

Laos: Six Years On, Civil Society Worldwide Demands Answers to the Enforced Disappearance of Sombath Somphone

14 December 2018

On the eve of the sixth anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Lao civil society leader Sombath Somphone, we, the undersigned organizations, reiterate our calls for the Lao government to conduct an independent, impartial and effective investigation to reveal his fate and whereabouts.

Sombath was last seen at a police checkpoint on a busy street of the Lao capital, Vientiane, on the evening of 15 December 2012. Footage from a CCTV camera showed that Sombath's vehicle was stopped at the police checkpoint and, within minutes, individuals forced him into another vehicle and drove him away in the presence of police officers. CCTV footage also showed an unknown individual driving Sombath's vehicle away from the city center. The fact that police officers were present at and witnessed Sombath's abduction and failed to intervene strongly indicates state agents' involvement in, or acquiescence to, human rights violations committed against Sombath, which include the crime of enforced disappearance. Later that evening, witnesses reportedly saw Sombath at a police holding facility in Vientiane yet to date officials have provided no information about what he was doing there and subsequently what happened to him.

For the last six years, the Lao government has failed to provide any credible answers with regard to the disappearance of Sombath Somphone. In its most recent pronouncements, made during the review of Laos' initial report by the Human Rights Committee (CCPR) in July 2018, the Lao government said it had been "trying very hard" to investigate Sombath's fate and whereabouts. However, this statement has been contradicted by the government's refusal to accept international assistance in conducting the investigation and to provide any details about the progress of its investigation. Lao authorities have failed to disclose any new findings from their investigation of Sombath's case to the public since 8 June 2013 and have met with his wife, Shui Meng Ng, only twice since January 2013.

Despite the government's recent claim that police had the "capacity and techniques" to reveal Sombath's fate and whereabouts, we remain extremely concerned by the lack of progress in the investigation by Lao authorities into his case and reiterate our call for Vientiane to allow international assistance towards conducting an independent, impartial and thorough investigation according to international law and standards.

The Lao authorities have international legal obligations to conduct such investigations and to bring persons responsible for serious violations to justice under treaties to which they are party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture.

We also urge the Lao government to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which Laos signed in September 2008, to incorporate the Convention's provisions into the country's domestic legislation, and implement it in practice.

Until Sombath Somphone's fate and whereabouts are revealed, we will not stop demanding that Sombath be safely returned to his family and we will continue to ask the Lao government: "Where is Sombath?"

1. 11.11.11 Belgium
2. Action from Ireland (Afri)
3. Addison Road Community Centre Organisation (ARCCO)
4. All India women Hawker Federation
5. Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma)
6. Amnesty International
7. Armanshahr/OPEN ASIA
8. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
9. Asia Pacific Movement for Debt and Development (APMDD)
10. Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)
11. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia)
12. Attac France
13. Bangladesh Working Group on External Debt (BWGED)
14. Bank Information Center
15. Borneo Dayak Forum International
16. Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino - BMP (Workers Solidarity Philippines)
17. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
18. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
19. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
20. CCFD-Terre Solidaire
21. Centre for Environmental Justice
22. China Labour Bulletin
23. Christian Development Alternative (CDA)
24. CLEAN (Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network)
25. CNCD-11.11.11
26. Coalition against Trafficking in Women-Asia Pacific
27. Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS)
28. Community Action Network (CAN)
29. Community Resource Centre Foundation (CRC)
30. Corner House
31. EarthRights International
32. Ecologistas en Acción
33. Environics Trust
34. Equitable Cambodia
35. Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières (ESSF)
36. Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND)
37. FIAN International
38. FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights
39. Finnish Asiatic Society
40. Focus on the Global South
41. Fresh Eyes -- People to People Travel CIC
42. Function 8
43. Fundacion Solón
44. Global Justice Now
45. Human Rights Commission Pakistan (HRCP)
46. Human Rights in China (HRIC)
47. Human Rights Watch
48. Indian Social Action Forum - INSAF
49. International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED)

50. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
51. International Peace Bureau
52. International Rivers
53. Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw)
54. Jagaran Nepal
55. KATARUNGAN (Kilusan para sa Repormang Agraryo at Katarungang Panlipunan)
56. Kesatuan Nelayan Traditional (KNT)
57. Keshav Gore Smarak Trust
58. KRuHA - People's Coalition for The Right To Water
59. Labour Education Foundation
60. Land Watch Thai
61. League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI)
62. Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center--Kasama sa Kalikasan/Friends of the Earth
63. LILAK (Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights)
64. Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture (MADPET)
65. Maldivian Democracy Network
66. Manushya Foundation
67. MARUAH
68. Migrant Forum in Asia
69. National Hawker Federation
70. Network for Transformative Social Protection
71. New Trade Union Initiative
72. NGO Forum on ADB
73. Nomadic Livestock Keepers' Development Public Fund (NLKDF)
74. Nouveaux Cahiers du Socialism
75. Odhikar
76. Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union
77. Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee
78. Participatory Research Action Network- PRAN
79. Peace Union of Finland
80. People's Health Movement
81. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy(PSPD)
82. People's Watch
83. Progressive Labour Federation
84. Progressive Voice
85. Project SEVANA South-East Asia
86. Project X
87. Resonant Strategic
88. Rural Poor Institute for Land and Human Rights Services, Inc. (RIGHTS, Inc.)
89. Solidarité des Jeunes Lao
90. South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)
91. Stiftung Asienhauses
92. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
93. Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL)
94. Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR)
95. Tameer Nau Women Workers Association
96. Thilak Kariyawasam, Sri Lanka Nature Group
97. Think Centre
98. Timor-Leste Institute for Development Monitoring and Analysis
99. Transnational Institute
100. Ulu Foundation

101. Union Syndicale Solidaires
102. Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR)
103. Woman Health Philippines
104. Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau (WLB)
105. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
106. World Rainforest Movement
107. York Psychotherapy Centre

Individuals

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3. Andrew Nette, Australia
4. Anne-Sophie Gindroz, Switzerland.
5. Anuradha Chenoy, India
6. Chansophearet, Cambodia
7. Charlie Thame, Thailand
8. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Thailand
9. Christophe Aguiton, France
10. Colin Archer
11. Corazon Valdez Fabros, Philippines
12. Cristina Machado, Portugal
13. David Bruer, ICanada
14. Edeliza P. Hernandez, Philippines.
15. Elenita Daño, Philippines
16. Glenn Hunt, Australia
17. Jenina Joy Chavez, Philippines.
18. Kamal Chenoy, India
19. Kirsten Han, Singapore
20. Maria Elena Grace D. Katigbak, Philippines
21. Mary Ann Manahan, Philippines
22. Mika Levesque
23. Miriam Lang, Ecuador
24. Mu Sochua, Cambodia
25. Murray Hiebert, U.S.
26. Nicolaas Bakker, Portugal
27. Paul-Emile Dupret, Belgium
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29. Raffy Simbol, Philippines
30. Rajeev Patel, USA.
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32. Rosanna Barbero, Australia
33. Saturnino M. Borrás Jr., The Netherlands
34. Soren Sondergaard, Denmark
35. Tony Salvador, Philippines
36. Walden Bello, USA
37. William H. Dangers, USA