



## American Friends Service Committee

1501 Cherry Street · Philadelphia, Pa. 19102 · (215) 241-7086 · quakeraction@afsc.org

August 25, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Sombath Somphone's Disappearance and 2016 ASEAN Summit in Laos

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to you on behalf of a collection of American organizations and individuals concerned with the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone, a prominent Asian civil society leader.

We appreciate the actions your administration has already taken to call for the safe return of Sombath Somphone, a beneficiary of U.S. education, who was abducted outside a police post in the capital of Vientiane, Laos on December 15, 2012. We also applaud your personal commitment to and understanding of the critical need for worldwide civil society growth, as you have expressed at the United Nations and throughout your international visits.

In private bilateral discussions we urge you to raise two actions to help restore Lao civil society growth and confidence, which plummeted after Sombath's disappearance.

1. Urge the new Lao Administration to publicly announce a renewed investigation into Sombath's disappearance and to call for regional and international assistance on this unresolved case.
2. Urge Lao authorities to restore and increase safe public space for independent non-profit associations and independent local media.

As you prepare your public remarks for the ASEAN Summit this September, we ask that you please raise once again the worldwide concern about increasing incidents of disappearances, violent acts and threats against civil society actors. We note increasing negative constraints on civil society sectors throughout ASEAN.

Your sustained concern could make all the difference, not only for Sombath, but in deterring future abductions of this kind and in promoting the vitality of ASEAN's civil society sectors.

Sincerely,

Shan Cretin  
Secretary General, American Friends Service Committee

Shui-Meng Ng  
Wife of Sombath Somphone

Thor Halvorssen  
President, Human Rights Foundation

Susan Hammond  
Executive Director, War Legacies Project

T. Kumar  
International Advocacy Director, Amnesty  
International USA

The Sombath Initiative

Christine Harnos  
Executive Director, Circus Remedy

Rob Wolcott  
Vice President, Chino Cienega Foundation

Arnaud Dubus  
Correspondent of Radio France  
Internationale for Thailand and Laos

Rob Wolcott  
Chino Cienega Foundation

Linda Yarr  
Director, Partnerships for International  
Strategies in Asia (PISA)

William Goodfellow  
Executive Director, Center for International  
Policy

Trude Bennett  
Associate Professor Emerita, University of  
North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Derin Henderson  
Environmental Consultant, Vientiane, Lao  
PDR

Jacquelyn Chagnon  
Consultant on Post War Legacies

Miranda Rumpf  
Sophia Quinn-Judge

Paul Quinn-Judge

William Dangers

Bruce Shoemaker

David Merchant

Lois Foehringer

Karen Vinacour

Penelope Khounta

Benedict J. Kerkvliet

Melinda Tria Kerkvliet

Lauren Nichols

Chet Tchozewski

Steve Nichols

Murray Hiebert

Sally Benson

Carrol Long

Jim Archer

Brett M. Ballard

Ian Baird

Alan R. Hurdus

Luzviminda G. Hurdus

Diane Niblack Fox

Hannah R Foehringer Merchant

Ted Engelmann

Anne-Sophie Gindroz

John S. Grove

Melody Kemp

Polly Griffith

Jon Griffith

Nancy Morton