

URGENT ACTION

Respected member of Lao civil society Sombath Somphone abducted on 15 December 2012

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LAO CITIZEN ABDUCTED, NOT SEEN OR HEARD FROM

Respected member of Lao civil society Sombath Somphone – well known for his work promoting education and sustainable development – was taken away in a truck by unknown persons after being stopped by police in the Lao capital, Vientiane on 15 December 2012. Nobody has seen or heard from him since.

Sombath Somphone, 62, left his office in his car at around 5:30pm on 15 December 2012. Police stopped him at around 6pm at a checkpoint on Thadeua Road, in Vientiane's Sisattanak district. Video footage from a traffic camera appears to show that he got out of his car to speak with police. A motorcyclist arrived and drove off with Sombath Somphone's car, leaving his motorcycle behind. A truck with flashing lights then arrived, and Sombath Somphone was taken to the truck and driven away. Family and friends have identified Sombath Somphone as the man shown in the footage.

The Lao authorities have denied arresting Sombath Somphone and being responsible for his disappearance, saying that he may have been abducted as part of a private dispute after being stopped by police for a routine document check. Although the Lao government issued a statement on 19 December 2012 which claims that the "authorities concerned" are "seriously investigating" the matter, they have yet to provide detailed information about the investigations to his family or others with a legitimate interest. Amnesty International is concerned that the investigations undertaken so far have lacked transparency and may have been inadequate.

Sombath Somphone founded the Participatory Development Training Centre in 1996 to promote education, leadership skills and sustainable development in Laos. In 2005, he received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership. He helped to organise the Asia-Europe People's Forum in Vientiane in October 2012.

Please write immediately in Lao, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Lao authorities to undertake prompt, transparent and thorough investigations into the abduction and disappearance of Sombath Somphone, in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law;

- Demanding that they give full information about the progress of the investigations to his family and others with a legitimate interest;
- Urging them to ensure that all steps are being taken to locate, rescue and return him safely to his family as soon as possible.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 MARCH 2013 TO:

Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong
Prime Minister's Office Lane Xang Avenue,
Vientiane Lao People's Democratic Republic
Fax: + 856 21 213650
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Public Security
Dr Thongbanh Sengaphone
Ministry of Public Security
P.O. Box 7040, Vientiane
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Fax: + 856 21 214208 (c/o President's
Office)
Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Thongloun Sisoulith
Ministry of Foreign Affairs 23 Singha Road,
Vientiane Lao People's Democratic Republic
Fax: + 856 21 414009
Email: cabinet mofa.gov.la

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.
