

*Statement on the Disappearance of Sombath Somphone by Phongsavath Boupha, Chairman for the Lao National Steering Committee on Human Rights, at the Universal Periodic Review for the Lao PDR on 20 January 2015**

The missing of Sombath Somphone is shocking news for the Lao government, as it happened after the Lao PDR successfully hosted the ninth ASEM summit in Vientiane. We have been wondering why he went missing exactly, during this time. I would like to confirm that the Lao government has never had any hidden negative attitude toward him, who live his private life and perform his work in his personal interest, and in the development of the Lao PDR over the past 30 years.

The Lao government has always emphasised that innocent people will never be punished, and only those who violate the law will be punished. His missing is concerned by the Lao government like the missing of any Lao citizen. There have been many disappearance cases in the world due to the different reasons, including conflict with criminal groups. In some cases, the investigation could come to a result quickly, some cases needed years to solve, while other cases are still pending, despite the countries today having investigative techniques of high technologies.

Like many other Lao people, Sombath Somphone sought and received funds from abroad and used to fund projects implemented in different provinces of the country as a means of earning his living. He travelled to many parts of the Lao PDR and frequently travelled abroad. He was an ordinary citizen and has not been detrimental to the Lao PDR. The missing case is one of the many types of criminal acts that used to happen in Laos and in many countries all over the world.

The investigation committee has always been open to views or suggestions to help and the investigation committee is ready to receive suggestions from any interested parties with regard to the on-going investigation. For example, the committee did look into a recommendation recently made by the ICJ.

There are some organisations that try to discredit the Lao government and tarnish its increasing international reputation by regularly using the missing case as a pretext. Some organisations even made an accusation that the Lao government might have been involved in the missing. In this regard, these accusations can be refuted by referring to the mere fact that the incident happened in front of a police CCTV camera, and the police authorities, based on their duties under the law, cooperate sincerely with his wife and relatives, allowed them to view and record the CCTV footage.

Also those investigation steps and actions undertaken so far by the investigation committee, the close supervision of the Ministry of Public Security, the concern openly expressed and the attention paid by the Lao PDR leadership are all indicative of the sincerity and seriousness of the Lao government in solving this case. I would like to give assurance that the concerned authorities are still seriously conducting the investigation and will continue to so in order to find the truth and bring the perpetrators to justice in accordance to the law of the Lao PDR.

*Unofficial transcription