

# PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

February 10, 2005



ລາວສຶກສາ ໑ Lao Studies I  
An International Conference  
DeKalb, IL USA 2005

## CONTACT:

Vinya Sysamouth  
San Francisco Main Organizer  
(415) 401-6255  
laolanxang@yahoo.com

Khammany Mathavongsy  
ULCD President  
(510) 243-0142  
mkhammany@netscape.net

John Hartman, Ph.D.  
NIU Main Organizer  
(815) 753-6462  
Tc0jfh1@wpo.cso.niu.edu

Aloun Khotisene  
Lao Cultural Night Main Organizer  
(847) 742-7930  
la\_vie73@yahoo.com

## First International Conference on Lao Studies to Be Held in Northern Illinois

*San Francisco, CA* -The First International Conference on Lao Studies will take place on the campus of Northern Illinois University from May 20-22, 2005. This historic conference is co-sponsored by Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University and the United Laotian Community Development of Richmond, California with the support of the Lao American community of Elgin, Illinois. The main objective of this conference is to provide an international forum for scholars to present and discuss various aspects of Lao studies.

Laos is a small country but is endowed with rich and vibrant ethno-linguistic and cultural heritage. The Lao diaspora community is even larger. This inaugural event will allow those interested in Laos to come together for an international conference to promote Lao scholarship and culture for the first time. According to Professor John Hartmann, "interest in this very First International Conference on Lao Studies is much higher than we expected when the idea first emerged." In recent years there has been an increased interest in Laos and its peoples as subjects

of serious discussion by scholars and the interested public alike. Indeed, there has been a flowering of scholarly publications on topics pertaining to Laos in the last several decades and a growing interest cultivated by the international media with its global reach. A new community of young scholars is eager to see the conference take place; the old and wise fervently want it to happen too.

The First Lao History Symposium held in the Spring of 2003 at the University of California-Berkeley, heralded the burgeoning of a growing interest in Lao studies among a new generation of scholars. This conference will build on that momentum. As a member of conference planning committee, Vinya Sysamouth stated that, “not only will the meeting bring scholars together from all over the world, it will also unite the peoples of the Lao diaspora who are eager to participate in a professional conference devoted specifically for Lao Studies.”

The three days conference will feature invited speakers and paper presentations by scholars from around the globe on wide range of topics concerning Lao Studies. As of February 5, 2005 there are over 200 potential participants who are planning to join the conference. Scholars from Laos, Thailand, Japan, France, Belgium, Germany, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, India, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Austria, Australia, Canada, China and all regions of the United States are planning to attend. The United States embassy in Vientiane will provide funding for 4 scholars from Laos to attend the meeting. Confirmed speakers and attendees include Grant Evans, Ph.D. from Hong Kong, Venerable Pra Ajan Maha Bounkhong, President of Lao American Buddhist Monks of America from Hawaii, Hmong-American scholar and community leader Yang Dao from Minnesota, Somsong Burusphat, Ph.D. Thai linguist from Bangkok, and Tiao (Prince) Nithakhong Somsanith from France, a grandson of the last Vice Roy of the Kingdom of Laos and a scholar-artist on Indochinese textiles and art golden thread embroidery from the days of the Lao Royal Court.

Additionally, the conference program will feature a film festival to showcase films and documentaries on Laos and Lao in diaspora. On the evening of May 21<sup>th</sup> the local Lao American community in Elgin, Illinois will host a Lao Cultural Night featuring Lao food, performances and art exhibition. In addition to talent from the region surrounding northern Illinois who will perform at the cultural night in Elgin, two scholar-musicians; one from Loei Province in northeastern Thailand and another a French woman from Paris will both play the *khene* (the emblematic Lao mouth organ) in a live performance and *molam* singing at the Cultural Night Celebration. Without doubt, their appearance will revive interest in Lao culture — especially music — in the Lao American community and could profitably lead to future cultural exchanges between Laos and the United States.

For more information about the conference registration and accommodation, please visit the First International Conference on Lao Studies official website at [www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/LaoStudies](http://www.seasite.niu.edu/lao/LaoStudies)

End