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Thongsing Thammavong
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Vientiane
Lao People's Democratic Republic

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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Your Excellency

THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE OF SOMBATH SOMPHONE



Sombath Somphone accepting the 2005 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership

As the third anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone nears, the undersigned Directors of Amnesty International offices in Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Korea, India, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Senegal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Togo, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, the United States of America, and Zimbabwe are writing to remind your government of the worldwide concern over his disappearance and the apparent lack of an adequate investigation.

It is deeply worrying that despite the availability of CCTV footage showing Sombath Somphone's abduction in the early evening of 15 December 2012 at a police checkpoint on Thadeua Road, in Vientiane's Sisattanak district, no progress has been made in locating him and returning him safely to his family.

We have noted that during consideration of Laos under the UN Universal Periodic Review in March 2015, the Lao delegation clarified:

“...that the Investigation Committee was always open to views or suggestions to help the investigation, and was ready to receive suggestions from any interested parties with regard to the ongoing investigation. The delegation gave assurances that the authorities were still conducting its investigations and would continue to conduct a thorough investigation into this case in order to find the truth and bring perpetrators to justice in accordance with the law.”¹

Yet this claim and others by the Lao authorities that there is an ongoing investigation are barely credible. Responsible government ministries have revealed no information that transparently and concretely demonstrates that an in-depth and thorough police investigation is taking place. Instead, the Lao authorities and government officials have given inadequate and often dismissive responses to requests for information, as well as attempting to silence or avoid mentions of concern about Sombath Somphone among civil society in Laos and the region.

Enforced disappearance is a grave human rights violation and heinous crime. Amnesty International campaigns vigorously on individual cases around the world, including for those individuals disappeared for many years and whose loved ones – who are also victims - continue their search to establish their fate and whereabouts. We will do the same for Sombath Somphone. We will continue to raise his case at any and every opportunity and to press other governments and institutions to do the same, including during this coming year.

Amnesty International urges your government to heed our previous calls to establish a new independent commission to undertake an impartial and thorough review of all the evidence, including of the detailed CCTV footage of his abduction, identifying and questioning all those present, and details pertaining to the white pick-up truck in which Sombath Somphone was last seen.

While Laos takes over the Chair of ASEAN during 2016, an increased spotlight will be on the country. It is regrettable that the ASEAN People’s Forum, traditionally hosted by the country holding the Chair, will not be held there. The Forum is an opportunity for civil society groups and organizations in ASEAN to come together and hold a range of events and meetings on topics of concern to everyone living in the region. Many of them have voiced concerns over Sombath Somphone’s disappearance. It is a sad indictment that restrictions and obstacles on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly prevent Laos and particularly Lao civil society from benefiting from this gathering.

Finally, we, the undersigned, sincerely hope that the Lao authorities will indeed accept all offers of assistance to establish the fate of Sombath Somphone, and will ensure that those responsible for his enforced disappearance are brought to justice fairly. Although your government has signed but not yet ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the first step of signing also brings responsibilities and commitments to conform to the spirit of the treaty. We call on your government to honour the commitment by ratifying the Convention at the earliest opportunity and by ensuring a thorough and impartial investigation into Sombath Somphone’s enforced disappearance, informing his family and making the results public as soon as possible.

A copy of this letter is being sent to Embassies of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and will be posted on Amnesty International websites.

Yours sincerely,

¹ See A/HRC/29/7, 23 March 2015, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review.

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