

U.S. Department of State  
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration  
**U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM NEWS**

**25 Years of Lao Dance in Nashville**



Photo: Bounthanh Manivong

On April 9, 1980, 55 Lao refugees arrived in Nashville, Tennessee. Like thousands of other Lao, they had fled to refugee camps in Thailand following the 1975 communist takeover of Laos. For many of those refugees, third-country resettlement was the best solution to their uncertain future. In 1980 alone, more than 100,000 Lao were resettled from Thailand, the vast majority to the U.S. The refugees who arrived in Nashville 25 years ago were unique in that they were all part of the Royal Lao dancers who performed in the royal palace in Luang Prabang, Laos' traditional capital. The dancers and musicians were resettled together so that they could preserve and perpetuate dance and other traditional elements of Lao culture within the new American Lao community. Nashville was selected as the site for their resettlement because of the availability of jobs and of sponsors ready to help them through the process of resettlement.

The original group of 55 increased as additional members of the company arrived later in 1980. Marriages, children, and grandchildren followed. Now into a third generation, the dancers and musicians continue to preserve and pass on Royal Lao customs and practices.

On April 9, 2005, the members of the Royal Lao dance company and their families, as well as other members of the Lao community in Nashville, gathered to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the group's arrival in Tennessee. Terry Rusch, Director of the Office of Admissions in the Bureau, represented the U.S. Government at the event. Kingfa Phimavong, chairperson of the organizing committee for the anniversary event, expressed to Ms. Rusch the group's gratitude to the Department of State for the opportunity to come to America and continue the ancient traditions of Laos. Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen sent a letter congratulating the dancers on their success in reestablishing themselves in Tennessee.

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## Support for Unaccompanied Refugee Minors

On April 13, Deputy Assistant Secretary Kelly Ryan traveled with representatives from the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) to Richmond, Virginia, to visit a USCCB foster care program for unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs). Unaccompanied refugee minors are refugee children who have been determined by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to be separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for them.



*Foster care group home in Richmond, Virginia*

The Richmond visit included a tour of a home for boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 18. Ms. Ryan visited with a “teaching” parent couple who provide guidance and direction to the children. Ms. Ryan was impressed by the couple’s dedication to the youth. The “Teaching Parent” therapeutic care model has been known in the foster care field for nearly 40 years, and has been used with increasing frequency in recent years. The model facilitates leadership and moral development in children.

Ms. Ryan also visited two foster care families where the children had developed strong bonds with their foster care parents. It was clear that both foster parents and children benefit from the exchange in culture and care giving experiences. During lunch with case-workers, Ms. Ryan heard about the challenges they face in meeting the many needs of refugee foster care children. At the same time, the case-workers reported that working with refugee children can be very satisfying and rewarding. Ms. Ryan also met two former foster care children from Sudan who had transitioned from foster care to supervised independent care and are now attending community college.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement under the Department of Health and Human Services funds the refugee foster care services. These services are provided by LIRS and USCCB, which are authorized by the U.S. Department of State Refugee Admissions Program to resettle unaccompanied youth. Both of these agencies have worked through licensed child welfare affiliates to provide appropriate support services for unaccompanied refugee youth for more than 20 years.

Thousands of South East Asian minors were placed in the U.S. Refugee Foster Care program throughout the 1990s. One of the larger groups of minors to arrive in recent history was the Sudanese “Lost Boys” from Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. The label “Lost Boys” is somewhat misleading because this group of 500 included 89 girls.

On May 5, 2005, the Bureau recommenced a U.S. Refugee Program Working Group, in cooperation with LIRS and USCCB, to address the resettlement of unaccompanied refugee minors and issues concerning the processing and placement of other vulnerable refugee minors. The Working Group will meet regularly.

Currently fewer than 100 children are placed in foster care each year. Foster care placements are based on the individual needs of a particular child, with atten-

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## Resettlement of Hmong Lao Continues; No New Program Planned

At the 10<sup>th</sup> Hmong National Conference, organized by Hmong National Development, Inc., and held in Fresno, California, April 8-10, PRM Reception and Placement Officer Margaret Burkhardt made two key points about the ongoing resettlement of Hmong from Wat Tham Krabok. She repeated the U.S. Government's commitment to resettling all approved refugees at Wat Tham Krabok, and she stated that the Department of State is not planning any new resettlement programs for Hmong Lao refugees in Thailand.

The theme of the Conference was "The Hmong American Experience: Celebrating 30 Years of Progress." More than 900 people attended.

*"The United States does not require or accept registration fees for resettlement in the United States. Registration for the ongoing resettlement of Hmong from Wat Tham Krabok was available without charge or fee. The United States is not currently conducting any registration of Hmong for resettlement in the United States and there are no plans for another resettlement program after the Tham Krabok program is finished."*  
(quote from the weekly newsletter published for refugees at Wat Tham Krabok)

Ms. Burkhardt told the participants that the Department of State is very concerned about continuing rumors suggesting that the U.S. Government may designate other Hmong groups in Thailand for resettlement. She told the audience at the Conference, "These rumors are false. There are no plans for designating a second Hmong group for resettlement." She said that Hmong from Laos should not relocate to Petchabun Province or elsewhere in hopes of a resettlement program, because there is no program planned.

Addressing concerns that have arisen since the discovery of a cluster of tuberculosis cases among the Hmong refugees at Wat Tham Krabok, Ms. Burkhardt emphasized that the U.S. Government is committed to resettling all approved Hmong refugees from the Wat and that the program will continue until all eligible persons have departed. As of April 25<sup>th</sup>, 9,964 Hmong have arrived in the U.S. as part of the resettlement from the Wat. Approximately 450 Hmong departed in April, following the resumption of flights after the imposition of enhanced tuberculosis screening. The Department is planning for approximately 500 departures in May, and 1000 or more each month, June through September.

Cultural Orientation classes for the refugees who have been medically cleared have resumed, as have classes for schoolchildren. The Bureau recently funded the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to begin a food assistance program consisting of daily rations of rice and canned fish for families residing in the Wat who were identified as most vulnerable, including single mothers with children, the elderly, and persons with mental or physical disabilities. IOM also provides supplementary meat soup for individuals undergoing treatment for tuberculosis, who need to maintain proper levels of nutrition to ensure that medications are effective. In her remarks, Ms. Burkhardt encouraged members of the Hmong American community to continue sending remittances to their relatives at the Wat until the resettlement program is complete.

When the heightened rates of tuberculosis were first detected in January 2005, the Bureau began an information campaign to keep the Hmong refugees at Wat Tham Krabok informed about the disease and how it will affect resettlement. The Refugee Coordinator from the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok holds weekly meetings with Hmong section leaders to keep them apprised of developments, and a weekly newsletter is published in English and Hmong. Section leaders read the newsletter to individuals who are illiterate. IOM medical staff conduct ongoing information sessions

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tion to his or her cultural, linguistic, and religious background, special health, educational, and emotional needs, as well as personality, temperament and opinions. Foster parents must be licensed by their state or county child welfare provider and receive ongoing training in child welfare matters. Foster parents come from a myriad of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and receive special training on the adjustment needs of refugee youth. Different care settings allow foster care programs to meet the individual developmental needs of the children. Resettlement of URM's occurs in accordance with domestic child welfare guidelines, but services are only provided through programs specifically designed for the reception of refugee children.

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regarding tuberculosis and treatment three times per week. The U.S. Embassy Refugee Resettlement Unit (RRU) has daily office hours four days a week, and is available other days in case of emergency.

Ms. Burkhardt asked conference participants to encourage their relatives who remain in Wat Tham Krabok to take advantage of these information resources and to ask questions directly to IOM and RRU staff working at Wat Tham Krabok who will be able to provide the most accurate information.

## Fiscal Year 2005 Admissions Statistics

Region	FY 2005 Regional Ceiling	April 2005 Arrivals	Arrivals in FY 2005 as of 4/29/2005
Africa	20,000	779	9,170
East Asia	13,000	354	5,045
Europe & Central Asia	9,500	874	4,591
Latin America & Caribbean	5,000	595	3,452
Near East & South Asia	2,500	357	1,488
Unallocated	20,000		
<b>TOTAL</b>	70,000	2,928	23,746

President Bush has authorized the admission of up to 70,000 refugees for fiscal year 2005, 50,000 regionally allocated and an additional 20,000 unallocated.

**In Memoriam**

**ROSA O. WHITTED**



The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration is saddened to announce the passing of Rosa O. Whitted, Comptroller/Office Director, who died suddenly on April 23, 2005. Ms. Whitted, who worked for the Department of State for 12 years, was admitted into the Senior Executive Service in 2004. She was highly respected for her financial management expertise, and her colleagues recall her integrity and great dedication to her work.

Ms. Whitted is survived by three children; Ricardo, Katreena, and Naomi Whitted; a grandson, Damon Braxton; her mother; two sisters and three brothers.