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February 3, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

It has been brought to my attention that the Trump administration is negotiating with the Lao People's Democratic Republic on an agreement to allow for the deportation of long-time Hmong and Lao residents of the U.S. back to the country of their birth. I am writing to register my strong opposition to any such repatriation agreement between the U.S. and Laos. Any deportation of Hmong and Lao refugees residing in the U.S. to Laos will tear families apart while putting those individuals at risk in a country that has never been their home.

Minnesota is now the home to tens of thousands of Hmong and Lao veterans of the war in Indochina, naturalized U.S. citizens who were refugees from Laos, and a small number of legal residents who never received citizenship. This is a strong and vibrant community that contributes immeasurably to the success of Minnesota's economy and our quality of life. Any repatriation agreement resulting in the deportation of Hmong-Lao community members will be viewed as a direct attack on my constituents and their family members.

While I am a strong advocate for improving the U.S.-Lao bilateral relationship, human rights conditions in Laos are substandard and raise serious questions about the safety and well-being of any deportee. The State Department's annual Human Rights Reports makes this fact crystal clear.

Secretary Pompeo, it is unconscionable to deport individuals to any country in which the U.S. knowingly puts them at physical risk. To take such action is itself a human rights abuse. Please know that I oppose all efforts to deport any individuals currently residing in the U.S. to Laos.

Sincerely,

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress