

URGENT ACTION

THREE LAO ACTIVISTS HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Three Lao human rights activists have been arrested on 5 and 22 March in circumstances that may constitute enforced disappearances. They remain in incommunicado detention since they appeared on national television on 25 May in a report that confirmed that they had been arrested for threatening national security through social media postings.

Soukan Chaithad (32), **Lodkham Thammavong** (30), and **Somphone Phimmasone** (29) are Lao nationals who had been working in Thailand until February 2016, when they returned to Laos to obtain documentation to continue working there. The three had participated in a peaceful demonstration of around 30 people outside the Lao embassy in Bangkok on 2 December 2015, Lao national day, and had posted a number of messages on Facebook criticising the Laos government for corruption, deforestation and human rights violations.

Lodkham Thammavong and Somphone Phimmasone, who are a couple, were arrested at home in Ban Vang Tay Village, Nong Bok District, Khammuan Province on 5 March. Soukan Chaithad was arrested on 22 March, reportedly at the Ministry of Public Security office in Savannakhet City, western Laos, where he had gone to renew his passport. The arrests may amount to enforced disappearances, as the whereabouts of the three are being concealed after their arrests.

On 25 May, the three appeared on state television wearing prison uniforms, sitting at a table in front of uniformed police and men in plain clothes, in a report that confirmed that they had been arrested for allegedly being a threat to national security through social media postings. During the report, Soukan Chaithad said that he would "change his attitude and stop all activities that betray the nation". He added that his confession had not been coerced by the authorities.

The three still remain in incommunicado detention. It is unclear what offences they are accused of committing, whether they have been charged and where they are detained.

Please write immediately in Laotian or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Soukan Chaithad, Lodkham Thammavong and Somphone Phimmasone if they have been arrested solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Urging the authorities to publicly make known the charges against the three, their whereabouts and well-being;
- Demanding that the Lao authorities immediately cease the practice of enforced disappearances and ensure access of individuals arrested and charged with recognized criminal offences to their family and lawyers of their choosing, in line with international standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 SEPTEMBER 2016 TO:

Prime Minister
Thongloun Sisoulith
Prime Minister's Office
Lane Xang Avenue
Vientiane
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Fax: + 856 21 213560
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Saleumxay Kommasith
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
23 Singha Road
Vientiane
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Fax: + 856 21 414009
Email: cabinet@mofa.gov.la
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Minister of Justice
Xaysy Santivong
Ministry of Justice
Lane Xang Avenue
Vientiane
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Fax: + 856 21 414102

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a one-party state under the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. The rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are severely restricted in the country. In September 2014, a new Prime Ministerial Decree on management of information through the internet was enacted. Since its enactment at least two people have been arrested in relation to information posted online, one of whom has since been released. The other, Bounthanh Thammavong, is a Polish national of Lao descent who was convicted of criticizing the ruling party on Facebook and other anti-government activities and sentenced to four years and nine months in prison.

Laos signed the International Covenant on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances in September 2008 but has not yet ratified it. The most well-known enforced disappearance case in recent years involved Sombath Somphone, who was last seen at a police post in the capital Vientiane in December 2012. The government has acknowledged his disappearance but has failed to ensure a full and independent investigation. Sompawn Khantisouk, an entrepreneur who was active on conservation issues, remains disappeared since being abducted by men believed to be police in 2007.

Name: Soukan Chaithad (m), Lodkham Thammavong (f), Somphone Phimmasone (m)

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