

SAPA Working Group on ASEAN

Solidarity Message delivered by Debbie Stothard at the Protest Action in front of the Lao Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand

December 15, 2013

We, the conveners of the Solidarity for Asian Peoples? Advocacy Working Group on ASEAN, stand in solidarity with the rest of the world in expressing our strongest condemnation over the continued disappearance of our colleague, internationally known development worker, Sombath Somphone. For his family and friends and to all people who have worked with Sombath Somphone, one year is like a lifetime of pain and anguish.

We hold the government of Lao accountable for his enforced disappearance. The inconsistencies in the Lao government?s policy pronouncements over his case prove our point that it has something to do with what happened to Sombath Somphone. We challenge Lao officials to, once and for all, provide a credible action and resolution on his case. It must prosecute individuals and institutions responsible for his enforced disappearance. Failure to do so will continue to tarnish its already damaged reputation overseas. We will not be surprised if Lao will be considered as ASEAN?s new pariah state.

Exactly five years since the coming into force by the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN, the organization, should show its commitment to uphold Article 7 of the Charter which states that one of its purposes is to ?promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms,? and pressure the Lao authorities and call for the immediate release of Sombath Somphone. If ASEAN wants the world to take it seriously then it should do no less than that.

On this day, we promise that we will continue to raise our voices and speak out against the wrongdoing committed against our dear Sombath and many others who have been forcibly taken in Lao and in all countries in the region. We will not stop until he is safely back at home. For every day the Laos authorities keep Sombath Somphone from his loved ones is another day to gather more support or human rights defenders in Laos.