



TEXTS ADOPTED

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Laos, notably the cases of Somphone Phimmasone, Lod Thammavong and Soukane Chaithad

European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2017 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 the outcome of the 8th meeting of the European Union-Lao PDR Joint Committee held in Vientiane on 17 February 2017,
 - having regard to the statement by the Delegation of the European Union to the Lao PDR made in Vientiane on the World Freedom of the Press Day, 3 May 2017,
 - having regard to the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders of 1998,
 - 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 the ASEAN Charter,
 - having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in March 2017 three Lao workers, Mr Somphone Phimmasone, Mr Soukane Chaithad and Ms Lod Thammavong, were sentenced to prison terms of between 12 and 20 years and the equivalent of tens of thousands of euros in fines for criticising the government on social media in relation to alleged corruption, deforestation, and human rights violations, while working in Thailand; whereas the three also stood accused of participating in an anti-government demonstration outside the Lao Embassy in Thailand in December 2015;
- B. whereas on 25 May 2016, state-run TV showed Phimmasone, Chaithad, and

Thammavong in custody at police headquarters in Vientiane; whereas the news report said the three had been arrested for threatening national security by using social media to tarnish the Government's reputation;

- C. whereas Mr Sombath Somphone, a civil society activist, was stopped by Vientiane police in 2012 and has not been accounted for since; whereas in the case of Mr Sompawn Khantisouk, an entrepreneur active on conservation issues, who was subjected to forced disappearance in 2007, no progress on his whereabouts has been made to date; whereas Mr Bounthanh Thammavong, a Polish national, was sentenced in 2015 to four and a half years in prison for online criticism of the Government;
- D. whereas severe restrictions are placed on civil society space in Laos; whereas Laos was ASEAN's chair in 2016, but refused to host the traditional parallel civil society meeting, obliging the ASEAN People's Forum to meet in Timor-Leste instead;
- E. whereas the Government of Laos has taken no significant steps to improve the poor human rights situation, including the treatment of minorities, 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;
- F. whereas the Lao authorities continue to harass and repress religious minorities, particularly Christians; whereas there have been numerous cases of confiscation of property, arson attacks against churches and homes, beatings of Christians for celebrating Christmas, and forced renunciations of the Christian faith;
- G. whereas Laos has signed but not ratified the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance;
- H. whereas there is a lack of media plurality in Laos and existing media output is strictly controlled by the state; whereas the media law of 2008 was amended in November 2016, introducing further constraints preventing media criticism of government policies and requiring journalists to submit their reports to a government censor before publication;
- I. whereas in 2014 the Government of Laos issued a decree prohibiting online criticism of the Government and the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP);
 - 1. Strongly condemns the prison sentences against Somphone Phimmason, Soukane Chaithad and Lod Thammavong, and calls for their immediate release;
 - 2. Notes with concern that these verdicts add to a list of arrests and forced disappearances of activists and protesters who have expressed critical views on issues ranging from land disputes to allegations of corruption and abuse of power;
 - 3. Reiterates its call on the Government of Laos to stop the harassment and arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defenders, independent journalists and social activists, and to respect the rights of free expression and association and the rights of minorities; reminds Laos of its international obligations under the human rights treaties it has ratified;
 - 4. Urges the Laotian Government to respect its international commitments and protect

freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance which Laos signed in 2008;

5. Is gravely concerned at the widespread human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances and absence of fair trial; calls on the Lao authorities to meet their international human rights obligations by immediately accounting for the whereabouts of at least 10 missing individuals, including Sombath Somphone and Sompawn Khantisouk, and providing details of the charges brought and evidence produced against imprisoned activists;
6. Calls for transparent, thorough and impartial investigations into all pending cases of enforced disappearance, the disclosure of information on the whereabouts of the disappeared, and the prosecution of the perpetrators;
7. Condemns the persecution of religious minorities, in particular Christians; calls on the Government to immediately cease any activities aimed at Christians and to bring to justice those responsible for arson attacks and beatings;
8. 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;
9. Calls on the Lao Government to take measures to promote a multi-party political system and ensure the right of individuals to stand for election without the approval of the LPRP;
10. Supports efforts to increase levels of internet connectivity in Laos; urges the Government of Laos to foster an environment supportive of freedom of expression and to cease the monitoring and targeting of individuals online; urges the Government in this regard to repeal the repressive elements of the 2015 Law on Prevention and Combating of Cybercrime;
11. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to urgently raise the case of Somphone Phimmasone, Lod Thammavong and Soukane Chaithad with the Government of Laos; calls on the EU Delegation to Laos to closely monitor the human rights situation in the country and, specifically, to be present at any proceedings held against Phimmasone, Thammavong and Chaithad, and to continue to raise the cases of jailed and missing individuals with the Lao authorities;
12. Calls on the EEAS to put these issues high on the agenda of the future meetings of the EU-Lao PDR Joint Committee and of the next Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) summit, to be held in Brussels in 2018;
13. 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.