



Plenary sitting

B8-0513/2017

12.9.2017

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 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on Laos: notably the cases of Somphone Phimmasone, Lod Thammavong and Soukane Chaithad
(2017/2831(RSP))

Barbara Lochbihler, Bodil Valero, Maria Heubuch, Heidi Hautala, Jordi Solé, Igor Šoltés, Florent Marcellesi, Ernest Urtasun, Bronis Ropè, Sven Giegold, Michel Reimon, Davor Škrlec
on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group
Ignazio Corrao, Fabio Massimo Castaldo

European Parliament resolution on Laos: notably the cases of Somphone Phimmasone, Lod Thammavong and Soukane Chaithad (2017/2831(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Laos,
 - having regard to statements by the EU delegation in Vientiane, notably the one on World Freedom of Press Day of 3 May 2017,
 - having regard to the 2016 ASEAN Summit in Vietiane and the refusal by the Laos government to host the traditional parallel civil society meeting, forcing the ASEAN People's Forum to meet in Timor-Leste instead,
 - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966,
 - having regard to the Cooperation Agreement between the EU and the Lao People's Democratic Republic of 1 December 1997,
 - having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in May 2017, three Lao workers Somphone Phimmasone, Soukan Chaithad, and Lodkham Thammavon, received prison terms between 12 and 20 years for criticizing the government on social media in relation to alleged corruption, deforestation, and human rights violations while working in Thailand; whereas the three stood also accused of having participated in a demonstration against the government outside the Lao Embassy in Thailand in December 2015;
- B. whereas the government of Laos has taken no significant steps to improve the poor human rights situation and continues to severely restrict freedom of speech, association, and peaceful assembly; whereas the lack of fair trial standards, judicial corruption and entrenched impunity for human rights violations continue unhampered;
- C. whereas all media are strictly controlled by the government and broadly and vaguely formulated provisions in the constitution and the penal code give the authorities sweeping powers to silence anyone who is critical if the government; whereas the 2015 law "on Prevention and Combatting of Cyber Crime" extends absolute power of the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party also to the social media;
- D. whereas the case of the three workers recalls the event of the five arbitrarily detained former student leaders, Khamphouvieng Sisi-at, Keochay, Bouavanh Chanhmanivong, Thongpaseuth Keukoun, and Sengaloun Phengphanh, who were sentenced to 20 years in prison for pro-democracy activities in 1999; whereas only three have allegedly been released, of whom two finally in January 2017;
- E. whereas in the cases of the leading civil society activist Sombath Somphone, who disappeared on 15 December 2012 and the entrepreneur Sompawn Khantisouk, active on conservation

issues, who disappeared in 2007, both allegedly abducted by police, no progress on their whereabouts have been made to date;

- F. whereas the EU is one of Laos' main development donors, Laos benefits from the EU's Everything But Arms scheme and trade between the EU and Laos has been growing rapidly in recent years;
- H. whereas on 12 August 2017, the governments of Laos and Cambodia reached an agreement for Lao soldiers to withdraw from disputed territory on the Cambodian border;
1. Expresses its strong concern over the government of Laos' continuous systematic denial of basic rights and freedoms as enshrined in the UN Covenants to its citizens;
 2. Condemns the arrests and sentencing to prison of Somphone Phimmason, Soukan Chaithad, and Lodkham Thammavong, and calls for their immediate release;
 3. Notes with concern that the verdicts add to a list of arrests and forced disappearances of activists and protesters who have been critical of issues ranging from land disputes to allegations of corruption and abuse of power;
 4. Reiterates its call on the Government of Laos to stop harassment, arbitrary arrests and detention of human rights defenders, independent journalists and social activists respect the rights of free expression and association, and the rights of minorities; reminds Laos about its international obligations under the human rights treaties it has ratified;
 5. Calls for transparent, thorough and impartial investigations into all pending cases of enforced disappearances, the revelation of the whereabouts and the prosecution of the perpetrators
 6. Urges to revise the media licensing rules and the Internet Decree to align them with international standards protecting freedom of expression; calls equally on the government to allow for national and international NGOs to function freely;
 7. Calls on the Lao authorities to allow specialised UN agencies and representatives of humanitarian organisations unrestricted access, so that they can visit political prisoners, and all ethnic and religious minorities in Laos;
 8. Urges the government to ratify the International Covenant on the Protection of All Persons from Forced Disappearances, which it pending since its signature in 2008;
 9. Is relieved about the peaceful solution of the border dispute between Cambodia and Laos and the creation of a commission to try to come to terms with the outstanding issues on both sides;
 10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of Laos, the Secretary-General of ASEAN, and the UN Human Rights Council.