

Letter to Sombath on his birthday, 17 February 2024

Friday 1 March 2024, by [Ng Shui Meng](#) (Date first published: 17 March 2024).

My dearest Sombath,

Today is 17 February, and once again it's your birthday. You would be 72 years old today. In the past you never wanted to celebrate your birthday, but I would remember, and each year I would cook something special that you liked and we would have a nice quiet dinner with members of the family. Now, I can only silently send you blessings for your birthday and wish you good health, happiness, and peace wherever you may.

Even though you have been missing for more than 11 years now, never a day passes that I do not think of you and still hope you will come back to me and the family.

Today I want to tell you the action I have taken to make sure that your memory and legacy can continue to live on even after I am gone, and will no longer be there to remind people of your enforced disappearance in 2012.

I have established a Memorial Fund in your name - the "Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund". This Fund was officially launched in May 2023. It will be managed by the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF), a Thai non-profit foundation, under which SEM (Spirit in Education Movement) and INEB (International Network for Engaged Buddhists) operate. Both SEM and INEB are founded by Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, your mentor and Thailand's most respected social justice activist and leading thinker of Engaged Buddhism.



Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund:

<https://inebnetwork.org/engagement/sombath-somphone-education-fund>.

The Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund's goal is to continue your vision and mission to give opportunities to children and young people, especially those who lack opportunities and who want to improve themselves to work for the greater benefit of society in a holistic, sustainable, and balanced

way with nature and the environment. The ultimate goal of the Fund is to develop the greater wellbeing (happiness) of the self and society as a whole.

The Sombath Memorial Fund will provide small grants of up to US\$3,000.00 each to support:

- Education – To provide full or partial scholarships, especially to marginalized children and young people seeking to complete their education in schools or colleges.
- Community projects – To provide small grants to active young adults (up to 35 years of age) to initiate start-up work or activities for youth in community education or development.
- To support organizations providing education or humanitarian relief to at risk children and families.

The Fund will target recipients, especially marginalized children, actively and socially engaged young adults, and at risk children and families in need of emergency support and humanitarian assistance from countries in the Mekong Sub-Region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam) and the southwest region China. These groups and countries are those you have paid most attention to and have worked with in the past.

Financial support for the Fund has come mostly from family and friends and NGOs which support your work and your development vision. Interest in the Fund has grown rapidly with many friends and supporters, and from people who have not met you but have heard about your work and your enforced disappearance. They have generously made donations to the Fund.

In 2023, the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund received 61 applications from which 11 applicants from Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam were selected by the Fund Committee to receive awards to support their projects. All the awardees have completed their projects, and last week they have presented results of their projects to the Fund's Committee.

Sombath, if you have heard their presentations, you would have been so proud of what these young people have done and achieved with the small grants provided to support their work. Many worked under very difficult and challenging situations, especially the awardees from Myanmar and Vietnam, but all demonstrated real commitment and real passion for their work. Most of the awardees have worked in teams and used very creative and innovative approaches to gain support and participation from the communities to reach the objectives they set out to achieve. Their work truly reflect some the principles and values you promoted in your own community-based development work.

Last week, the Fund Committee called for applications for the Sombath Somphone Memorial for 2024. We hope this year the Fund will once more be able to support some worthwhile projects spearheaded by young people who want to make a real change to the communities and societies, just as you have done through your own life and work.

So my dearest Sombath, your legacy lives on even though you have been so unjustly taken away from me and our family and community. Those who committed this ignoble crime against you might have been able silence you, but they could never wipe out your legacy which will live on through the work of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund.

My dearest Sombath, I hope this will give you some solace on this your birthday and be comforted by the fact that you are still held up as a model for many young people in the region and beyond.

For myself, my birthday wish to you is that wherever you are, you will be blessed with another year of good health, happiness and peace.

Love you always,

Shui Meng

For those interested in making a donation to the Sombath Memorial Fund, please send donations to:

Bank name: **Siam Commercial Bank Plc.**

Branch: **Charoen Nakorn**

Bank address: 674 Charoen Nakorn Road, Banglumpulang, Klong San, Bangkok 10600 Siam (Thailand)

Account type: **Savings**

Account number: **024-2-62146-8**

Account name: **INEB (by Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation)**

SWIFT code: SICOTHBK

Purpose: For the Sombath Memorial Fund

P.S.

• Focus on the Global South. Feb 19, 2024:

<https://focusweb.org/letter-to-sombath-on-his-birthday-17-february-2024/>