

The Honourable Members of the Senate Committee on Immigration Issues

Thank you at last, for an opportunity to place the name of my Foster Son, Amai Lecheur, or Alor Lecheur on the Official Records of the House of Government in Australia.

My wife and I had planned to bring him to Australia, right up until his death on June 11 this year, a sad, miserable end, which occurred as a direct result of the policies of The Vanstone Immigration Department, even though it occurred almost 10,000 kilometres from our "privileged" shore.

Amai will not have an opportunity to explore the Australia I used to love.

There will be no road trips to Cairns, with his putative parents, as accepted by the Immigration Department. There will be no boat trips fishing at sea off Moreton Island, there will not be a ride on a tilt train, nor petting kangaroos in a small park in Nowra.

Instead ladies and gentlemen, my child rests in an un-remarked grave under a tree in a tiny village with no electricity near the Burmese Border in Northern Thailand. My son shares his rest with others like him, denied Statehood by the Burmese SLORC and the Royal Thai Government.

Australia is a signatory to more than one International Treaty which requires us to actually do something for Refugees from Burma and several other countries where the Government of those countries refuses to give them statehood. Burma is just one of them. Unfortunately for my son, Burma also has money, little enough if truth be known, but Australia is happy enough to go into these countries and while flying the flag of engagement Australia is actually just denying the population access to funds that would be better put to use there, rather than brought back here and used to support the international trade figures.

In January this year, my wife was in Thailand to attend a meeting between our son and the representatives of the Australian Embassy to determine whether he could come here and joins us, to be safe, and to have some vestige of quality of life. At the meeting, conducted by Ms [REDACTED] D [REDACTED], with whom we exchanged dozens of emails about his case, Ms D [REDACTED] stated that "he is Burmese," which made him subject to Australia's protection under those treaties.

Over the following 5 months, we sent additional information regarding his status, his current medical status as well as social and political issues which impacted on him and us. A number of those emails are included shortly regarding those issues. Suffice it to say, to all intents and purposes the case for him to be considered Burmese had been made at that meeting.

Ms D [REDACTED] stated that as she was convinced that he was Burmese the application process would continue, but that this process would usually take up to 12 months. We were instructed not to call about the case, but were advised we could send additional material for inclusion in Amai's file.

On Wednesday 8th June, we sent an email to the embassy, advising that there were real fears for our sons' life. This email was acknowledged by embassy staff Khun Uraiwan, who had been at the meeting in January.

On Saturday June the 11th, at 2.00 PM, I received a call from a friend in Thailand advising that our son had been killed.

- Thai officials accepted that my wife and I were Amais' putative parents and would only release his body to one of us.
- Embassy officials in our application accepted we were and had been for 7 years, his parents at least by imputation if not by record. This was acknowledged at the January interview. The question "who are your parents?" was answered with our names.
- Why is it that a refugee application, properly made at an overseas post, has to take 12 months to process?
- Why do refugee's, who go through proper channels in applying for refugee status, not be given a protection visa where they can stay within the safety of Australia's borders, instead of fearing for their lives?
- Considering the political climate in Thailand, for Burmese, why do people have to die while waiting for an embassy functionary to approve the application?
- Is it any wonder refugees would prefer to enter Australia illegally and wait the horrendous times they must wait, in detention, just to feel safe and not fear for their lives?
- Why does Australia care so little for the few people who see this as a reasonable place to try and have some kind of life?
- When will this monstrous behaviour on the part of Australia, stop?

Here follows the email trail, a few of hundreds, which were part of the correspondence between us and the embassy, leading up to Amais death.

They accepted he was our son. But still we were told "12 months usually". His regular calls didn't indicate he had given up. They just indicated he was frightened. Then in less than a week, he was dead.

If our son had been here, he would be alive today, and there would be no call from us for the embassy and the department to contemplate how the rules are applied. The department is in turmoil; it is leaderless and has no clear direction. We are told that interviewing officers have no on the ground experience in the countries they are interviewing for, though personally I can't see how that can possibly be applied in this case. ~~Lesley D~~ had been in Bangkok for an extended period and had to have clear knowledge of the political process.

When will this department be called to account for the lives it uses up? Peter Quasim; 7 years behind Baxter's' razor wire to what end? How did it protect our lifestyle for him to go mad and end up in a mental hospital before finally

being released less than a month ago? What did it prove? What was gained? What did this fine country gain from my sons' death? Who was protected? Who is going to pay for the anguish and suffering of our son, and now us, that we are left to wade through? Can the Australian government give us back our son? It can however prevent this ever happening to another family and their son or daughter.

Immigration doesn't need a restructure. It needs to be rebuilt from the top down, starting with a totally incompetent minister and going all the way down to the contract prison guards who drive prisoners for 7 hours without food or water. What has this country gained from the Vanstone Immigration department? It has gained an international reputation, as jailers to the world's worst off people.

What a thing to be proud of. What an excellent thing to tell your pals at international conferences. What an appalling abuse of human rights, this ministers department is.

The email trail follows from when we expressed our fears and supported that fear with an article from the Nation, One of Thailand's own News Papers.

The trail starts at the bottom with the article and my wife's contacts with Embassy staff.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Heather Gray** <heather.leona.gray@gmail.com>
Date: 20-Jun-2005 12:15
Subject: Re: 200406233 Amai Lecheur, 8 February 1986.
To: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I will fax the death certificate this afternoon, from the post office.

Regards

Heather

On 6/19/05, [REDACTED] wrote:

Ms. Gray,

Kindly fax me a copy of Amai's death certificate at 66 2 213 1177.

Thank you & Regards

[REDACTED]
Client Service Officer (Immigration)

Australian Embassy

Tel : [REDACTED]

Fax : [REDACTED]

Heather Gray

<heather.leona.gray@gmail.com>

To

17/06/2005 06:00
PM

[REDACTED]
cc

Subject

Please respond to
Heather Gray
<heather.leona.gray@gmail.com>

Re: 200406233 Amai Lecheur, 8
February 1986.

Please find attached a copy of Amai's Death Certificate and the Police Report.

I am sorry but the scanner here doesn't work well, so I have tried to send two copies of each so that you can read all the information on the forms. If it is too difficult to read these documents, please let me know and I will fax them to you from Australia.

Sincerely

Heather

On 6/16/05, Heather Gray <heather.leona.gray@gmail.com> wrote:
Yes you can confirm that I am the sponsor of Amai LECHEUR (date of birth 08/02/86) for an application to migrate to Australia in relation to file reference number 200406233. We met in Chiang Mai at Amai's interview in January this year.

I am getting the death certificate from city hall this afternoon and will email both the death certificate and the police report to you this afternoon.

Sincerely,

Heather Gray.

On 6/16/05, [REDACTED]

>

wrote:

Dear Ms. Gray,

Sorry for Amai's passing. Can you please provide me Amai's death certificate or police officer's statement, I would then be able to finalise the case.

Can I confirm you on this email that you are the sponsor of Amai LECHEUR (date of birth 08/02/86) for an application to migrate to Australia in relation to file reference number 200406233 ?

Regards,

[REDACTED]
Client Service Officer (Immigration)
Australian Embassy
Tel : [REDACTED]
Fax : [REDACTED]

Heather Gray

< heather.leona.gray@gmail.com > To

Uraiwan

14/06/2005 08:46 [REDACTED]

AM cc

Subject

Please respond to Re: 200406233 Amai Lecheur, 8

Heather Gray February 1986.

< heather.leona.gray@gmail.com >

Dear [REDACTED]

I am now in Chiang Mai, I arrived this morning. Can you please provide me with a letter that indicates I am Amai's sponsor (it can be an attachment), including his file number, so that I can have his body released for burial?

The Guest House Phone Number is: 053 246 180.

Thank you for all your support and assistance.

Sincerely,

Heather Gray

On 6/11/05, Heather Gray < heather.leona.gray@gmail.com > wrote:

Please find attached a statement from the attending police officer, of Amais passing.

Sincerely

Heather

On 6/11/05, Heather Gray < heather.leona.gray@gmail.com > wrote:

Dear [REDACTED]

I have just been informed that Amai passed away last night. I have requested that a copy of the police report be sent to you to attach to Amais file. The police dealing with his case are in the Mae Ping Police station in Chiang Mai.

I am planning to return to Thailand shortly to organise Amai's funeral and finalise his belongings.

Can you please let me know if there is anything further that I need to or should do in this case?

Thank you for all your support and service.

Sincerely

Heather Gray

On 6/8/05, Heather Gray <heather.leona.gray@gmail.com> wrote:

Although I have previously asked this question, I will ask it again as I want to make sure that all documents that I am sending via email, are being placed on Amai's file.

I realise that you have confirmed that all documents "you" receive are being placed on Amai's file, but does this also include all documents pertaining to Amai that I have sent to Lesley Dalton also?

If not please let me know so that I can forward them to you as well.

Thank you for your assistance,

Sincerely

Heather

On 6/8/05, [redacted] > wrote:

Dear Ms. Gray,

Thank you for updating me on what happening to Amai. This email will be attached to file for consideration.

Regards,

[redacted]
Client Service Officer (Immigration)
Australian Embassy

Tel : [redacted]
Fax : [redacted]

Heather Gray
<heather.leona.gray@gmail.com>To
Uraiwan
07/06/2005 07:15 AM cc

Subject
Please respond to200406233 Amai Lecheur, 8

Heather Gray February 1986.
<heather.leona.gray@gmail.com>

On going reports as the one below are very concerning. Amais safety is constantly of concern to us as we read of these incidences.

Amai was "collected" last week when authorities came to the house he was staying in, taking all people present to the local police station for questioning. Amai was released after questioning as he was not party to the incident the police were trying to solve. That ALL members of the household were taken in for questioning was concerning enough, let alone that Amai innocently staying with this family should relive these intrusions into his security. This has stressed him to the point where he no longer feels safe with this family.

Our son should not have to live in an environment where he is afraid to leave his place of residence for fear of being sent to Burma. Amai should not be faced with living in fear of the authorities. Amai should not be forced to run and hide because he has no identity. Amai should be with us, his family, in a country where he can learn to trust the authorities. Where the invasion of his home is not a constant fear. Where his identity and family are not questioned when ever he walks outside his door.

These fears are not just Amai's, they are ours. These fears we live through daily, knowing that our hands are tied and we can do nothing else, except sit, wait and pray. I am trying to be patient but the tears I shed constantly for our son are that of a mother whose sacrifices for him have been great. The tears I see my husband shed are for the separation that has prevented us providing the daily necessary care that Amai needs. Our tears at the end of each phone call are for the missed son, who can only hear our voice and lives in the misery that he may never see us again, but the hope that one day we will be reunited.

For over seven years our lives have revolved around and been enhanced by the life, love and health of a young boy, who is becoming a young man, but who has always been our son. He was a blessing given to us to care for and love and watch as he blossomed in health and life from the loving family that surrounded him. He still has that, and a further extended family who are all waiting for him to rejoin us in Australia and the relative peace and love that Australia and we, his family, have to offer.

Please include this as further information for Amai's file.

Sincerely,

Heather Gray

News Item from The Nation:

50 Burmese held in illegal alien sweep

Published on June 05, 2005

Nearly 50 illegal immigrants from Burma and one trafficker were arrested yesterday in two separate incidents in Mae Hong Son and Phrae provinces, police said.

Forty-one Burmese were arrested in Mae Hong Son in four pickup trucks en route to construction sites in Chiang Mai's Mae Chaem district.

One trafficker, Saksin Thitinanapatcharakun, 27, was arrested, while three others fled the scene.

During police questioning, Saksin said he was paid Bt20,000 to transport the Burmese to Chiang Mai.

The Burmese – who were from Ban Hua Muang and Ban Na Mon – held entry passes issued by Mae Hong Son immigration that restricted them from traveling more than 12 kilometres from their border villages.

However, immigration officials apparently allowed them to travel beyond the restricted area on their way to Chiang Mai.

In Phrae province, five Burmese women were arrested at a border checkpoint across from Burma's Tha Chi Lek.

Police said they were driving a car belonging to Pol Sergeant Sithi Wanna, 24, from Bang Len district in Nakhon Pathom.

He is wanted for questioning, they said.

The women said they each paid Bt10,000 for the transport to Nakhon Pathom.

Source: The Nation

http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2005/06/05/national/index.php?news=national_17601409.html

Why did our son have to die? Where is the department's compassion and support of Australian families overseas? No support was offered. No hope or encouragement and no protection for our son while he waited. Nothing but 'case closed' from an inhumane department, who's purpose is to 'provide humanity' for those so desperately needing it, like our son.

Should you require copies of Amais file and or emails that were exchanged between ourselves and embassy staff in Bangkok, please let us know and we would be only to happy to provide these for your reference.

Sincerely,

Heather Gray and the rest of Amai's family.