

PUBLIC

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Possible

**LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC**

**Thongpaseuth Keuakoun (m), aged 39**

**Five students**

**Up to 100 protestors**

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Scores of people have reportedly been arrested in connection with an anti-government protest due to take place on 26 October 1999 in the capital, Vientiane, and their whereabouts are now unknown. Amnesty International is concerned that they may be ill-treated in detention, and considers them possible prisoners of conscience. The authorities have denied that any protest took place or that anyone has been arrested.

The leader of the planned protest, Thongpaseuth Keuakoun, was arrested outside the Presidential Palace shortly before the demonstration was due to begin. Five students were arrested with him. A further 15 to 25 people were reportedly arrested the following day, and up to 100 people are now in detention.

Those arrested are reported to include a senior local government official from the Sikhotobong district of Vientiane, as well as students and teachers from Dong Dok National University and Vientiane High School. An open letter from the organizers of the protest included calls for respect for human rights, the release of political prisoners, a multi-party political system and elections for a new National Assembly.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Freedom of expression and association is severely restricted in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The last known public protest against government policies was in 1990, when three former government officials called for peaceful political and economic change in letters circulated among a small number of people. They were arrested and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment in 1992. One of them died in detention in 1998, and the other two are still in prison. At the beginning of their detention in Vientiane they were held for some time in dark solitary confinement cells. They were later transferred to Prison Camp 7 in Houa Phan province, where they have been held in extremely harsh conditions amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/express/airmail letters in English, French or your own language:**

- expressing concern at the arrest of Thongpaseuth Keuakoun and five students on 26 October 1999, and as many as 100 people in total;
- urging the authorities to make public the names of all those arrested in connection with the planned protests, where they are detained and any charges against them;
- urging the authorities to ensure that they are treated in accordance with international minimum standards;
- urging that they be allowed immediate access to their families, lawyers and any medical treatment they need;
- expressing concern that they may be prisoners of conscience detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association.

**APPEALS TO:**

Khamtai Siphandone  
Prime Minister  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Vientiane  
Laos

**Telegrams: Prime Minister, Vientiane, Laos**  
**Salutation:Your Excellency**

Major General Asang Laoli  
Minister of Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
Vientiane  
Laos

**Telegrams:Interior Minister, Vientiane, Laos**  
**Salutation:Dear Major General**

**COPIES TO:**

Somsavat Lengsavat  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Vientiane  
Laos

diplomatic representatives of the Lao People's Democratic Republic accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 December 1999.