



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Plenary sitting

5.2.2013

B7-0067/2013

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 122 of the Rules of Procedure

on Laos: the case of Sombath Somphone
(2013/2535(RSP))

Charles Tannock, Valdemar Tomaševski, Adam Bielan
on behalf of the ECR Group

**European Parliament resolution on Laos: the case of Sombath Somphone
(2013/2535(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Laos,
 - having regard to the UN declaration of Human rights defenders of 1998,
 - having regard to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders approved by the Council on 14 June 2004, and updated in 2008,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by Lao People's Democratic Republic on 25 September 2009,
 - having regard to the EU Annual Report on Human Rights 2012,
 - having regard to Article 13 of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance,
 - having regard to the press briefing of 21 December 2012 by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,
 - having regard to the statement of 24 December 2012 by the spokesperson of High Representative Catherine Ashton on the disappearance of Sombath Somphone,
 - having regard to the statement of 10 January 2013 by the US Secretary of State calling on Lao authorities to pursue a transparent investigation,
 - having regard to the ASEAN Parliamentary Delegation to the Lao PDR on the disappearance of Sombath Somphone, 13 - 15 January 2013,
 - having regard to its article 122 (5) of the Rules of Procedure,
- A. Whereas on 15 December 2012, shortly after leaving his office, Sombath Somphone, internationally known community development worker and social activist, went missing in the capital Vientiane;
- B. Whereas the CCTV footage obtained by his family shows that Mr Somphone was last seen with local police at the Thadeau police post around 6 pm on the date of his disappearance and driven away in a car by men in civilian clothes;
- C. Whereas his family has been unable to locate him since that day despite repeated calls to the local authorities and searches in the adjacent area;

- D. Whereas Mr Somphone, although he is not a political figure, is a prominent member of Laotian civil society who promoted the rights for small farmers, which is a sensitive issue in Laos;
 - E. Whereas Sombath Somphone, former director of the Participatory Development Training Centre, an NGO he founded in 1996 to promote education, training and sustainable development, won in 2005 one of Asia's top civil awards for his work - the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership;
 - F. Whereas after a month of investigation, the only thing that has been established by the Laos authorities is that the police had nothing to do with his disappearance;
 - G. Whereas crucial questions linked to the case, such as who drove away with Sombath's car after his disappearance or whether the policemen who had stopped Sombath as visible in the video footage were identified, remain unsolved;
 - H. Whereas the Laos Government has so far released two statements only denying their involvement in Mr Somphone disappearance and stating the case is a private affair with personal or business conflict in the background but did not provide any explanation on why no action was taken at the scene to stop what authorities claimed to be a "kidnap";
 - I. Whereas it is feared that Sombath Somphone could have been subject to an enforced disappearance as nothing confirms the version presented by the Laotian authorities of an alleged "kidnap" on personal or business grounds as Sombath neither had any such conflicts nor any ransom has been demanded;
 - J. Whereas Sombath's disappearance could have been linked to the Asia Europe People's Forum held in Vientiane in October, during which he brought up the issue of environmental degradation and illicit land acquisition for economic development, including an invitation for a female villager to the conference to tell her story of land grabbing;
 - K. Whereas Laos is on its way to joining the World Trade Organisation and last year was recorded as the fastest growing economy in south-east Asia; albeit from a very low level
 - L. Whereas there is still concern about the general political situation in Laos, which has been ruled by a single party since 1975 and whose population continues to be deprived of basic human rights;
1. Is strongly concerned by the allegations of enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone in Vientiane on 15 December 2012, in the light of the important work he has carried out defending human rights in Laos and promoting sustainable development through developing the capacities and leadership skills of young people;

2. Calls on the Laos Government to thoroughly investigate the circumstances of Sombath's disappearance taking into account the existing information from the CCTV footage and the fact that he went missing in the vicinity of a police checkpoint;
3. Calls on the Laos authorities to fully reveal all facts known relating to Sombath's interaction with any officials, security personnel or policemen at the time preceding his disappearance;
4. Is alarmed at apparent stagnation in the status of the investigation and urges the Laotian authorities to take all necessary steps to address questions which have still remained unanswered in over a month after Sombath's disappearance;
5. Calls on the Laotian authorities to take all necessary steps to end the practice of arbitrary arrests and secret detention;
6. Reminds the Laotian authorities about its international obligations under human rights treaties it has ratified;
7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the to the HR/VP Mrs Ashton, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the governments of the ASEAN and ASEM member states, the ASEM secretariat, the UN Secretary-General and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the government and parliament of Laos.