

THE MORAL DILEMMA OF RIGHT VERSUS RIGHT:
MORAL LEADERSHIP IN THE STUDY OF U.S.-LAOS NORMAL TRADE
RELATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

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INTRODUCTION

On November 19, 2004, the United States' Senate passed legislation to normalize trade relations with Laos (Diaz, 2004). Laos was, until the late 1990s, the only country in Southeast Asia that maintained a diplomatic relationship with the United States, but without Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status. Business owners, policymakers, scholars, and government officials in both countries supported normalizing trade; to do so would promote aid to a struggling Lao economy and establish a long-term relationship in the region. For several months, policymakers debated whether to approve normal trade relations with Laos. The debate centered on a moral *right versus right* paradigm (Kidder, 1995). Those who supported legislation believed it was a moral obligation for the United States to normalize trade with Laos, thus securing a long-term relationship with the region and increasing Lao economy and welfare. Those who opposed the legislation believed the moral obligation was to reinforce human rights policies. The approval of the U. S. – Lao NTR legislation divided many ethnic Lao communities in the United States, especially the Hmong.

This situation is a moral dilemma; there are several questions that leaders must address. Did community and international leaders do enough to question the NTR and its moral implications? Did these leaders act as moral leaders and take a moral stance in the situation, or did they care only about economics and politics? Can moral leaders decide which decision minimizes the “wrong” and maximizes the “right” (Stratton, September 2004, personal communication)? In this paper, I will utilize the *right versus right* paradigm developed by Rushworth Kidder (1995) to describe the moral dilemma of the

NTR and human rights situation, apply a resolution principle, and determine whether there was a third choice in the dilemma.

THE MORAL DILEMMA

From a moral perspective, the moral dilemma looks like this: should the United States normalize trade relations with Laos, which would bring about positive economic, social, and political change to a country that desperately seeks international aid for its citizens and its economy? Or, should the United States continue to deny Laos normal trade relations, thus demonstrating that it does not support countries that violate human rights laws and policies or are in clear violations of the Geneva Convention?

Supporters of NTR argued that the moral obligation was to give aid to Laos, a country that faced horrendous economic, political, and social conditions since the end of the Vietnam War. Furthermore, rebuilding Laos' economy, its social structure, and political framework would improve its international status. Opposing voices argued that the United States' moral obligation was to the thousands of ethnic minorities that fled Laos in the 1970s and to those who continue to face terrible human rights abuses. For opponents of the NTR, it is a moral obligation for the United States to intervene with policies that forces Laos to abide by international law and the policies set forth by the Geneva Convention.

Within this moral dilemma, actors (supporters and opponents) feel a sense of moral responsibility. There is a responsibility to voice what is best, ethically and/or morally, for the international community and its citizens. Kidder (1995) writes, "In matters of ethics, we're all involved. Why? Because we all live within a context of

community, and communities depend on ethical interrelations” (p.183); therefore, all “actors in a moral dilemma” (Kidder, 1995) have the responsibility to minimize the ethical issues that will arise from this moral dilemma. Leaders, in particular, must gauge the moral dilemma and decide a course of action that minimizes the moral issue.

HISTORY OF THE U.S. – LAOS NTR AND LAO HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

To understand the moral dilemma and make a case for the more appropriate course of action, Kidder recommends an assessment of the dilemma and its future implications (1995, p. 183). This requires an evaluation of the United States and Lao relationship, the relationship of the Lao government to its’ ethnic minority citizens, the alleged violations of human rights activities by the Lao government, and the support for NTR. By delving into these areas, one will uncover information that will aid in the elimination of the “wrong” moral decision and capitalize on the “right” decisions.

Background of Laos

The State Department’s report, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (2004), lists the country of Laos as an “authoritarian, Communist, one-party state ruled by the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP)” (U.S. Dept. of State, 2004) and as “extremely poor with an estimated population of over 6 million” (U.S. Dept. of State, 2004). Laos is the sixth poorest nation in the world and the “mean annual income is just over \$300 and the per capita gross domestic product was estimated at \$1,700” (U.S. Dept. of State, 2004). Economically, Laos struggles to compete within the new global economy. Its workforce is unskilled and illiterate; many Lao citizens and ethnic Lao

minorities work in the agricultural sector. Education for Lao citizens and ethnic minorities are for the privileged few.

In the late 1990s, the Lao government took steps to increase tourism, “a growing industry and important source of foreign exchange” (U.S. Dept. of State, 2004) and “agreed to expand fiscal and monetary reform, promote private enterprise and foreign investment, privatize or close state firms, and strengthen banking. In addition, it also agreed to maintain a market exchange rate, reduce tariffs, and eliminate unneeded trade regulations” (U.S. Dept. of State, 2004). With these changes, the Lao government hoped to bring favorable impressions of its country.

Half of Laos’ population consists of ethnic minorities dispersed throughout the country. “Mountain tribes of Miao-Yao, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman - Hmong, Yao, Akha, and Lahu - and Tai ethno linguistic heritage are found in northern Laos” (U.S. Dept. of State, 2004). Documentations from Laos’ history indicate the government had turbulent years battling uprisings from ethnic minority groups and made several attempts to recover from their involvements in the first and second Indochina Wars. Of particular importance are the ethnic minorities that fled the country’s oppressive policies and regime after the withdrawal of American troops in 1974. Estimates of over 200,000 ethnic minorities, most of whom were Hmong, fled to Thai borders or withdrew into the jungles of Laos to escape the massive genocide. Communist Lao officials hunted these persons for revenge because they served as American recruits in the “Secret Army” in the Vietnam War. Hmong scholar, Yang Dao (Yang, October 2004, personal communication) indicated that the Hmong were not recruited by the C.I.A., but by the

Royal Lao Government, who fought on the side of the United States. Nevertheless, the United States' moral response to the massive killing was to relocate these individuals.

Today, the Lao government continues to struggle with Hmong insurgents. Nakashima (2004) reported that an estimated 17,000 remaining Hmong soldiers and their families from the Vietnam War remain in the jungles of Laos "as rebels or because they fear government reprisals, according to a 2001 estimate presented by advocates for the Hmong in the United States" (Nakashima, 2004). To control Hmong insurgents the Lao government created amnesty programs in recent years to invite Hmong rebels to lay down their arms and enter civilian life (Nakashima, 2004). However, reports from ex-rebels indicate that Lao amnesty programs were traps to lure the Hmong away from their hideouts, only to be killed, arrested, or tortured. The Lao government continues to deny these reports, but Lao civilian sympathizers report to international aid agencies that they witness cruel and torturous behaviors on the part of the Lao government. It is this reason many Hmong insurgents continue to distrust the government, remain in the jungles or attack the Lao military.

Laos' is slowly rebuilding its relationship with its Southeast Asian neighbors and in the early 1990s began a more formal relationship with the United States. Today, U. S. and Lao relations focus primarily on search efforts for missing prisoners of war and a continued search for the remains of U.S. soldiers from the Vietnam War; second, the United States works to gain Lao authorities' cooperation in the narcotics trade. In a letter to Congress dated February 26, 2003, then Secretary of State Colin Powell, and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, wrote,

In areas of concern to the United States, Laos has been cooperative, working closely with U.S. to obtain the fullest possible accounting for our prisoners of war and those missing in action. In addition, we have a long-term bilateral counter-narcotics program including successful alternative development programs. Laos has also responded to our requests for support and cooperation on counter-terrorism following the September 11, 2001, attacks. (U.S. – Lao NTR Coalition, 2004)

These changes opened the country to positive reinforcements and international assistance. A supporter of NTR wrote that Laos, “is a country that is dynamic at its core: a nation that is poor but struggling to lift itself up, a nation that was once isolated, but is now working hard to find its way into the family of nations” (Swick, 2004). Clearly, for many persons, Laos is on the path to recovery.

Support for Normal Trade Relations with the U. S.

Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California boast the highest ethnic minority Lao in the nation. In the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul, the Hmong population continues to soar as Hmong families move to the area to be near clan members and friends. The Twin Cities are known for their high Hmong populations with an estimate of 70,000 (www.hndlink.org, 2004) and Minnesota is the first state to elect a Hmong state senator, a Hmong representative to the house, and two elected Hmong persons to the Saint Paul School Board. The Hmong vote is very important in Minnesota and in recent years has divided the community on moral issues. Politicians and lawmakers consult Hmong community leaders prior to making decisions and are careful to position themselves within the Hmong community.

Representative Betty McCollum initiated the *House Bill 3943* with Representative Philip Crane. For McCollum, the bill symbolized much needed help to aid

Lao citizens and ethnic Lao minorities who faced human rights abuses in Laos. It was not a bill that ignored the atrocious human rights issues within the country. In November 2004, McCollum's chief of staff, Bill Harper remarked that the bill "is a step toward economic engagement with Laos....They have isolated Laos for 30 years and human rights continue to be an issue. We feel that engagement is the manner in which transparency, human rights and religious freedom and democracy will prosper" (StarTribune, November 20, 2004).

Prior to the approval of NTR, Laos faced tariffs of 43% or more on all exports to the United States, whereas those who had NTR with the U. S. faced a low 2.3% tariff. For many persons this was an unjust situation; however, there were multiple reasons as to why the United States placed high tariffs on exported goods from Laos. The two most cited reasons were that Laos was not considered a market economy "when Jackson-Vanik Trade Act was passed in 1975" (Swick, 2004) and that "Laos was also included with Vietnam as a recent belligerent during the Vietnam conflict" (Swick, 2004) during the mid 1970s. Nevertheless, high tariffs on exported goods were costly and damaging for an already crippled economy. High tariffs hindered monetary flow into the country and often halted production of resources. Business owners in the U.S. who sold Lao products such as clothing, timber, or jewelry placed higher prices on their products because of the high tariffs. Many complained about the injustice and immoral behavior of the United States to punish a country that was, in their perspective, changing their policies to reflect a free market economy. In fact, many argued that Laos' entrance into ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) reflected the country's support for counter-terrorism activity

and regional stability. Additionally, Laos' negotiations for entrance as a member of the WTO (World Trade Organization) further solidified Laos' commitment to changing its policies to reflect a global perspective.

Supporters argued the moral obligation was to assist Lao citizens and residents by granting NTR. This moral obligation would set straight the mistakes of the past and rebuild an important relationship and ally. The Normal Trade Relations bill, *H.R. 3943* (U.S. - Lao NTR Coalition, 2004), summarized the benefits to both countries in this way,

The U. S.-NTR Coalition strongly believes that granting Normal Trade Relations (NTR) agreement to Laos will bring these following benefits: increased economic opportunities; stimulated foreign investment; improved gradual socio-economics and political transformations; improved bilateral relationship between the two countries; contributed improvement of human rights; reduced the level of poverty; and restored mutual respect and trust between Lao-Americans and all peoples in Laos. (U. S. – Lao NTR Coalition, 2004, p. 1)

Numerous Lao, Hmong, Asian, and non-Asian organizations supported the NTR, each speaking passionately about the urgency to establish NTR as a venue for enforcing human rights policies within Laos. A group of Lao and Hmong scholars from the *Laotian Multi-Ethnic Alliance for U. S. A. – Laos Friendship* wrote letters and garnered petitions in support of the bill. In a letter dated, April 15, 2003, they wrote that they “strongly believe 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” (U.S. – Lao NTR Coalition, 2004, p. 17). Furthermore, the relationship would create “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” (U. S. – Lao NTR Coalition, 2004, p. 17). Finally, the relationship

would create “constructive dialogue” (U. S. – Lao NTR Coalition, 2004, p. 17) and “contribute to accelerating political reform by promoting civil rights and democratic liberties” (U. S. – Lao NTR Coalition, 2004, p. 17) Supporters reiterated that legislation would allow the United States and other international countries to oversee Lao activities, particularly its violations to human rights. This relationship was the morally right decision and the only access into the country. Passing NTR legislation would mean the following: saving the lives of Lao citizens, expanding education in the country, increasing monetary funds into Lao economy, and affecting Lao political structure.

Human Rights Violations Evident in Laos

On September 13, 2004, Amnesty International released a public statement condemning the Lao government’s role in the horrific crimes against five Hmong children in the Xaisomboune military zone on May 19, 2004. These children, of whom four were female, were searching for food near their village when they were brutally raped, mutilated, and killed by 30-40 Lao soldiers. Amnesty International stated, “The attacks violate the most fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. These rapes and killings constitute war crimes. The Lao authorities must bring to justice those responsible for this atrocity and cease attacks on unarmed civilians” (Amnesty International, September 13, 2004). The atrocities were videotaped by a member of the *Fact Finding Commission*, an organization in search of truth regarding America’s forgotten allies, the Hmong (www.factfinding.org, 2004).

A witness, who has subsequently fled the country and been recognized as a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, reported hearing one of the soldiers saying: ‘Meo (Hmong). Your *kael ni* (mouth) allows you to

‘speak. Your *hin* (vagina) allows you to breed.’ He then heard moans and a gunshot. (Amnesty International, September 13, 2004)

This incident is one of the many documented human rights violations the country continues to deny. “Lao government spokesman Yong Chanthalangsy called the account ‘untrue,’ and especially cast doubt on the videotape, saying it was a ‘fabrication that could have been shot anywhere in the world’” (International Custom Wire, 2004) and criticized Amnesty International for their hasty decision against the Lao government. Furthermore, Lao officials and supporters of NTR claim there is no ethnic cleansing within the country. They point to the few Hmong officials in government as proof that ethnic discrimination does not exist in Laos.

Lao government claims it attacks only Hmong insurgents who fight against the government’s policies towards minorities. It also claims that it has the right to counterattack these insurgents because of the terrorist activities committed in past years against innocent Lao civilians. International news agencies report that several incidents of Hmong insurgents have killed and wounded Lao citizens. In a report by Great Britain’s, *The Times*, “Gunmen killed 12 people and injured 30 in an ambush on a bus...It blamed Hmong rebels for the shootings” (The Times, 2003). The United States also condemned the violent actions of the Hmong rebels and made clear in a meeting with top State Department officials that,

It’s illegal to aid insurgents still operating in Laos, and the United States has no tolerance for Hmong-Americans who do. . . We know that in Laos there have been planned attacks on civilians in the past year, and we regard those as acts of terrorism (Webb, 2004).

These claims do not settle well with human rights organizations. A Thai newspaper, *The Nation*, reported in 2000 that two Hmong-American men disappeared from Laos after they placed two ads calling for a rebellion against the communist government (The Nation, 2000). The Lao government controls all media sources and it is believed that the government had a role in the disappearance of the two Hmong-Americans. “The only political party in the country is the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party, the communist party which controls the government. Opposition to the government is not permitted, and the state retains control of institutions such as the media, religious organizations and trade unions” (Amnesty International, 2002).

In 2003, a Hmong pastor accompanied two Belgian journalists on an investigation to report on Laos’ human rights abuses and to interview Hmong insurgents. They were arrested for their alleged roles in the murder of a village government official and were released only after U. S. political powers and members of the international community threatened to withdraw from the NTR agreement. Later that same year, Amnesty International criticized the government’s role in using “starvation as a weapon of war against members of the ethnic Hmong minority” (International Custom Wire, 2003). The organization received reports of thousands of Hmong persons foraging for food and an increase in death rates within the jungles; this was a direct effect of the government’s prevention of the Hmong to find food.

In recent years, the *Fact Finding Commission* followed groups of Hmong and other ethnic Lao minorities in the jungles to capture their stories. In 2003, photo news journalist, Phillip Blenkinsop was able to document the horrific conditions of the Hmong

“freedom fighters” as they left camp periodically to avoid military violence from Lao officials. The *Fact Finding Commission’s* “Beyond the Mekong” (www.factfinding.org, 2003) recorded the activities and life of Hmong insurgents. One Hmong woman in the video cried desperately in Hmong, “Kill me now so I don’t have to be killed later” (Beyond the Mekong, 2003).

In an Amnesty International report released in 2002 titled, *Lao People’s Democratic Republic: The laws are promulgated but have no impact on the people: Torture, ill-treatment and hidden suffering in detention*, the organization interviewed detainees, prisoners, and former Lao citizens to gather detailed information regarding Laos’ human rights violations within the prison system. The report found “a bleak picture has emerged of arbitrary detention, lack of judicial oversight, little or now access to medical facilities, and appalling cruelty by prison officials” (Amnesty International, 2002). The report only supported the State Department’s records of the human rights violations it had on file for several years.

It is a well known fact that the Lao government does not allow independent human rights organizations to monitor the country; therefore, there cannot be a true assessment of the human rights conditions in Laos. However, reports from prisoners indicate there is an atrocity of abuses within the prison system. Amnesty International reports the abuses they have uncovered are:

Punching and kicking with hands and feet, beating with sticks or truncheons, death threats and mock executions, solitary confinement, and long term shackling in wooden stocks. There are also reports of suffocation near-drowning, use of electric shocks, burning with cigarettes, and exposure to extremes of temperature. (Amnesty International, 2002)

These abuses are all in violation of the Geneva Convention, the Declaration of Human Rights and other international law. The international community condemns these abuses but has taken no further action to force Laos to abide by these terms.

Opponents of NTR argue that by agreeing to a normal trade relations with a country that abuses international laws is immoral and irresponsible. A congressman who opposed the bill stated,

I cannot support upgrading Laos' trading status as long as the human rights situation in that country remains so disturbing. . . .The U. S. has an obligation to the Hmong people, and I strongly believe that we have a moral interest in reducing human suffering and protecting human rights abroad (StarTribune, November 20, 2004).

Although Congress passed the legislation for NTR, there exists a strong division in the community. Both sides feel their choice is the "right" choice. Each continues to criticize the other. Only time will tell whether the decision made on November 20, 2004 will prove to have minimized the wrong in the moral dilemma, and maximized the right.

RIGHT VERSUS RIGHT PARADIGM

In ethics, a moral dilemma such as a right versus right is the most difficult decision to make because both decisions are morally right. Regarding the U. S. – Laos NTR and Laos' Human Rights issues there are two clear rights within this dilemma. The first is that there is a moral obligation for the United States to provide aid through trade relations to a flailing country. It is also a right for the United States to take a moral stance against the inhumane actions and clear violations of human rights. In these types of situations, Kidder recommends analyzing the moral dilemma under four paradigms: truth vs. loyalty, justice vs. mercy, short-term vs. long-term, and self vs. community (Kidder,

1995, p. 114-117). Within this dilemma, one can apply the paradigms of self vs. community and short-term vs. long-term to making the morally “right” decision.

Self vs. Community

Both sides to the argument would agree to disagree that there is one moral decision in a self vs. community paradigm. Supporters of NTR argue that legislation ultimately benefits the community (national and international) rather than the needs of certain individuals. Through NTR legislation, Congress believes all aspects of the country’s structure will thrive; new opportunities for growth will appear. Rather than address only human rights issues, Congress and supporters would argue that there is more at stake than human rights abuses. This is clear in petitions and letters for support of NTR. One such letter written by Hmong scholar, Dr. Yang Dao (2003) indicates an international obligation to Laos regardless of its human rights abuses. Dao writes that economic, social, and political issues must be viewed in its totality, not in isolation. He sets aside human rights abuses, but states the NTR agreement is an alternative to addressing the human rights dilemma.

On the other side are opponents of the NTR who argue that the agreement does not benefit the community if groups within the community never live to see the benefits. Human rights abuses are seen as “side issues” to trade and economics. The U. S. government has made clear that trade and terrorism are priorities in their relationship with Laos; therefore the NTR will not address human rights violations. For these persons, it is a moral obligation to intervene when the government knows there are cruel standards in place.

Short-term vs. Long-term

Supporters of NTR and Congress based their decisions on long-term results of NTR, whereas opponents of the bill concerned themselves with the current injustices of the country. The passage of NTR would have long-term results, such as new educational systems, expansion of the market economy, new jobs and imports of international resources; all would in the end benefit the community and secure a positive future for the country. Opponents disagree; NTR was another policy that focused only on economic growth and not the social conditions of the country. Human rights violations were pervasive and permeated all levels of the political and economic structure; thus, they argued a long-term solution, which often took years to implement and for results to be analyzed, did not address nor stop the injustices. Furthermore, they argued that those who faced human rights abuses could not wait for a transformation of the economy before they were given their freedom.

RESOLUTION PRINCIPLES

Congress' approval of the NTR legislation is utilitarian-based. Utilitarianism is a moral principle based on achieving the greatest good for the greatest number. "The English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), generally credited with developing the first systematic utilitarianism, noted that the measure of the rightness of an action was to be found in the greatest happiness for the greatest number" (Kidder, 1995, p. 155). In the end, it was the greatest good (NTR legislation) to address the needs of the greatest number (Laos and the international community) that proved to sway Congress.

Opponents of the NTR utilized a Kantian perspective or what Kidder (1995) described as “rule-based thinking” (p.157). Future consequences of the NTR are unknown and the United States cannot expect that passage of NTR legislation would improve the Lao economic, political, or social structure. For example, many supporters of NTR argue that passage of legislation allowed Cambodia to create over 200,000 jobs, yet opponents argue that the U. S. or Laos cannot guarantee the same would occur in Laos. Furthermore, by allowing NTR approval, the United States implies that human rights violations are not as important as trade relations. Countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam, China, and Thailand who have NTR with the United States and have terrible human rights records would not have to worry about their human rights violations. The concern for this group is whether the United States trade human rights violations for their own economic and global prosperity.

A THIRD CHOICE TO THE DILEMMA

The dilemma is clear. Action for or against the NTR would result in further divisions within many sectors of the national and international community. Can politicians and government officials make a decision that appeases both sides? Yes, it is a moral obligation of the United States to support normalizing trade and it is a moral obligation for the United States to intervene on atrocious human rights violations. Often times, leaders feel the need to separate these issues, but there is no need to as they both impact the other.

An alternative choice is to create special provisions within the trade legislation that would offer Laos the opportunity or the “level playing field” it needs to generate

growth for all its sectors, but also hold it accountable for its human rights abuses. When Congress passed the legislation it did not place a special provision because it felt that by doing so it would convey a message to Laos that would deter future opportunities, such as human rights monitoring. After much debate, the Senate did agree to note dissenting opinions about the NTR in the bill, although no stipulations were tied to the bill for making changes to the current human rights situation.

United States' leaders did not act as moral leaders. The United States has more power and presence in the international community than any other country and is able to influence other governments to persuade Laos to allow human rights monitoring. Laos' relationships with Vietnam, Thailand, and Russia have long been known and these countries can help leverage the United States' role in the situation, yet it did not pursue these venues. How can societies learn to be morally responsible when those we elect to positions of leadership lead from one perspective?

Moral leadership should find a compromise within the dilemma, not further divide the issues. Robert Coles (2000) wrote that Robert Kennedy once assessed the poverty problem within America and said that leaders "can do a little more" (Coles, 2000, p. 8) to address the moral issues in our society. Similar to this situation, political leaders who dealt with the NTR lacked the moral or "ethical fitness" (Kidder, 1995, p. 57) needed to assess the moral challenges. Leaders did not act morally and made decisions based on maintaining political status quo.

Legislation passed based on strong support for the United States and Lao economies with little or no regards to their human rights violations. In articles, petitions,

and letters of support for NTR, advocates minimized human rights abuses in support of economic reform. Every individual acknowledged Laos' human rights abuses but developed reasons to eliminate human rights violations as a factor in determining NTR. This is the tragedy of leadership; that individuals in these positions are not able to gauge the moral challenges and who choose consciously to avoid moral issues while making claims that the decision benefits the international community. Furthermore, the tragedy within the international community is that it continues to be absent in the face of moral dilemmas. Rieff (2002) wrote that the concept of an international community does not exist; it appears that no members of the international community stepped forward to question this moral dilemma or Laos' blatant violations against the Geneva Convention and the Declaration of Human Rights. These are documents that stipulate international and humanitarian law and are universally accepted principles; yet, these policies are hardly enforced. It would seem that leadership lacks responsibility; therefore setting aside moral issues for others to solve. Moral leadership requires we assess our value systems and our relationships with one another, even if the result is to be the lone voice in the moral issue.

CONCLUSION

The moral dilemma of the U. S. – Lao NTR and human rights violations within Laos divided many international communities. Congressional leaders passed legislation on Normal Trade Relations with Laos after review of materials that alluded to the positive economic, political, and social changes to the country. Opponents of the bill reminded congressional leaders of their moral obligation to *not* support a regime that

deliberately ignored human rights, international, and humanitarian law. The decision to pass legislation was a utilitarian-based decision, as most policies often are. Leadership lacked moral or ethical fitness in their decision-making process and the international community took no steps to participate or voice their objections. The tragedy of the U.S. and Lao NTR is not that a decision was made, but that there was a lack of moral leadership from leaders. Their inability to understand the systemic issues of the moral dilemma will continue to affect future generations of citizens.

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