



14 January 2015

We, the undersigned, request you to resolutely address the disappearance of Sombath Somphone at the upcoming Universal Periodic Review for the Lao PDR on January 20, 2015.

Enforced disappearance is a horrible crime, one of a few internationally recognized as unjustifiable under any circumstances.¹

It is a crime not only against the victim. It is equally a crime against the victim's family, who are left with no rationale, resolution or means of recourse, and are vulnerable to intimidation and reprisals. For similar reasons, it is also a crime against wider society and, if part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population, a crime against humanity.

Sombath Somphone is widely known for a lifetime of innovative work and remarkable achievements in sustainable agriculture, community and alternative development, public participation, and youth education. He has received accolades from many sources, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership in 2005.

It is because of this recognition and respect that his disappearance has brought such a significant and sustained outpouring of concern from across the globe.²

Spanning more than three decades, much of Sombath's work sought to open doors for exchange and cooperation among government authorities, civil society, and citizens both young and old.

This prominence as a respected leader of Lao civil society is why his abduction has had such a shocking effect in his own country. Today fear reigns among Lao citizens. Many do not even dare to mention Sombath's name for fear of reprisals that they too could become the next victim.

His disappearance also parallels a decisive reversal in opportunities and space for democratic dialogue, as well as a broader deterioration of the human rights situation throughout the country, notably among those most directly bearing the negative effects of economic development policies, land concessions and infrastructure projects.

Given this, it is of no doubt there are many serious issues to be raised during this Universal Periodic Review. Extensive documentation is available through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.³

In reviewing these reports, note that Sombath Somphone is a central issue in the majority of the stakeholders' submissions, and nearly all of those from civil society organisations not subject to Lao government control.

¹ The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance states: "*No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification for enforced disappearance.*"

² See <http://sombath.org/global-concern/> for more information on the scores of appeals and events to date.

³ For the National, UN and Stakeholders' Reports, as well as individual submissions, please see: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/LASession21.aspx>

Also note that, despite repeated claims it is more concerned than anybody else, the Lao government report makes no mention of his name. Nor does it cite any role for civil society, except in reference to the UPR process itself.

It has been over two years since Sombath Somphone was taken from a police post on a busy street in the capital city. While there has been no indication of any official investigation for over 18 months, numerous independent assessments, including a recent report by the International Commission of Jurists, conclude that the case remains “*eminently solvable*.”⁴

Further, UN experts have again made clear it is the Lao government’s responsibility under international law to carry out “*an independent, thorough, credible and effective investigation*.”⁵

It is simply unacceptable that a nation so seeking of and dependent on international aid has summarily refused any assistance for just such an investigation.

In sum, the disappearance of Sombath Somphone is not an isolated case in an otherwise acceptable human rights landscape, but perhaps the most visible manifestation of a broader and deeper malaise.

We ask what potential and resolve exists to address the many other human rights issues given that Lao authorities so steadfastly ignore this one?

It is for these reasons that we implore you to give the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone its rightful place among the most central issues at the upcoming Universal Periodic Review.

Respectfully,

1. The Sombath Initiative (Advisory Board)

- Walden Bello, Member of Philippine House of Representatives, Akbayan Party
- Paul-Emile Dupret, Political Advisor, European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)
- Murray Hiebert, Chair of Southeast Asia Studies, Center for Strategic & International Studies
- Angkhana Neelaphajit, Founder, Justice for Peace Foundation
- Lee Rhiannon, Senator, New South Wales, Australian Green Party
- Charles Santiago, Member of Parliament, Democratic Action Party, Malaysia
- Ng Shui Meng, spouse of Sombath Somphone

* *Members of the Advisory Board serve in a personal capacity. Professional affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.*

2. Action for Environment and Communities (AEC), Cambodia
3. Action Paysanne Contre la faim (APCF), Congo
4. ActionAid International, United Kingdom
5. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Lao PDR
6. Advocacy Forum, Nepal
7. African Resources Watch (AFREWATCH), Congo
8. Alliance Sud, Switzerland
9. Altsean-Burma, Thailand

⁴ See the ICJ report: “Missed Opportunities: Recommendations for Investigating the Disappearance of Sombath Somphone” at: <http://icj.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Lao-Somphone-disappearance-Publications-report-2014-ENG.pdf>

⁵ See: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49679#.VJocLp0FyQ>

10. Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), Philippines
11. American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), United States
12. Amnesty International, United Kingdom
13. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
14. Asia Indigenous People's Pact (AIPP)
15. Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
16. Asia Europe People's Forum (AEPF)
17. Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), Philippines
18. Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN), Thailand
19. Asian Resource Foundation (ARF), Thailand
20. Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos, Ejecuciones Extrajudiciales y Torturados Huancayo-Junín (AFDDEET), Peru
21. Asosiasaun HAK, Timor Leste
22. Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), India
23. Association for the Recuperation of the Historical Memory in Catalunya (ARMHC), Spain
24. Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha, India
25. BioThai, Thailand
26. Burma Partnership
27. Burnet Institute, Lao PDR
28. CCFD-Terre Solidaire, France
29. Center for Environmental Law, United States
30. Center for International Environmental Law, United States
31. Chiadzwa Community Development Trust, Zimbabwe
32. Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR), Republic of Korea
33. Civil Rights Defenders
34. Conflict Victims' Society of Justice (CVSJ), Nepal
35. Conseil Régional des Organisations Non gouvernementales de Développement (CRONGD), Congo
36. Consorzio Città dell'AltraEconomia, Italy
37. Corner House, United Kingdom
38. Dawei Development Association (DDA), Myanmar
39. Defense of Human Rights Pakistan
40. Dharmajala, Indonesia
41. Disarmament and Nonviolence, Georgia
42. Earth Rights International, United States
43. Ecologistas en Acción, Spain
44. Environment Support Group, India
45. Equality Myanmar, Myanmar
46. Equitable Cambodia, Cambodia
47. Euro-Mediterranean Federation Against Enforced Disappearances (FEMED), France
48. Families of the Disappeared, Morocco
49. Families of the Disappeared (FOD), Sri Lanka
50. Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND), Philippines
51. FIAN International
52. Finnish Asia-Europe People's Forum Network, Finland
53. Finnish Asiatic Society, Finland
54. Finnish Philippine Society, Finland
55. Focus on the Global South, Thailand
56. Food First, United States
57. FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), Philippines
58. Forest People's Programme (FPP), United Kingdom

59. Forum for Democracy in Burma
60. Free Jonas Burgos Movement, Philippines
61. Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), Philippines
62. Freedom House, United States
63. Friends of the Earth International
64. Friends of the Earth, United States
65. Gender and Development Initiative, Myanmar
66. Genève pour les Droits de l'Homme-Formation Internationale, Switzerland
67. Global Witness, United Kingdom
68. Green Advocates International, Liberia
69. Health Poverty Action
70. Helvetas, Switzerland
71. Housing and Land Rights Network, Habitat International Coalition (HLRN), Egypt
72. Hukum, Alam dan Keadilan (HAK), Indonesia
73. Human Rights Council-Ethiopia, Ethiopia
74. Human Rights Watch (HRW), United States
75. Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Indonesia
76. Inclusive Development International, USA
77. Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), India
78. Indigenous Community Support Organization (ICSO), Cambodia
79. Indigenous People's Links (PIPLinks), United Kingdom
80. Indonesian Association of Families of the Disappeared (IKOHI), Indonesia
81. International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), Philippines
82. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
83. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), France
84. International Rivers, United States
85. Institute for Policy Studies, Climate Policy Program (IPS), United States
86. Jamaa Resource Initiatives, Kenya
87. Justice for Peace Foundation, Thailand
88. Kachin Peace Network, Myanmar
89. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN)
90. Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), Myanmar
91. KEPA, Finland
92. KontraS, Indonesia
93. Land Core Group (LCG), Myanmar
94. Lands in Our Hands, Myanmar
95. Lao Movement for Human Rights (LMHR), France
96. Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora, Argentina
97. Mekong Watch, Japan
98. Mennonite Central Committee SE Asia, Thailand
99. Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar
100. Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), Philippines
101. Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Nigeria
102. Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA), Myanmar
103. National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), India
104. National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), Sri Lanka
105. Network for Democracy and Development
106. Network for Social Justice and Human Rights, Brazil
107. New Myanmar Foundation, Myanmar
108. NGO Forum on ADB International Secretariat, Philippines

109. Odhikar, Bangladesh
110. Otros Mundos AC, Mexico
111. OT Watch, Mongolia
112. Oxfam, Lao PDR
113. Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), Pakistan
114. Paung Ku, Myanmar
115. People's Action for Change (PAC), Cambodia
116. People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand
117. Polaris Institute, Canada
118. Proyecto de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales (ProDESC), Mexico
119. Qatary Panituri, Peru
120. Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, Philippines
121. Re:Common, Italy
122. Relatives Committee of the May 1992 Heroes, Thailand
123. Réseau Camerounais des Organisations des Droits de l'Homme (RECODH), Cameroon
124. Rivers Without Borders, Mongolia
125. Rural Development Agency (RDA), Lao PDR
126. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT), Cambodia
127. Samdhana Institute, Indonesia
128. School for Wellbeing Studies and Research, Thailand
129. Shwe Gas Movement, Thailand
130. Social Action for Change (SAC), Cambodia
131. Social Political Ecology Research Institute (SPERI), Vietnam
132. Solidarité des Jeunes Lao, France
133. Southbound Publishers, Malaysia
134. Southeast Asia Development Program (SADP), Cambodia
135. STOP the War Coalition, Philippines
136. Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA), Thailand
137. Towards Organic Asia (TOA), Thailand
138. Transnational Institute (TNI), The Netherlands
139. Truth Now, Cyprus
140. Ulu Foundation, USA
141. Universal Progress ILC, Mongolia
142. War on Want, United Kingdom
143. We Remember Foundation, United States
144. World Renew
145. World Vision, Lao PDR

* Fifteen additional organisations added endorsements after the petition was sent to various missions to the United Nations in Geneva

In addition to the above organisations, the following individuals specifically requested to be added as signatories:

1. Michael M. Cernea, NR Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution
2. Luke Ming Flanagan, Member of European Parliament, GUE/NGL, Ireland
3. Philip Hirsch, Professor, University of Sydney
4. Rina Ronja Kari, Member of European Parliament, GUE/NGL, Denmark
5. Ana Miranda, BNG, Parliamentary Assistant in the European Parliament, Spain
6. Laphai Seng Raw, 2013 Magsaysay Laureate