

Laos: Our Deep Concern over the Disappearance of Mr. Sombath Somphone

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Statement from The International Organising Committee of the Asia Europe People's Forum.

The International Organising Committee of the Asia Europe People's Forum is compelled to share as widely, vocally and publicly as possible our deep concern for the safety and wellbeing of Mr. Sombath Somphone one of the most prominent Lao co-organizers of the Asia Europe People's Forum 9 (AEPF9), the founder and former Director of PADETC and one of the most respected and influential voices for sustainable people-centred and just economic and social development in Laos.

Mr. Sombath Somphone has been missing since about 5 pm on Saturday December 15th 2012.

We urge the Lao Government to immediately and urgently initiate an investigation into Mr. Sombath's disappearance.

His wife and colleagues last saw Mr. Sombath Somphone on December 15 at 5 pm when he left the PADETC office in Vientiane to go home. He left the office in his own car; his wife was in another car. He did not reach home and his family has had no news from or about him since then. His family checked all the hospitals later the same day and on Sunday December 16, but none of the hospitals had admitted him. His car—an open-top Jeep—has also not been found. His family has filed a report with the police. His family and friends have continued searching for Mr. Sombath Somphone, with no results. Where he is now, his safety, his state of health and his wellbeing are all unknown.

As members of the International Organising Committee of the Asia Europe People's Forum we have worked intensively with Mr. Sombath Somphone over the last year as is the co-chair of the Lao National Organising Committee for AEPF9. His contribution to the successful Asia Europe People's Forum 9 in Vientiane on the 16-19 October was extremely significant, widely recognized and deeply respected. The film he has inspired, 'Happy Laos', closed the forum. In addition he is a highly respected educationalist, inspiration for sustainable development and a recipient of the prestigious international Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership in 2005. He has dedicated his life to sustainable development and poverty reduction in the Lao PDR, and has contributed positively to numerous international processes, including the AEPF9. Mr. Sombath is an inspiration to development practitioners all over the world.

We are deeply concerned for Mr. Sombath's safety and well-being and his disappearance is cause for great alarm.

We urge the Lao Government to use its extensive resources to conduct an immediate and thorough investigation into Mr. Sombath's disappearance, and to make every effort to ensure his safety and freedom.

We are urging all relevant national and international institutions, Parliamentarians from ASEM

member countries, people and organisations who have participated in and been part of the Asia Europe People's Forums since 1996 to join us in urging the Lao Government to investigate Mr. Sombath's disappearance, and to make every effort to ensure his safety and freedom.

The International Organising Committee of the Asia Europe People's Forum,

Cristine Ebro, Institute for Popular Democracy, The Philippines

Maris dela Cruz, Institute for Popular Democracy, The Philippines

Charles Santiago, Member of Parliament, Malaysia

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Riza Damanik, Asia Europe People's Forum Committee of Indonesia

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