

## **Government Drops Charges Against General Vang Pao**

9/18/09 (San Francisco, Calif.)—The United States government Friday dismissed its case against General Vang Pao, the leader of more than 145,000 Hmong-Americans, who was arrested in 2007 for allegedly conspiring to overthrow the government of Laos.

U.S. Attorney Lawrence Brown in Sacramento stated Friday that given the totality of evidence in the case and the circumstances surrounding General Vang Pao, continued prosecution of Vang is “no longer warranted.” In a superseding indictment issued Friday, however, the government said it would pursue its case against the 10 other defendants named in the original indictment.

"We're thrilled that the government has finally realized that General Vang Pao is innocent and dropped the unjust charges against him," said John Keke, a Vietnam veteran and founding partner of Keke & Van Nest. "We're disappointed, however, that this deeply flawed prosecution and unfair sting operation is continuing against the other defendants."

Keke, along with firm attorneys David Silbert and Galia Phillips, has represented Vang pro bono since shortly after Vang was indicted. Sacramento defense attorney John Balazs also represented Vang in the case.

Since 1975 Laos has been controlled by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. During the 1960s and 1970s, in conjunction with the Vietnam War, General Vang Pao led a CIA-backed secret Hmong army that fought against the communist Lao movement and the North Vietnamese. The group served as a counter attack to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail and rescued downed American pilots.

In June 2007, General Vang Pao was charged with violating the federal Neutrality Act, which bars Americans from taking military action against countries that have peaceful relations with the U.S. Keke & Van Nest secured the general's release following his arrest; he now resides in Southern California with his family.