

04 January 2013

H.E. Pehin Dato Dr. Awang Hj. Ahmad bin Hj. Jumat

Chairperson

ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)

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Your Excellency,

Request for AICHR to ensure the safety and wellbeing of disappeared development worker, Mr. Sombath Somphone

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), a regional human rights organization representing 47 non-governmental organizations across 16 countries in Asia, writes to you to express gravest concern on the disappearance of a prominent education and development worker in Laos, Mr. Sombath Somphone. He has been missing since 15 December 2012 and to this date, there has been little information regarding his safety or whereabouts. His wife, Ng Shui-Meng, last saw him at about 6.00pm that same day as they drove home separately from the office.

Sombath is the founder and retired director of the Participatory Development Training Centre (PADETC) in Laos, which promotes sustainable development. He is a highly respected educator who as a result of his work, received the **Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership**, one of Asia's top civil awards, in 2005. He was also an instrumental figure as a co-organizer of the highly-successful Asia-Europe People's Forum 9 (AEPF 9), held prior to the 9th Asia-Europe Summit Meeting (ASEM) in Vientiane, Laos last October 2012.

Available CCTV footage shows Sombath's vehicle was stopped on KM3 Thadeua Road in the vicinity of Watnak village, Sisattanak District, Vientiane on 15 December 2012. He was then seen entering the police post. Following which, his vehicle was taken away by an unidentified man who arrived on a motorcycle. The motorcycle remained parked there while the man drove Sombath's vehicle away. A white pick-up truck then arrived later flashing hazard lights at the police post. The footage showed that Sombath was escorted by two men who had arrived in the white truck and led him into the truck. He has since not been seen and we are deeply worried about his safety, physical and mental health and overall well-being.

There are many questions surrounding the troubling circumstances of his disappearance. For example, it is not known why Sombath was allowed to leave with the unidentified men in the

white truck or why the police did not take any action regarding the alleged “kidnap” as highlighted in the government’s official statement on 19 December 2012¹.

In view of the urgency for the protection of the physical and mental wellbeing of Mr. Sombath Somphone, we urgently request the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), as the overarching body responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights in ASEAN, to communicate with the Lao authorities immediately to expedite the investigation of the case, to find out the whereabouts of Mr. Sombath Somphone and to ensure the safe return of Sombath to his wife and family.

FORUM-ASIA is committed to assist and cooperate with the AICHR in this case. If you require more information on the case, please kindly contact Joses Kuan at tel: +66 83544 5166 or email: joses@forum-asia.org.

We thank you for your kind attention and hope to receive a positive response from you.

Yours truly,

Sayeed Ahmad
Country Program Manager

CC:

1. H.E. Le Loung Minh, Secretary-General of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
2. H.E. Om Yentieng, Representative of Cambodia to AICHR
3. H.E. Mr. Rafendi Djamin, Representative of Indonesia to AICHR
4. H.E. Mr. Bounkeut Sangsomsak, Representative of Laos to AICHR
5. H.E. Dato’ Sri Dr. Muhammad Shafee Abdullah, Representative of Malaysia to AICHR
6. H.E. Amb. Kyaw Tint Swe, Representative of Myanmar to AICHR
7. H.E. Amb. Rosario Gonzales Manalo, Representative of the Philippines to AICHR
8. H.E. Amb. Chan Heng Chee, Representative of Singapore to AICHR
9. H.E. Mr. Seree Nonthasoot, Representative of Thailand to AICHR
10. H.E. Amb. Nguyen Duy Hung, Representative of Vietnam to AICHR
11. Ms. Leena Ghosh, Assistant Director, AIPA, ASEAN Foundation, AICHR and Other ASEAN Associated Entities Division, ASEAN Secretariat

¹ <http://kpl.net.la/english/news/edn7.htm>