



Open Letter to the Lao Government

15 December 2022 marks the 10th anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone, a senior development worker, Ramon Magsaysay awardee, friend and colleague to many individuals and organizations in Thailand and across the region. The disappearance of Sombath is a tragic incident that we cannot forget, especially with the clear public testimony from a CCTV camera that shows the outrageous operation which occurred right in the center of Vientiane.

The Lao PDR government has always denied involvement with Sombath's enforced disappearance and keeps promises to investigate the case. However, after a decade, still no progress has been made. The Lao PDR government has yet to provide an answer to Sombath's family as to what happened and why Sombath was taken away. Official appeals have been submitted by the United Nations, governments of various countries, human rights organizations, and many media networks in the region and internationally for the Lao government to transparently investigate Sombath's enforced disappearance.

Once again, we are here in front of the embassy of Lao PDR in Thailand to condemn Sombath's enforced disappearance. We reaffirm our demand to the Lao government for justice for Sombath Somphone and his rights which have been severely violated. We also demand justice for Sombath's family who are victims of this enforced disappearance. What happened to Sombath is a significant loss and continuous crime against sustainable and equitable development in Laos. Throughout the past decade, grief, suspicion, and fear have spread widely all over the country. Enforced disappearance is one of the most severe ongoing crimes against humanity. The Lao government must stop being silent, ignoring, covering up, and denying their responsibility. The government must also seriously accept and follow their duty ratified by the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

On this occasion, the tenth anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone, we call on the Lao government to reveal the truth and bring justice to Sombath and his family. The Lao PDR government must be held accountable for its stated commitment to bringing the perpetrators to justice. Enforced disappearances must cease in Lao PDR. We submit these demands in solidarity with the global protest movement against state sponsored abduction and abuse of the civil liberty.

We, the Thai and regional civil society organizations reaffirm our commitment to continue monitoring the progress of Sombath's enforced disappearance until we receive the answer.

15 December 2022

Sombath Somphone and Beyond Project (SSBP)

The Thai and Regional Civil Society Network