible.

This is not the right time for the U.S. government to reward NTR to the terrorist communist Lao government of the LPDR. This is the time for the U.S. government to take action to demand that the communist Lao government of the LPDR must

immediately stop the biological and chemical warfare and ethnic cleansing war and genocide against former CIA soldiers and other Hmong and Lao people in Laos.

Thank you very much for your consideration of the above peace proposals for Laos.

Sincerely,

Former LT. Pang Bliang Vang
President
Wisconsin Lao Veterans of America, Inc.

Womens' International League for Peace and Freedom
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19170

Herewith is a statement in support of Normal Trade Relations with Laos submitted by the Womens' International League for Peace and Freedom.

Our organization is an international organization with branches in 37 countries. In the United States our Asia Pacific Commission has worked with the women of Southeast Asia, including the women of Laos. We have visited the Womens' Union and not only have we had lengthy discussions at their offices in Vientiane, but we have seen their work in Luang Prabang and in villages in the mountains beyond. Their goal is to improve the working conditions of women, their health and welfare, concern for their education and that of the children, and general economic betterment. In spite of very limited support from the government, progress is being made. An improvement in the overall economy would greatly advance their work; and while the "filter down" process is often slow, it can be accelerated.

In discussions of such topics as making permanent the trade relations with Laos, the manner of presentation is often technical and abstract, ignoring the women are the base of the economic pyramid. It is the women who work to support families, to care for children and provide unity and stability in the community. While there are compelling arguments, historical, political and diplomatic for permanent normalization of trade relations with Laos, it is with particular concern for the women of Laos, the foundation of the society, that we strongly support this measure.

Madeline Duckles
Asia Pacific Commission

Mary Day Kent
Executive Director
Womens' International League for Peace and Freedom

Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17603

Dear Committee Member,

I am writing to you urge the passage of permanent normal trade relations with Laos. I am encouraged by news of human rights progress in Laos and believe passage will benefit both the US and Laos. Thank you

David R. Workman, Esq.

Brooklyn Center, Minnesota 55429
April 20, 2003

Honorable Philip M Crane, Chairman,
 Subcommittee on Trade,
 Committee on Ways and Means
 House of Representatives,
 United States Congress

Congressman Jim Ramstad
 103 Cannon House Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Crane and Congressman Ramstad:

My name is Ge Yang, a Hmong with roots in Laos. I am an American citizen, resident of Brooklyn Center in Minnesota. I currently own Su Express Alteration in downtown Minneapolis, State of Minnesota.

I am writing in support of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) for Laos following the official request to Congress signed on February 24, 2003 by Secretary of State Colin Powell and US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick on behalf of the Bush Administration.

I have been back to the Lao PDR for several return visits and recently I had the opportunity to accompany Dr. Yang Dao in his official visit to Laos. I would be able to testify that changes for social and economic reforms are taking place in my former country for the best interests of all the Lao multi-ethnic people.

My support of granting Normalized Trade Relations for the Lao People Democratic Republic is based on the statement regarding the benefits of NTR for both the US and Laos by my cousin Sayasith Yangsao, such as follows.

QUOTE

Peace and stability in the Lao PDR

Currently Laos is enjoying peace, stability and harmony, which are crucial to building a new society for the social betterment and economic benefits of the Lao multi-ethnic people. It is a society based on representation from all ethnic minorities at all levels of the Lao PDR administration. Laos has built and continues to develop roads and bridges, which will adequately permit the transport of goods and people nationwide, thus enabling easy access to markets and services greatly needed by Laotian rural communities. Communication is key to the Lao multi-ethnic people's active participation in all aspects of the country; already they are feeling the sense of belonging to a nation, in which their basic needs are being met.

The past sadly felt by both the United States and Laos is history and today is the best time ever to move together into the future by using NTR for economic and social development. Political reform would emerge once the Laotian people have enough to eat on a daily basis and the majority of Lao will have an acceptable level of education which will allow them to understand and partake in politics democratically for the interest of all.

There is no tangible evidence of acts of aggression by the LPDR on a specific group of ethnic minorities. On the contrary, there are continuous acts of sabotage and banditry against an internationally recognized government and its peaceful citizens. Some ongoing destabilizing activities in Laos by internal or external elements, which were translated into violence and anti-social actions, have forced the LPDR to take actions against those who may propagate such acts of internal terror, in order to protect their citizens, employees, government institutions, tourists and general peace in the region. Through Normal Trade Relations with Laos, Lao-Americans, whose majority desire to make Laos a developed and prosperous nation, will turn to focus their efforts and positive actions towards their former nation and motherland, instead of collecting money to fill the pockets of the so-called numerous movements of resistance.

Welfare of the Laotian people

Today the current conditions in the Lao PDR appear to meet the aspirations of the majority of the Lao people. The Lao government has been taking all steps and measures required to implement a long-term *economic growth policy* aimed at moving the country out of the underdevelopment in order to reduce the current number of poor families. With an increasing per capita income and a new tax system improved and implemented, Laos will be able to provide more schools, more school supplies, more hospitals and medicines, more food for the Lao children; more farm equipment and advanced farming technologies for the Lao farmers; and more roads to connect between the underdeveloped rural areas. For decades, Laos has desired training and higher education opportunities to form a skilled work force to produce goods and provide services in a variety of industries. Currently in Lao PDR all ethnic groups and social strata throughout the country actively participate in rebuilding a peaceful and developed nation.

Economic interests

In my humble opinion, an NTR status granted to Lao PDR will benefit both the US and Laos. Many opium growers in the Hmong and Iu-Mien villages will gradually change their traditional ways of making a living if NTR is granted by the US to Laos. NTR will assist them in their integration into a new world of light industry with the production of goods, handicrafts, mining, garment factories, tourism, and services. Heavy machinery and equipment are in great need by foreign contractors dealing with infrastructure development and mining business of Laos. In the United States small American business owners will find NTR to their advantage due to the low tariff for the import of Lao goods. The absence of NTR between the US and Laos has not forbidden Laotian-Americans to send money back to their motherland. An

estimated 90 million dollars was brought freely to the economy of Laos by 30,000 Lao and Hmong Americans visiting Laos in 2001.

UNQUOTE

Conclusion

I sincerely believe that granting an NTR status for Laos will greatly improve the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Laos and will strengthen the cooperation and friendship between the two nations. The people of both nations must not turn back to the past history that divided the worlds of communism and capitalism, which had only caused the climate of the cold war. I strongly urge you to establish legislation for Normalized trade relations with my former country of Laos.

Thank you for your attention and please feel free to contact me for further information.

Sincerely,

Ge Yang

Turlock, California 95382
April 21, 2003

The Honorable Phillip Crane Chairman,
Subcommittee on Trade
House Ways & Means Committee

Dear Chairman Crane:

I am writing this letter in support of granting NTR to Laos with the following conditions:

1. NTR must benefit all people and ethnic groups of Laos, not just the elites in Laos,
2. Visiting students and officials (related to NTR) from Laos to the USA must be representative of the ethnic make up of the population of Laos (for example, 60% of ethnic Lao and 40% of ethnic groups),
3. The implementation phase of NTR to Laos must include inputs from experts from the community of former citizens of Laos, who have first hand knowledge of the situation of Laos,
4. The government of Laos must address issues related to human rights, religious freedom, corruption, socio-economic and political situation in Laos, and
5. The government of Laos must immediately stop the practice of Hmong American Ethnic Profiling (The US Embassy in Vientiane has information and list of these cases. See also in Bandits or Rebels, available form:)

I am a naturalized American citizen, born in Laos. I left Laos in 1975 as part of the post war refugee exodus of Laos. I spent a year in the refugee camp in Thailand and then resettled in the US in 1976 at the age of 21. I started my life in America with dishwashing, and went on to become one of a few refugee resettlement workers in the late 1970s, and Social Worker in the 1980s and 1990s. Currently I am an Associate Professor of Asian American Studies at California State University, Stanislaus. I came to America without language, cultural and vocational skills and knew only a few words of English, but I am a believer of hard work, self-improvement, adaptability and flexibility. Moreover, I, like, other people in Laos highly value education. To reach my own goals and American dream, I have always worked and attended school whenever opportunity allowed. My own perseverance, in addition to America's opportunity and value of freedom, liberty and the pursue of happiness, have empowered me to go from learning English as a Second Language to earning a doctoral degree, and from being dishwasher to university professor. I am a living proof and proponent that with proper social, economic and political environment, anyone can achieve their own fullest potential and give their very best to humanity.

Sincerely,

Kou Yang, Ed.D.

Brooklyn Park, Minnesota 55443
April 20, 2003

Honorable Philip M Crane, Chairman,
 Subcommittee on Trade,
 Committee on Ways and Means
 House of Representatives,
 United States Congress

Dear Chairman Crane:

My name is Sayasith L. Yangsao, a Lao of Hmong origin. I am an American citizen, trained in Canada as an Engineer and Electronics Technology instructor. I presently work as a freelance computer network consultant in the Twin Cities area in the state of Minnesota.

I am writing in support of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) for Laos such as requested to Congress and signed on February 24, 2003 by US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and Secretary of State Colin Powell on behalf of the Bush Administration.

Since 1993, I have been back to the Lao PDR for several personal visits and a one-year assignment as a UN-ITU curriculum specialist at the Post and Telecommunications Training Center in the Lao capital of Vientiane. I consider myself a close observer of Lao politics, with a special interest in the Lao PDR economic, social, and educational development.

My support of granting Normalized Trade Relations for the Lao People Democratic Republic is based on the following reasons.

Peace and stability in the Lao PDR

Currently Laos is enjoying peace, stability and harmony, which are crucial to building a new society for the social betterment and economic benefits of the Lao multi-ethnic people. It is a society based on representation from all ethnic minorities at all levels of the Lao PDR administration. Laos has built and continues to develop roads and bridges, which will adequately permit the transport of goods and people nationwide, thus enabling easy access to markets and services greatly needed by Laotian rural communities. Communication is key to the Lao multi-ethnic people's active participation in all aspects of the country; already they are feeling the sense of belonging to a nation, in which their basic needs are being met.

The past sadly felt by both the United States and Laos is history and today is the best time ever to move together into the future by using NTR for economic and social development. Political reform would emerge once the Laotian people have enough to eat on a daily basis and the majority of Lao will have an acceptable level of education which will allow them to understand and partake in politics democratically for the interest of all.

There is no tangible evidence of acts of aggression by the LPDR on a specific group of ethnic minorities. On the contrary, there are continuous acts of sabotage and banditry against an internationally recognized government and its peaceful citizens. Some ongoing destabilizing activities in Laos by internal or external elements, which were translated into violence and anti-social actions, have forced the LPDR to take actions against those who may propagate such acts of internal terror, in order to protect their citizens, employees, government institutions, tourists and general peace in the region. Through Normal Trade Relations with Laos, Lao-Americans, whose majority desire to make Laos a developed and prosperous nation, will turn to focus their efforts and positive actions towards their former nation and motherland, instead of collecting money to fill the pockets of the so-called numerous movements of resistance.

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Today the current conditions in the Lao PDR appear to meet the aspirations of the majority of the Lao people. The Lao government has been taking all steps and measures required to implement a long-term economic growth policy aimed at moving the country out of the underdevelopment in order to reduce the current number of poor families. With an increasing per capita income and a new tax system improved and implemented, Laos will be able to provide more schools, more school supplies, more hospitals and medicines, more food for the Lao children; more farm equipment and advanced farming technologies for the Lao farmers; and more roads to connect between the underdeveloped rural areas. For decades, Laos has desired training and higher education opportunities to form a skilled work force to produce goods and provide services in a variety of industries. Currently in Lao PDR all ethnic groups and social strata throughout the country actively participate in rebuilding a peaceful and developed nation.

Economic interests

In my humble opinion, an NTR status granted to Lao PDR will benefit both the US and Laos. Many opium growers in the Hmong and Iu-Mien villages will gradually change their traditional ways of making a living if NTR is granted by the US to Laos. NTR will assist them in their integration into a new world of light industry with the production of goods, handcrafts, mining, garment factories, tourism, and services. Heavy machinery and equipment are in great need by foreign contractors dealing with infrastructure development and mining business of Laos. In the United States small American business owners will find NTR to their advantage due to the low tariff for the import of Lao goods. The absence of NTR between the US and Laos has not forbidden Laotian-Americans to send money back to their motherland. An estimated 90 million dollars was brought freely to the economy of Laos by 30,000 Lao and Hmong Americans visiting Laos in 2001.

Conclusion

More two-way trade as offered by NTR will have additional long-term beneficial effects in the US-Lao Relations. At present, the Lao PDR can use the ASEAN markets to export its products to the US, but at much higher prices, which are not in the interest of both sides. Offering these remarks in support of the NTR for Laos, it is great hope that the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Laos will be further improved between the two nations. The lack of normal trade relations will delay other cooperative agreements that will serve to establish a trusting relationship between the two governments. The people of both nations must not have to suffer at the hands of some biased vindictive groups that have strongly lobbied their government representatives to oppose ratification of the bilateral Lao-U.S. Trade Agreement. I strongly urge you to establish legislation for Normalized trade relations with the country of Laos.

Thank you for your attention and please feel free to contact me for further testimony.

Sincerely yours,

Sayasith L. Yangsao

[BY PERMISSION OF THE CHAIRMAN:]

Jakarta 12110 Indonesia
21 April 2003

The Honorable Philip Crane
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade
House Ways & Means Committee
Fax. No. (202) 225 2610

Dear Chairman Crane,

I write to support Normal Trade Relations (NTR) for Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) which is a Member Country of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

ASEAN's ten Member Countries covering the whole of the Southeast Asian region is America's third largest overseas market; our trade with America contributes nearly 800,000 high paying US export jobs; and, American companies have tremendous equity in the region as its top investor.

Passing NTR for Lao PDR is a key step to building the foundation for moving forward with the Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative (EAI) which was announced by President George Bush on October 26, 2002 at APEC in Los Cabos, Mexico. Engaging ASEAN through the EAI is an important step for US competitiveness in the ASEAN market. As you know, China is moving forward with negotiations for an ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and India, Japan and Europe are also beginning to negotiate similar framework with ASEAN.

I am aware that NTR with Lao PDR has been strongly endorsed by Secretary of State Colin Powell and US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick. The US Administration and US Embassy in Vientiane report that Lao PDR is moving forward on key areas of past concern to America. These areas, including religious freedom, human rights and economic reform are highlighted in the Administration's letter to you recommending moving forward on Lao PDR NTR.

For all these reasons, the passage of NTR status would be considered a positive step forward for the strong trade relationship between ASEAN and America which has brought mutual benefits for our peoples.

Thank you for your kind attention.
Sincerely,

Ong Keng Yong
Secretary General of ASEAN

Washington, D.C. 20036
April 2003

The Honorable Philip Crane
Chairman Subcommittee on Trade
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing in support of Congressional ratification of extending normal trade relations to Laos, as requested of the Congress by Secretary of State Colin Powell and United States Trade Representative Robert Zoellick in late February. As you know, the bilateral trade agreement between the United States and Laos was negotiated in 1997, even before the trade agreement between the United States and Vietnam. It is heartening to see that your subcommittee is working to complete the normalization of economic relations between Laos and the U.S.

I have been involved in efforts to improve the relationship between the United States and Laos over the last 12 years, beginning in 1991 when I worked for the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. The Committee made several trips to Laos to investigate reports of Americans held as prisoners of war or missing in action during the Vietnam War days. Most recently, two years ago, I led a delegation of Congressional staff there for discussions on how to move forward on issues of human rights, freedom of religion, trade and economics. Ten years had passed between my first trip and my latest, but light years had passed on the Laotian side. Most impressive was our discussion with the government officials in the Ministry of Commerce, the people responsible for negotiating the trade agreement with USTR. The delegation found them to be as sophisticated, open and hard-working as any of their counterparts in other countries in Southeast Asia.

Laos is a small country and lowering trade barriers to their goods here in the United States will not make much of an impression here, but it will make an enormous difference for the Laotians. Those reformers who worked so hard to move their country to embrace a fuller trade relationship with the United States in 1997 took a chance for their country's betterment; and their work should be encouraged and supported.

Thank you very much for soliciting comments on the matter of extending normal trade relations to Laos. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance in this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Frances A. Zwenig
*Senior Country Director
US-ASEAN Business Council*