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Minister of Foreign Affairs (Fax: 856 21 414009)
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Vientiane, Lao Peoples Democratic Republic

Cc: Embassies/consulates of Australia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, and the Delegation of the European Union; ASEAN Secretary General

21 December 2012

Dear Madams and Sirs,

Re: Request for urgent investigation into the disappearance of Mr. Sombath Somphone

We the undersigned civil society organizations in Asia and Europe are disturbed by the disappearance of Mr. Sombath Somphone, who was the co-chair of the Lao National Organizing Committee of the Ninth Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF9) that was successfully held in Vientiane last October.

We are requesting for an immediate and thorough investigation into his disappearance. We urge the Lao Government to use its extensive resources to cause his return to his family and friends healthy and unharmed.

Mr. Sombath, winner of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership in 2005, has been missing since 15 December 2012. His wife and colleagues last saw him at about 5 p.m. that Saturday as he drove off in his vehicle (an open-top Jeep) from his office. He failed to show up at home later that day, prompting his family to look for him in all hospitals in the area. Not finding him in any hospital, his friends joined his family in searching for him and reporting his disappearance to the police the following day, 16 December. To date, he and his Jeep have not been seen.

We share his family and friends' concern and worry for his health, safety, and wellbeing. Like them, we are greatly alarmed by his disappearance.

A highly committed and well-respected social development worker and scholar, Mr. Sombath is a true inspiration to the Lao people and to us, kindred spirit in promoting sustainable development and other peaceful solutions to poverty. Founder and former director of Participatory Development Training Centre (PADETC), Mr. Sombath has dedicated his life to better the welfare of his fellow women, men, and children.

We share the hope of many other national and international civil society organisations that Mr. Sombath "remains safe and will soon re-appear to resume his important work – for this will encourage not only those who share a similar mission, but also those who share his vision of making this world a better place for us all."

Deeply concerned,

From Asia

AEPF Finland

Alliance of Progressive Labor, Philippines

Altsean Burma

Amnuay Sungchuay, Thailand Land Reform Network

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (*FORUM-ASIA*)

Auranuch Phonpinyo, Land and Forest Network in Northeastern of Thailand

Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association- ADHOC

Civil Society Alliance for Political Laws Amendment (Aliansi Masyarakat Sipil untuk Revisi Undang-undang Politik), Indonesia

Dr. Nymia Pimentel Simbulan, Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights)

Equitable Cambodia

Focus on the Global South, Thailand

Global Network ASIA

Himalaya Niti Abhiyan, Himachal Pradesh, India

Inclusive Development International, Cambodia

India FDI Watch

Indian Social Action Forum, India

Indonesia for Global Justice, Indonesia

Indonesian Peasant Union (SPI)

Institute for Popular Democracy, Philippines

Junya Yimprasert & Richard Thompson Coon, Action for People's Democracy in Thailand

Kanchana Ya-ud, Ecological Alert And Recovery - Thailand (EARTH)

Kanya Pankitti, Thailand Land Reform Network

Keadtisak Yungyuen, Sustainable Agriculture Foundation (Thailand)

Kerala Fishworkers Forum (KSMTF), Trivandrum, India

Kusuma Khumpin, Land and Forest Network in Northeastern of Thailand

KIARA, Indonesia

Labor Education Foundation, Pakistan

LEARN, Philippines

Life of Dignity for All Campaign – Philippines

Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement, Philippine

Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation, Malaysia

National Hawkers Federation, Kolkata

Network for Transformative Social Protection in Asia (NTSP)

People's Action for Change, Cambodia

Pornpana Kuaycharoen, Thai Working group for Climate Justice (Thai - CJ)

Prayong Doklumyai, Northern Farmer Federation of Thailand

Prof. David Arase, The Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies, Nanjing University

Prue Odochao, Northern Farmer Federation of Thailand

School for Wellbeing Studies and Research, Bangkok/Thimphu, Thailand/Bhutan

Stop the War Coalition, Philippines

Suan Nguen Mee Ma social enterprise, Bangkok, Thailand

Sumech Panjumlong, Sustainable Agriculture Network in Northeastern of Thailand
Supa Yaimuang, Sustainable Agriculture Foundation (Thailand)
The Indonesian Institute, Center for Public Policy Research (TII), Indonesia
Towards Organic Asia (TOA) programme, Bangkok, Thailand
Women's Voice Empowerment Movement (Gerakan Pemberdayaan Swara Perempuan/GPSP),
Indonesia
Yu Xiaogang, Green Watershed, China

From Europe

CCFD-Terre Solidaire (Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement), France
Cris Brigoli, Geneva
Ecologistas en Accion, Spain
FIAN Netherlands
Francine Mestrum, Global Social Justice
Pierre Rousset, Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), France
Siemenpuu Foundation, Finland
Solidar
SYRIZA, Greece
Transnational Institute, The Netherlands
Watch Indonesia! - For Human Rights, Democracy and Environment in Indonesia and East Timor
(Germany, Berlin)