

FLAME OF SOLIDARITY FOR HMONG SPREADING AMONG INDIGENOUS AT THE UN

I dared to 'dream out loud' on Wednesday April 23rd when I felt compelled to write the article 'Without Solidarity we are all doomed to failure' - which highlighted the heartbreaking plight of the 7,000 Hmong Indigenous People in northern Laos; in South-East Asia. Now it appears that the global indigenous unity I wished for the Hmong became a reality at the just concluded Seventh Session on Indigenous Issues at the United Nations (April 21-May 2 2008).

Mr. Thomas Alarcon of the Juridical Commission for Development for the Andean First Nations (Peru), apparently told the leadership of the Congress of World Hmong People that the Carib Chief of Dominica and myself might be willing and/or able to assist them; and I am eternally grateful for Thomas for that....because 4 senior leaders of that Organization requested to meet with us last night as a result.

At 6pm our Hmong brothers arrived - including Mr. James Her - the President of the CWHP, Thomas met them in the lobby of our hotel and escorted them to our room on the eleventh floor, I met them at the door and with both hands shook the right hand of each as we welcomed them in. We had a long fruitful discourse, they gave us as much information as they possibly could in the 4 hours we spent in each others company, and asked the Thomas, the Carib Chief and myself for advice and solidarity - which we gave without hesitation. One of the High points of the night was at 9 pm when the aging leader of the persecuted 7,000 Hmong in Laos called the CWHP president's cell phone from a mountain top in northern Laos via a satellite phone smuggled to him recently by Hmong supporters abroad. I had only just watched this veteran leader on the Al-Jazeera documentary 4 days prior, and here I was - hearing his voice live as he relayed news to his people standing next to me....it was surreal. I am also noticing how 4 and 9 - the two sacred numbers for my Eagle Clan Arawak people have been featuring all through this particular episode in my life, beginning with my registration at UN headquarters on Monday April 21st at 9.04 am.

Another high point of the night was when the CWHP President asked Thomas Alarcon, myself and Carib Chief Williams; to write the Statement of Solidarity which they circulated among all the Indigenous Peoples representatives at the UN to gain additional moral support. I feel proud to have been a co-author of that statement, and among the first 4 persons to affix my signature to it.

The low points of the night were the recent photos smuggled out of northern Laos of new Laotian army atrocities that were shown to me, they disturbed me to the extent that I could not sleep last night after my Hmong brothers left; and I do not think I have wept like that since I held the dead body of my 3 day old first daughter Aderi in my arms 14 years ago.



*Damon with brother James Her President of
the Congress of World Hmong People at the
UN*

The first photo was of a young Hmong woman, her beautiful long black hair sullied by leaves and debris around her beautiful face as she lay naked and dead on her back on the forest floor, her nipples had been cut off; and her pregnant stomach had been cut open just below her navel. In my soul that was my wife and my baby, how did her husband feel (if he was even still alive) when he saw that scene in person? How would you feel?

The second photo was of a young teen aged boy, the soldiers had disemboweled him and left him to die, but he clung to life with his entrails in his hands for many hours before succumbing. In my soul that was my son Hatuey who is 14 now, how did his parents feel when they found him like that? As a parent how would you feel?

The third item was a confession in an American newspaper by a former CIA operative 'Gary Shanks' who recruited Hmong over 40 years ago during the Vietnam war for the United States government.

He described in great detail how at first they recruited young men from 18 years and over, but when those got too few they took Hmong males from the age of 14; eventually not enough of those were left alive so they took Hmong boys from ages 9-13 ...they couldn't go lower "Because that was the youngest age they could still hold and fire a rifle"

He went on to recount the last Hmong Child Soldier he airlifted into battle in a Bell Helicopter before the Vietnam war ended, the boy was about 11 he reckoned and very small - so much so that he had to fold and fasten his man-sized army fatigues to his body with cord so it would not fall off.

When the helicopter landed the little boy scrambled out and immediately fell flat on his face due to the weight of his gun and back-pack. The very next day the same CIA officer saw the boys limbless body being retrieved from the same battlefield.

In my soul that was my second son Tecumseh who is a wee fellow for his 12 years of age and I pictured his sweet smiling face on a mangled little corpse.

The last photo I saw was of a cage full of 28 beautiful little Hmong girls at an army camp in Laos, my Hmong brothers knew their ages, from 9 to 14 they told me. The girls were safely smuggled out of Laos and into Thailand - where their lives could have been save, but instead the Thai authorities deported them back to Laos - and to the awaiting clutches of the Laos military.

Do you know what happened to those 28 beautiful little girls? They were shared out to all the Laotian soldiers in that camp who all took turns raping them until their little lives were snuffed out - and their bodies dumped into an unmarked grave.

In my soul my second daughter Sabantho who is 9 was among them in that cage, and I felt the rage and sense of helplessness of a father unable to protect his daughter from the great evil that was about to be inflicted on her in her youthful innocence.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The Hmong Indigenous Nation are an independent people with a distinctive culture, language and religion; and they are one of the oldest tribal peoples in greater Asia with roots dating back to the Hmong Kingdom of King Chiyou in 3,000 BC.

The Hmong civilization, peoples, lands and territories were greatly affected by the imperialism in Asia by regional and European powers beginning with such treaties as the 'Franco-Chinese Treat of 1885', and the 'Franco-Siam Treaty of 1907, which determined the modern day political and geographical boundaries of China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand.

Traditional Hmong territories were fractured into isolated regions by these two treaties.

The Hmong were recruited to fight by all parties to the international conflicts of the First French Indochina War, the Second Indochina War, and the Laotian Civil War from 1946-1975; in battles to control South-East Asia. The national security of the Hmong People was never included in the cease-fire agreements to end the war in South-East Asia in Paris in 1972 - and in Vientiane in 1973.

Both the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (PDR) and the socialist republic of Vietnam violated the peace agreements in 1975 and started to implement a policy of extermination of the Hmong Indigenous People from then until the present year 2008; in which hundreds of thousands of Hmong people were killed. It is a Genocide that both the Lao PDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam deny. Despite calls for access to investigate the situation and begin conflict resolution by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD) in 2005, the Lao PDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have denied access and continued to violate International Human Rights laws and ignored their respective countries obligations as member countries of the United Nations.

In addition to waging Genocide against the Hmong Indigenous Nation, the Lao PDR also seized Hmong traditional lands, territories and natural resources - and awarded them to International investors; and offered the same for Special co-operation Treaties and debt-relief exchange agreements.

The Hmong in Laos continue to be victims of imperialism, grave desecration, occupation, population displacement, poverty, racism, chemical warfare, forced starvation, torture, rape, illegal detention and imprisonment, refugee repatriation, child trafficking, disappearances, forced relocation, assassination, poisoning, execution and genocide.

The Lao PDR Armed Forces - with direct assistance from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, continue to persecute the Hmong Indigenous People of Laos by every means at their disposal.

Over 4 decades later - they are still fanatically persecuting the Hmong in Laos for being allies of the United States in the 1960's - during the Vietnam war, despite the fact that virtually no Hmong in Laos alive today had any personal involvement with that conflict; and the Hmong have actually been begging for the peace agreement they made in good faith with their tormentors since 1975 to be upheld - to no avail.

* The World Bank is part of the apparatus of the United Nations, the Lao PDR government depends heavily on World Bank aid, and all that is required for the savage slaughter of the Hmong in Laos to be halted is for the World Bank to suspend aid 'until and unless' the government of Lao PDR grant the requested access to the UN CERD special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples to investigate the situation...is this too Herculean a task for the World Bank to accomplish?

* Will not a President of the United States have the conscience and moral fortitude to exert a modicum of its tremendous influence on a politically insignificant state like Laos - to help the Hmong people whom the United States have caused to endure all of this pain and suffering in the first place?

* Will His Excellency President Evo Morales of Bolivia - the only Indigenous head of state in the Americas remember the blood and tears of the genocide in the Andes inflicted on his own ancestors - and do just one thing to help the Hmong People in their hour of need today?

* Will a Caribbean Political Leader be noble enough to merely raise the issue of the UN CERD access at the United Nations General Assembly? For we the Indigenous Arawak and Carib peoples of the Caribbean also faced such a fanatical genocide 5 centuries ago and our tragedy should not be forgotten by those in positions of power in our region today who can prevent it from occurring to others crying out for justice!

As I end this article I leave you the reader with this final scene:

By the end of the meeting all my Hmong brothers were struggling to hold back their tears, and I remember being asked 4 questions that I still have no answer for...and that I will never forget; before leaving one of the Hmong turned to me and said:

"Brother, there is a God - but how are these things possible?

How could he let such terrible things happen to people who did not do anything?

Why does no-one in the world care about us?

Why does no-one do anything to help us?"

Damon Gerard Corrie

Eagle Clan Arawaks

Member of the Caribbean Caucus

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Seventh Session

April 21st-May 2nd 2008

New York