

## **UPR Info Pre-session 49 on the Lao People's Democratic Republic**

**Statement delivered by Aksonephet Khennavong  
on behalf of Mouvement Lao pour les Droits de l'Homme (MLDH)  
February 18th 2025, Geneva**

This statement is delivered on behalf of **Mouvement Lao pour les Droits de l'Homme** (MLDH), a non-profit Human Rights organization based in Paris (France), a member of the **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)**.

MLDH has participated in UPR processes since the Lao People's Democratic Republic UPR first cycle in 2010 and we have closely monitored the Lao PDR's pledges and implementation of recommendations since then.

The government of the Lao PDR has communicated in the past years its willingness to be more open to engagement with UN Human Rights mechanisms.

Unfortunately there are no tangible signs that the Human Rights situation in the Lao PDR has improved since the 2020 UPR cycle and our concerns highlighted a few years ago remain the same.

This statement addresses the following two main issues:

- 1 - Enforced disappearance
- 2 - Freedom of opinion and expression / Threat to Human Rights defenders

### **1 - Enforced disappearance**

As expressed by the UN Human Rights Committee in July 2024, despite several recommendations made during the third cycle of the UPR, no measures had been taken to effectively criminalize enforced disappearance and put in place thorough investigations into these cases.

In addition slow progress towards ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance has been observed as well as a lack of efforts to provide full reparation and information on investigations to victims and their families.

One of the most renowned cases remains the disappearance of the Lao civil society leader Sombath Somphone for which the investigations have not progressed more than 12 years later, leaving his family and relatives without any information and support since December 2012.

**Recommendations:**

- We urge the Lao PDR government to communicate on all the cases of enforced disappearance by providing updates on the investigations and by detailing the actions they put in place so far to address the several recommendations made regarding this issue during the previous UPR cycle
- We also ask the Lao government to put all the efforts to move forward to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

**2 - Freedom of opinion and expression / Threat to Human Rights defenders**

Threats and attacks have intensified towards Human rights defenders and critics of the Lao government in the last few years. The recurring and serious violations of the rights of the targeted individuals are a big concern.

Surveillance of the use of online social media has resulted in an increased number of cases of intimidation and arbitrary arrests. The Lao population is basically not allowed to comment or express any criticism of the authorities over corruption, Human Rights violations or the lack of democracy in the country.

The attempted assassination of a young online critic of the Lao government, in April 2023 in Vientiane and the death of the exiled Lao activist Bounsuan Kitiyano in May 2023 in Thailand are proof that no one is safe to express their opinions freely.

The Joint Allegation Letter LAO 3.2023 sent by the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council to the Government of Lao PDR on 13 September 2023 has not received any response. The intent of this letter was to ask for additional information and comments from the Government of Lao PDR on several cases of enforced disappearance and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

**Recommendations:**

- We urge the government to release all individuals who remain detained for the exercise of their right to freedom of opinion and expression and end the arbitrary arrest of individuals who peacefully criticize the government
- We also urge the government to guarantee the safety of all the Human Rights defenders and their freedom of opinion and expression