

15 December 2017

Laos: Five years on, 122 organizations worldwide demand to know: “Where is Sombath?”

On the fifth anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Lao civil society leader Sombath Somphone, we, the undersigned organizations, express outrage at the Lao government’s failure to independently, impartially, effectively, and transparently investigate Sombath’s disappearance, reveal his whereabouts, and return him to his family.

The Lao government’s continued silence and obfuscation of the facts around Sombath’s enforced disappearance have subjected his family to five years of fear and uncertainty over his fate and whereabouts, which remain unknown to this day.

Sombath was last seen at a police checkpoint on a busy street of the Lao capital, Vientiane, on the evening of 15 December 2012. His abduction was captured on a CCTV camera near the police checkpoint. The footage strongly suggests that police stopped Sombath’s vehicle and, within minutes, unknown individuals forced him into another vehicle and drove him away in the presence of police officers. CCTV footage also appears to show an unknown individual driving Sombath’s vehicle away from the city center before returning sometime later.

The fact that police officers appeared to have witnessed Sombath’s abduction and failed to intervene strongly indicates state agents’ involvement in, or acquiescence to, Sombath’s disappearance. Despite this evidence, the Lao authorities have not presented any new findings with regard to their investigation of the case. Despite claiming in various international fora that the investigation is “ongoing”, the government has not issued an official report on the investigation’s progress since 8 June 2013.

Sombath’s case is not the only case of an unsolved enforced disappearance in Laos. Lao authorities have failed to provide information on the fate or whereabouts of many other individuals, including community activists, who have been victims of enforced disappearance.

The Lao government’s failure to undertake adequate investigations into all cases of enforced disappearances violates its obligations under international human rights law, including Article 2(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Laos is a state party.

We urgently call on governments worldwide to demand that the Lao government immediately provide information on Sombath’s fate or current whereabouts, and other details surrounding Sombath’s enforced disappearance, as well as all other cases of enforced disappearance, in order to determine the victims’ fate or whereabouts. Lao authorities should commit to making the findings available to family members of the disappeared, and provide regular public updates on their progress on all cases of enforced disappearance. The Lao government should also ensure that those responsible for enforced disappearance, regardless of title or rank, are held accountable in trials that comply with international fair trial standards.

Lastly, we strongly urge the Lao government to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, incorporate its provisions into the country's domestic legislation, and implement it in practice.

1. Accion Ecologica
2. Al Haq
3. Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS)
4. Amnesty International
5. Armanshahr/OPEN ASIA
6. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
7. Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)
8. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
9. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)
10. Association for Law, Human Rights and Justice (HAK)
11. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP)
12. Awaz Foundation Pakistan - Centre for Development Services
13. Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)
14. Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) - Friends of the Earth Bangladesh
15. Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM)
16. Bank Information Center
17. Bytes for All
18. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
19. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
20. Center for Environmental Justice (CEJ) - Friends of the Earth Sri Lanka
21. Centre for Environmental Justice
22. Centre for Financial Accountability
23. Centre for Human Rights and Development
24. Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD)
25. China Labour Bulletin (CLB)
26. Christian Development Alternative (CDA)
27. Citizens Against Enforced Disappearances (CAGED)
28. Coalition of the Flemish North-South Movement 11.11.11
29. Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS)
30. Community Resource Centre Foundation (CRC)
31. Covenants Watch
32. Cross Cultural Foundation (CrCF)
33. DIGNIDAD (A Life of Dignity for All)
34. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
35. Empowering Singaporeans
36. ENGAGE
37. Fastenopfer Switzerland
38. FIAN International
39. FIDH – International Federation for Human Rights
40. Finnish Asiatic Society
41. Finnish League for Human Rights
42. Focus on the Global South
43. Friends of the Earth Asia Pacific
44. Friends of the Earth Australia
45. Friends of the Earth International
46. Friends of the Earth Japan
47. Fundacion Solon

48. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
49. Globe International
50. GZO Peace Institute
51. Haburas Foundation- Friends of the Earth East Timor
52. Human Rights Alert
53. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)
54. Human Rights Defenders Forum
55. Human Rights Defenders' Alert
56. Human Rights Watch
57. Indian Social Action Forum
58. Indigenous Perspectives
59. Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association(PBHI)
60. Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI)
61. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre
62. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC)
63. Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID)
64. International Accountability Project
65. International Commission of Jurists
66. Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw)
67. Italian League of Human Rights - LIDU
68. Jan Mitra Nyas
69. Judicial System Monitoring Program (JSMP)
70. Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS)
71. Lao Movement for Human Rights
72. Latvian Human Rights Committee
73. League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI)
74. Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center (LRC) - Friends of the Earth
Philippines
75. Liga lidských Práv (LLP)
76. Ligue des droits de l'Homme (LDH)
77. Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)
78. Mangrove Action Project
79. MARUAH
80. Mekong Monitor Tasmania
81. Mekong Watch
82. Moroccan Association for Human Rights (Association Marocaine des Droits
Humains/AMDH)
83. National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP)
84. ND-Burma
85. NGO Forum on ADB
86. Odhikar
87. Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON) - Friends of the Earth
Palestine
88. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD)
89. People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR)
90. People's Watch
91. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)
92. PILIPINA Legal Resource Center (PLRC)
93. Polish Society of Antidiscrimination Law (PSAL)
94. Programme Against Custodial Torture & Impunity (PACTI)
95. Progressive Voice
96. Pusat Komunikasi Masyarakat (Pusat KOMAS)
97. Re:Common

98. Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)
99. #ReturnOurCPF
100. Russian Social-Ecological Union (RSEU) - Friends of the Earth Russia
101. Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) - Friends of the Earth Malaysia
102. Savitri Bai Phule Women Forum
103. School for Wellbeing Studies and Research
104. Sister's Arab Forum (SAF)
105. Solidarité des Jeunes Lao
106. Sombath Initiative
107. Southeast Asia Development Program (SADP)
108. South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (SICHREM)
109. Suan Nguen Mee Ma
110. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
111. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
112. Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR)
113. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)
114. The Corner House
115. Think Centre
116. Transnational Institute
117. Ulu Foundation
118. Vietnam Committee on Human Rights
119. Vietnamese Women for Human Rights
120. WomanHealth Philippines
121. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
122. World Rainforest Movement