

Ref: ASA 26/002/2014

Sombath Somphone
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12 December 2014

OPEN LETTER FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORS

Dear Sombath

Two years after you disappeared on the evening of 15 December 2012, we, directors from across the global Amnesty International movement, write to express our deepest hopes for your safe return.

We have all seen the CCTV footage of your disappearance outside a police post on Thadeua Road in Vientiane. This evidence strongly indicates involvement of agents of the Lao state, whether through direct perpetration, or through support or complicity.

Yet for two years, the Lao government has denied arresting you and denies any responsibility for your disappearance. They have failed to conduct a prompt, thorough, competent and impartial investigation. They have refused other countries' offers of external assistance, including analysis of the original CCTV footage.

We are deeply disappointed that the Lao authorities have not lived up to their human rights obligations. Laos signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPED) in September 2008. It has not yet ratified the Convention, but it is expected to act according to the letter and spirit of its provisions. Laos is also a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which provides that governments must provide an 'effective remedy' for violations of rights guaranteed by the Covenant, including the rights to liberty and security of person.

Sombath, you have dedicated your life to sustainable development and poverty reduction in Laos, and have earned much respect and made many friends along the way. This was acknowledged internationally in 2005, when you received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership – known as Asia's Nobel Peace Prize – for your work.

Your enforced disappearance has sent a chilling message to others in Laos who want to debate and share ideas around human rights and development and has shocked civil society across Southeast Asia.

The Lao authorities' handling of your case and their sincerity and success in ensuring your safe return is the test by which their commitment to upholding human rights will be judged – and so far they are failing that test.

Sombath, there have been numerous voices of concern and offers of assistance to find you from around the world, and these will not stop. Our attention, and that of the wider international community, will not go away until you are safely returned to your family, the perpetrators of your enforced disappearance are held accountable and steps are taken to protect and respect human rights and human rights defenders in Laos.

**AMNESTY
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We will be sending copies of this letter to the Lao government and would like you to know that we will continue to urge them to:

- Ensure your immediate and unconditional release, and your safe return to your family;
- Initiate without delay an impartial and thorough investigation into your disappearance, which includes the acceptance and cooperation with offers of technical assistance from other states;
- Frequently provide detailed information about the progress of the investigations to your family, lawyers and others with a legitimate interest.

You are in our thoughts and you have our support. Amnesty International's global movement will not stop calling for your return. We will not stop asking 'Where is Sombath?'

Yours in solidarity,

Claire Mallinson
Director, Amnesty International Australia

Roger Minoungou
Director, Amnesty International Burkina Faso

Alex Neve and Bob Goodfellow
Secretary General and Executive Director, Amnesty International Canada

Ana Piquer Romo
Director, Amnesty International Chile

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