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**UN Human Rights Council
Twenty-ninth session, 15 June – 3 July 2015**

**Item 6:
Consideration of UPR reports**

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Mr. President,

Amnesty International welcomes recommendations made by 10 states in the Working Group, on the enforced disappearance of well-known and respected civil society leader Sombath Somphone, who has dedicated his life to promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction.¹ His abduction was captured on CCTV footage, as he was stopped by traffic police at around 6pm on 15 December 2012 outside a police post in the capital, Vientiane. He was last seen being driven away in a white pick-up truck and has not been seen or heard from since then.² Unfortunately, Laos was unable to accept six of the recommendations; however, did commit to undertaking a thorough and impartial investigation into his disappearance.³

A further 10 states urged Laos to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance⁴ and Laos has indicated that it is considering ratifying it.⁵ It is regrettable, however, that Laos has rejected calls by seven

¹ A/HRC/29/7, recommendations 121.25 (Germany); 121.94 to 121.101 (Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, Australia, Canada); 121.151 (Finland).

² See Amnesty International report, *Laos: Caught on camera – the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone* (Index: ASA 26/002/2013).

³ A/HRC/29/7/Add.1, page 8.

⁴ A/HRC/29/7, recommendations 121.13 (Paraguay); 121.20 to 121.27 (Netherlands, Canada, Spain, Uruguay, Italy, Brazil, Germany, France, Argentina).

⁵ A/HRC/29/7/Add.1, page 3-4.

states to extend a standing invitation to the Special Procedures,⁶ and specifically a visit by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.⁷

Mr President,

The decision by the authorities to reject offers of technical assistance in the search for Sombath Somphone signals a lack of genuine commitment to uphold the rule of law and to protect the rights of its citizens.⁸ The disappearance of Sombath Somphone and the failure by the authorities to adequately investigate have become symbolic of a climate of repression in Laos, with a lack of transparency and no accountability for human rights violations. This in turn has a chilling effect on civil society and on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression more generally.

Despite comments in the Opening Statement by the head of the Lao delegation to the 21st Session of the UPR Working Group on 20 January 2015 that “[t]he rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly are guaranteed in the Constitution, laws and decrees”, in practice these rights are severely restricted with the state exercising tight control over the media, judiciary and political and social institutions. We call on the authorities to extend its apparent willingness to participate in the UPR process, and particularly as it seeks membership of the UN Human Rights Council in the upcoming elections, to enable independent monitoring of the human rights situation and to engage in genuine consultation on the promotion and protection of human rights.

Thank you, Mr. President.

⁶ A/HRC/29/7, recommendations 121.67 (Japan), 121.68 (Luxembourg), 121.70-121.76 (Ghana, Hungary, Netherlands, Latvia, Paraguay, Norway, Uruguay), and A/HRC/29/7/Add.1, page 6.

⁷ A/HRC/29/7, recommendation 121.75 (Norway).

⁸ A/HRC/29/7/Add.1, page 8