



# ພັນທະມິດເພື່ອປະຊາທິປະໄຕໃນລາວ

## ALLIANCE FOR DEMOCRACY IN LAOS

### Alliance pour la Démocratie au Laos

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## **ADL report on the human rights situation and environmental issues in Laos**

### **Introduction**

The Alliance for Democracy in Laos (ADL) founded in 2009 in Brussels Belgium, is the global network of human rights advocates for Laos. ADL works together with the international institutions like the UN and the EU, as well with international NGO's like amnesty international. Since 2012 ADL participates at ACSC/APF and works together with other CSO's in Asia.

The last years the situation in Laos becomes more and more difficult for the people in that poor country. The main reason for this is the very bad human rights situation in Laos.

### **Political freedom**

The freedom of expression, especially the freedom of the press is hardly suppressed by the regime. Since the decree no. 327 and others has been into act, it is hardly impossible to criticize the government or the party. Every critic now is a discretization of the system, so dissidents are sentenced up to 20 years in prison. We remember the case of the three young bloggers in 2016/17. People are already being arrested when they say something on social media; it does not even happen that they can assemble peacefully. The information exchange is also blocked. The reason is the dictatorial one-party system of Laos.

### **Land grabs**

More and more, people in Laos are losing their homes and property to foreign investors, or due to questionable major projects, such as the dam projects and the construction of so-called special economic zones, the Lao are becoming less and less masters in their own country. So it is now very difficult to develop the country, because the government loses the control about the country. Meanwhile, about 30% of the land area of Laos is owned by foreign investors. One of the main reasons for these abuses in this country is the enormous corruption, which the government still has not got under control, because most of the government members are corrupt too.

### **Special topic dams**

The dam constructions are one of the big reasons for the environment and human rights violation into the Lao PDR. These projects are responsible for the largest number of forced relocations. 160 dams are planned. China has already built eight and planned eleven more. In Laos itself, there are currently 46 dams and 54 other projects. By 2020, a total of 100 dams are to be completed. Most of these dam projects are located in the tributaries, 11 of which are planned directly on the Mekong, 3 are under construction, for the fourth has already signed the contract. The dams on the Mekong are seen as a threat to the diversity of

animals and plants. Studies show that fish stocks will decline by up to 40 percent if all the dams on the Mekong River are completed as planned.

The follow up has come promptly. On July 23, 2018, there was a repeated dam failure in the province of Attapeu, in the south of Laos. During the night of July 23, 2018, the unfinished dam of the US \$ 1.02 billion Xe Pian Xe Namnoy hydropower project collapsed after heavy rains. Officially, there are only 39 dead, but it is doubted by the population. The misfortune was therefore predictable in our view, especially since this is not the first disaster of this kind. Almost three dams have been broken until now. So in 2016 the SeKhaman in the Sekong province, already on 11.09.2017 the Nam Ao dam in the province of Xaysomboun at the Thathom area was broken after heavy rains, on July 22 2018 the Nam Beng dam near the city Pakbeng, province Oudomaxay.

But after that it comes more worse. In August and September of 2018, massive floods occurred in Laos. Affected by this disaster were the following provinces: Attapeu, Bolikhamxai, Champasak, Houaphan, Khammouane, Luang Namtha, Louangphabang, Oudômxai, Savannakhét, Vientiane, Vientiane Capital, Xaignabouli, Xiangkhouang. These floods were triggered by heavy monsoon rain. The massive deforestation of recent decades, as well as the uncontrolled dam construction, which has mixed up the groundwater level, has favored this disaster. Now, the government has announced that it will not pay any further compensation to the victims of this disaster, despite financial international assistance.

### **Social problems, drugs and human trafficking**

Despite their contribution to the fast economic growth in recent years, the government's mega-development projects have not helped ameliorate the deep chronic lack of employment opportunities (exacerbated by substantial inflows of immigrants from Vietnam and China), and the widening income gap between the rich and the poor and between the urban centers and the rural areas.

The government of the Lao PDR neglects the youth, girls and boys, in the hundreds of thousands, who become victims of the black market as slave laborers and prostitutes in Thailand and instead of being concerned and seeking solutions to the problem the government manufactures narcotics like methamphetamines for sale in neighboring countries while affecting also the youth in Laos

### **Education**

The education problems are not solved in Laos. Although there is a communist regime in Laos, parents also have to pay school fees for their children for elementary school. Nevertheless, many schools are in poor condition. Partly are schools without a roof and with insufficient teaching material. In order to get a training place in Laos bribes have to be paid.

### **Health system**

Hospitals and doctors refuse to treat patients without paying money first. The Hippocratic Oath has no meaning in the country anymore. Many hospitals especially outside the cities are in a bad condition. Relatives of patients even have to organize the mattresses for the patients. Traffic victims are not rescued if no money is found or no relatives are found to pay for them. Much of the international aid sinks in the corruption stock.

### **The rights of habitat, livelihood and food security**

The mining and logging operations are depleting the natural resources of the country which Laotians regard as national treasures, causing in the process devastating and irreparable damages to the environment. Along with the multitude of dams that will clog the length of the Mekong river and its tributaries, they have already scarred the once pristine beauty of Laos' natural landscape. They will end up destroying the biodiversity and ecosystem of the country. The giant Xayaburi dam is being built despite the protestations of the people of riparian neighboring countries and despite the reservations and warnings of international environmental groups. It will adversely affect not only the people of Laos but also of Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. It is estimated that the food supply (from fishing, rice farming and other watershed farming) of 50 million people will be at risk along with their habitat.

### **People's right**

The right of self-determination of peoples is in danger in Laos. The influence of neighboring countries China and Vietnam has meanwhile reached disastrous proportions. Officially Laos is an independent country, but in fact it is a Chinese/Vietnamese colony. The Lao Vietnamese Friendship Treaty of 18.07.1977, which was then closed for 25 years and renewed every 10 years, guarantees Vietnam control over the Lao People's Republic. Key officials in Laos continue to be occupied by Vietnamese, and Vietnamese advisers and superiors are still present in Laos, with an increasing trend. This also continues in the political offices. The many special economic zones that belong to China have meant that the population is no longer master of their own land. In the meantime China threatens the ASEAN countries. It is to be feared that when the planned express train through Laos by the Chinese is done, the Chinese will invade in masses.

### **We appeal to the ASEAN Nations:**

- 1. That the ASEAN states will use their relations to urge the government of the Lao PDR to Respect and practice human rights according to the principles, treaties and conventions to which the Lao PDR is a signatory including the freedom of information and the press without restrictions from the party, the freedom to form political parties and organizations like NGO's, freedom of assembly, freedom to make criticism of the party's errors and mistakes. Stop decree no 327!**
- 2. The development aid for Laos has to be coordinated better. This aid can be used for the development of justice and human rights. Suppress corruption urgently without exception and ensure that international aid truly benefit the people the development aid has to be for the poor people in Laos and not for the privileged people. The money and the projects have to be directly for people. Laos needs a comprehensive improvement of the health, school and infrastructure system.**
- 3. That the ASEAN- bodies will do everything for the immediately release of Somphone Phimmason, Lothkham Thammavong, Soukanh Chaithat and Bounthanh Thammavong including all other political prisoners in Laos**

4. The non-interference policy by the ASEAN must no longer serve as a pretext to close the eyes to human rights violations. The sovereignty of Laos must of course be respected, but human rights abuses stop non-interference.
5. That the ASEAN will use their influence to reform Laos. Effect changes towards a genuine democratic system of government with multiple political parties and legitimate free elections under the supervision of the United Nations.
6. The ASEAN to take attention on the exploitation problems in that region. Cease the expropriation of people's lands for the benefits of foreigners, the sale of Lao natural resources and urgently stop the flood of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants into Laos. Stop the destruction of the environment, natural resources and wild life of Laos, and cease the unchecked construction of dams and polluting factories and end the massive land grabs all over the country!
7. The ASEAN can be able to help the young people in Laos. Stop the neglect of youth and safeguard them from drug addiction and prostitution, create equal educational opportunities for Lao youth without any discrimination and eliminate corruption in the education system.

Yours faithfully



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