

URGENT ACTION

LAO CITIZEN ABDUCTED, NOT SEEN OR HEARD FROM
Respected member of Lao civil society Sombath Somphone – well known for his work promoting education and sustainable development – was taken away in a truck by unknown persons after being stopped by police in the Lao capital, Vientiane on 15 December 2012. Nobody has seen or heard from him since.

Sombath Somphone, 62, left his office in his car at around 5:30pm on 15 December 2012. Police stopped him at around 6pm at a checkpoint on Thadeua Road, in Vientiane's Sisattanak district. Video footage from a traffic camera appears to show that he got out of his car to speak with police. A motorcyclist arrived and drove off with Sombath Somphone's car, leaving his motorcycle behind. A truck with flashing lights then arrived, and Sombath Somphone was taken to the truck and driven away. Family and friends have identified Sombath Somphone as the man shown in the footage.

The Lao authorities have denied arresting Sombath Somphone and being responsible for his disappearance, saying that he may have been abducted as part of a private dispute after being stopped by police for a routine document check. Although the Lao government issued a statement on 19 December 2012 which claims that the "authorities concerned" are "seriously investigating" the matter, they have yet to provide detailed information about the investigations to his family or others with a legitimate interest. Amnesty International is concerned that the investigations undertaken so far have lacked transparency and may have been inadequate.

Sombath Somphone founded the Participatory Development Training Centre in 1996 to promote education, leadership skills and sustainable development in Laos. In 2005, he received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership. He helped to organise the Asia-Europe People's Forum in Vientiane in October 2012.

Please write immediately in Lao, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Lao authorities to undertake prompt, transparent and thorough investigations into the abduction and disappearance of Sombath Somphone, in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law;
- Demanding that they give full information about the progress of the investigations to his family and others with a legitimate interest;
- Urging them to ensure that all steps are being taken to locate, rescue and return him safely to his family as soon as possible.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 MARCH 2013 TO:

Prime Minister
 Thongsing Thammavong
 Prime Minister's Office
 Lane Xang Avenue, Vientiane
 Lao People's Democratic Republic
 Fax: + 856 21 213650
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Public Security
 Dr Thongbanh Sengaphone
 Ministry of Public Security
 P.O. Box 7040, Vientiane
 Lao People's Democratic Republic
 Fax: + 856 21 214208 (c/o President's
 Office)
Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:
Minister of Foreign Affairs
 Dr Thongloun Sisoulith
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 23 Singha Road, Vientiane
 Lao People's Democratic Republic
 Fax: + 856 21 414009
 Email: cabinet@mofa.gov.la

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The lack of transparency of the investigation into Sombath Somphone's disappearance raises questions about the adequacy and thoroughness of attempts to locate him. For example, it is not known whether the Lao authorities who are currently conducting investigations have interviewed the police officers at the checkpoint, who seemingly did nothing to stop Sombath Somphone or his car being taken away. Nor is it known whether they have undertaken an analysis of the traffic camera footage to determine the number plates and owners of the vehicles involved, or whether they have analysed footage from other cameras in the vicinity that may show where he was taken next.

Sombath Somphone's family and friends, regional and international civil society groups, foreign governments and the United Nations have called for his disappearance to be thoroughly investigated, and his safe return. His friends have started an online campaign for his release and created a website with information and links to media coverage and advocacy initiatives: <http://sombath.org/>

Laos is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Article 9 of the ICCPR provides for the right to liberty and security of person. It prohibits authorities from arbitrarily arresting and detaining anyone, and provides that anyone who is arrested or detained must be brought promptly before a judge and tried or released within a reasonable time. States must ensure that their own officials respect this right; additionally, they also have an obligation to protect individuals against abuses of the right by private persons and entities. States also have an obligation under Article 2 (3(a)) of the ICCPR to provide an "effective remedy" for anyone whose rights under the Convention have been violated. Failure to take effective measures to prevent such acts and provide effective remedies, including investigating and ending these abuses and bringing perpetrators to justice, violates states parties' obligations under the ICCPR.

Laos is a signatory to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, but has not yet ratified it. The Convention prohibits enforced disappearance which it defines as "the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law." States must take measures to investigate such acts, including analogous acts committed by persons or groups of persons acting without the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, and to bring those responsible to justice.

Name: Sombath Somphone

Gender m/f: m

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