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ALLIANCE FOR DEMOCRACY IN LAOS

Alliance pour la Démocratie au Laos

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ADL Human Rights Report to the 49th Session of UPR on the Lao PDR

Prolog

The Alliance for Democracy in Laos (ADL), as a global network for human rights activists for Laos, has, as always, collected reports for the UN working group and the UN ambassadors in Geneva who are taking part in the cycle.

As they have often done, the representatives of the Lao PDR claim that the human rights situation is good and that the government is doing everything possible to further improve the situation. This was announced, among others, by Deputy Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone at the 53rd session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The AICHR representative Yong Chanthalangsy also recently confirmed this before ASEAN.

According to our findings, however, this is not true; on the contrary, human rights violations in Laos have taken on a new quality.

The problems in Laos begin with Article 3 of the constitution, which enshrines one-party rule in Laos. This is exacerbated by Decree Number 117 from 2019, which criminalizes so-called propaganda activities against the state. In fact, this decree prohibits any criticism of the state and its institutions. Even appeals are now considered criticism in Laos.

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and freedom of association in Article 44, this does not exist in reality. Many laws and decrees do away with the rights guaranteed in the constitution. There are also major differences in the work of Parliament and the implementation of laws by the government. The population is hindered in the exercise of their human rights. Civil rights activists but also simple inhabitants of the country disappear or are imprisoned when they stand up for their rights.

The citizens of Laos are denied the basic right to political participation. As previously reported, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party has absolute power. The elections in Laos are purely fake elections, the election results are already determined in advance.

The freedom of expression, especially the freedom of the press is suppressed by the regime. A disturbing development is the current crackdown on the Internet and social media. Since the decree no. 327 (in 2014) and others has been into act, it is hardly impossible to criticize the government or the party.

The institutions in Laos are against the principle and spirit of the Convention on Political Rights. According to the Laos Constitution in Art.3, the Lao Revolutionary People's Party has the core leadership across the country. Thus, it is impossible for other organizations to work and exist; the same applies to other thinkers. It can be observed that the arrests of politically different thinking over long periods of time are unchanged.

The citizens of Laos barely dare to stand up for their rights. As a result, the rule of law of the country is in danger. Decree number 238 (2017) prevents the work of NGOs in Laos. The government of Laos claims that more NGOs work today than ever before. But the fact is that neither human rights organizations nor political NGOs are allowed in Laos. Worse, regime critics are treated like criminals

Only those in power are effectively protected by the judiciary, but the population does not receive this protection. If members of those in power or high officials do something wrong, they will not be punished, but the common people will be punished even more harshly for any offense. Criminals from China or Vietnam also enjoy similar protection. Since, as already mentioned, the judiciary is not independent and is controlled by the communist party and corruption is also widespread in the judiciary, no improvement in conditions under the current system can be expected.

The government's measures to improve the human rights situation are pure waste of time. Petitions to the National Assembly are not answered and if you call the emergency number for such cases at the Prime Minister's office, no one answers. Since the population sees no way of drawing attention to their problems, these cases are posted on social media. However, as soon as the authorities find out who wrote these publications, they are threatened by the police and forced to delete their posts. It is not uncommon for some of these authors to disappear under mysterious circumstances, others are arrested and sentenced to prison terms of up to 20 years, and others die under unclear circumstances, but we know that these people were murdered.

The tactic of eliminating regime critics and undesirable people and often making it look like an accident is new and is intended to deceive the international public.

The government of Laos seems to be very aware that its actions are wrong, otherwise it would not be so restrictive against its critics. This has now reached such proportions that if just five people meet on the street, this is considered suspicious and the police ask them to disperse. Such behavior was last seen in the German Empire, out of fear of a revolution.

Political murders and attempted murders

Here is a summary of the unsolved cases:

1. The Case Mr. Maythong Sanbounkhounxay

Our ADL representative in Laos, Mr. Maythong Sanbounkhounxay led our mango-coconut development project for the SDGs in Vientiane and coordinated the research we have carried out in recent years for various governments and the United Nations. Mr. Sanbounkhounxay also exposed Russia's activities in Laos and gave us a detailed report.

In March 2023 he was in Bangkok with several activists for an ADL human rights training course and also visited the UN representation in Bangkok with the ADL delegation. After the training, Mr. Sanbounkhounxay and his colleagues were particularly active for human rights in Laos. He wrote posts on social media under an alias and gathered other activists to work with the ADL.

But neither the code name nor all other precautions could protect him. Mr. Sanbounkhounxay was last seen alive on September 14th, 2023, when his parents started his motorcycle on the main road towards the capital at around 2:00 p.m. On September 15, 2023 at 7:00 a.m., residents of Phonhaikham village in Xaythany district, Vientiane capital found the body of a motorcyclist near the main road to Vientiane capital. See Facebook pictures below:



They immediately called the police, who then put out a call for anyone who could identify the dead man. The police found out on site that the injured man must have been involved in a violent fight before, as signs of struggle could be seen everywhere on the lawn. Ultimately, the victim was killed by a blow to the head with a stone.

However, our on-site office manager noticed that the photos showed a motorcycle license plate that was not the license plate of Mr. Sanbounkhongxay's motorcycle. This may be his murderer's motorcycle license plate.

See pictures below



It was also important that neither the wallet with the cash nor the victim's cell phone were stolen. Both were seized by the police on site. But just at noon later on Sep.15, the police banned any further publication about this case.

Just three days before his murder, Maythong's girlfriend gave birth in Xayabulli. She was therefore unable to come to his funeral on September 17, 2023. Neither Maythong Sanbounkhongxay's girlfriend nor his parents knew anything about his human rights activities.

As this is now the third assassination attempt on human rights activists from Laos in 2023, we have warned all activists in the region and are in the process of tightening security precautions from our work.

The murder of our popular and arranged representative in Laos fills us with great sadness on the one hand, but also with great anger towards the regime and the conditions in Laos. It cannot and must not be tolerated or ignored by the international community that people who claim nothing more than their basic rights are murdered, kidnapped or imprisoned.

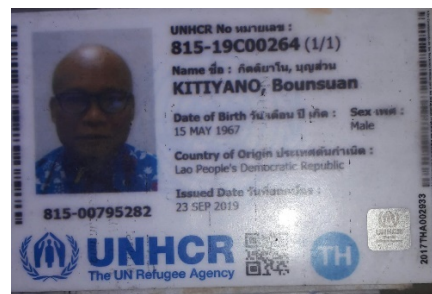
We will report further in due course. However, we can say that we will continue our work in Laos despite this and precisely because of such crimes. But those responsible in Laos be warned, they will

one day be held accountable for their crimes. Only an honest dialogue and a serious desire for far-reaching reforms can be a way for the communists to get out of the matter cleanly.

2.The Case Mr. Bounsuan Kitiyano

On May 17, 2023, the body of Mr. Bounsuan Kitiyano, a Laotian citizen, was found in the province of Ubon Ratchathani in the eastern part of Thailand bordering Laos, who was recognized as a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Mr Bounsuan was recognized as a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and was preparing to travel to Australia in late May 2023. On May 16, while waiting to live his life freely in a third country, he was shot dead by a gunman in Ubon Ratchathani on his way to his home.



According to evidence in chat history uncovered by Thai authorities, a person by the name of "Phu Kut Chom Lek" posted a picture of Bounsuan online: "One of the critics of Laos who lives in Thailand is already done, and there are others who are active in Thailand and are constantly complaining. This man (Bounsuan) many years ago led a demonstration in front of the Lao Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand." Visiting the Facebook page of the person named "Phu Kut Jom Chek" is an individual with a background from Vietnam in the Lao PDR. This is evidence that the killer was sent by the Lao PDR government.

According to the evidence, the report of a friend close to Mr. Bounsuan stated that before Bounsuan was killed, Bounsuan had received information that the Lao PDR authorities had found the family of Savang or Mr. Udone Phaleud (who died on April 20, 2023 in Province Savannakhet was arrested), then on the morning of May 16, 2023, someone from the Lao PDR called and threatened Bounsuan that there was an order from Mr. Sonexay Siphandon, Prime Minister of the Lao PDR for the Lao soldiers to kill Bounsuan. Hearing this, Bounsuan hurriedly called his friends to warn the group to be careful. Bounsuan hurriedly prepared to leave Ubon Ratchathani and go to Bangkok to prepare to leave for the third country.

Mr. Bounsuan had not yet escaped from Ubon Ratchathani. The next day, May 17, someone driving home saw Bounsuan's body next to a motorcycle and notified local authorities in Thailand, followed by Thai officials and United Nations officials who went to investigate the incident.

Mr. Bounsuan Kitiyano was a human rights and democracy activist in Laos. He recently reported to the international organizations about the arrest of Mr. Savang or Mr. Udone Phaleud who was detained in Savannakhet province, and other incidents where the Lao has suppressed the PDR, such as arrests, torture, enforced disappearances or killings. Mr. Bounsuan was an activist who had patience and never gave up. He was known for being active, courageous, and a noble spirit of sacrifice.

The Case of Anouxa (Jack) Luangsuphom:

A new case was reported to us at the end of April 2023. According to our source, another assassination attempt on a democracy activist took place on April 29, 2023. This is Mr. Anouxa (Jack) Luangsuphom, he was the admin of the Facebook group "Drive with Keyboard the so that Laos survive not being a Chinese slave" (literal translation). Jack Anouxa chatted with a certain suspected member of the Lao secret police. He asked Jack where he was going to eat. Jack sent pictures of the "After School Chocolate & Bar" in Ban Dongmieng Village, Chanthaboury City, to which the secret police replied that it looked good and he would come there too. After Jack got there, Perng Larlar made sure his victim was actually there. Shortly thereafter, he retrieved his gun and shot Jack in the chest and head from behind with a handgun.

Jack Anouxa had arranged a meeting with a certain Pherng Larlar, suspected collaborator of the Laotian secret police, at the "After School Chocolate & Bar" restaurant in Ban Dongmieng village, Chanthaboury city on April 29, 2023 after a chat. The attempted murder took place at 10:27 p.m. He was first taken to a hospital in the capital Vientiane with serious injuries and later to a hospital in Thailand. The assassination was captured by two surveillance cameras.

The videos are available to the ADL and can be viewed here:



Jack Anouxa



Images from surveillance video

3.The Case Mr. Phouvong Xayseng

The Laotian authorities are cracking down on human rights activists. First there is the murder of Mr. Phouvong Xayseng, a human rights activist who was assassinated in August 2020. Mr. Xayaseng had contacted some parliamentarians to talk about human rights violations, which was enough to kill him. The authorities were completely inactive after this murder. Since then, the relatives have lived in complete fear.

In the past few days we received another report of an attempted assassination of a human rights activist.



Mr. Phouvong Xayseng's body as it was found on the roadside

4.The case Mr. Laokham Losavath

Another case is the murder of Mr. Laokham Losavath * 08/09/1966 a car mechanic from the village of Thin near the town of Xay in the province of Oudomxay. At 11pm on 12 June 2020, a witness saw a black Toyota Hilux Vigo pull up outside Mr Losavath's workshop. Four men dressed in black got out and beat Mr. Losavath. Startled by the noise, people from the neighborhood came and found the victim unconscious. Mr. Losavath had serious head and shoulder injuries and 8 stab wounds. He died shortly thereafter in hospital. The authorities were completely inactive after this murder. Since then, the relatives have lived in complete fear.

5.The case Mr.Heuan(Thong Khampheng)

On October 22, 2017, the Lao PDR government sent a killing squad from Laos to assassinate Mr. Thong Khampheng alias Mr. Heuan (born July 8, 1954 in Salavan province), a pro-democracy activist who fled to safety in Ubon Ratshani in 2005 . The killer shot him straight in the mouth at his home, the victim died instantly. The killer disappeared through the forest back to Laos.



Recommendations:

1. The attacks on human rights activists must be enlightened without gaps by an independent commission under the supervision of the UN.
2. The protection of human rights activists must be guaranteed by the Laotian state.
3. Human rights activists must be allowed to do without restrictions.

Enforced Disappearances and Political Prisoners

Here we report on our latest findings on the current cases

1. Enforced disappearance case of Mr. Chilikham

Mr. Chilikham is a member of the Alliance for Democracy in Laos from 2022 onwards.

He is the reporter of information about the oppression of government officials against Lao people in the country. and the problem of corrupt officials in Laos.

He went to get a passport on February 2, 2024 to prepare to come to Bangkok for training on human rights issues with our organization. It was the local official of the state party who ordered to find him and control him to force him to disappear.

Here is what the relatives of Chilikham posted on February 4, 2024:



Screenshot translation:

Report a missing person

He is my own brother, his name is Mr. Xaysomphon Chilikhham (nickname Thao Tu)

He lives in Phonkham Village, Vilabuli District, Savannakhet Province

He went to Kaysone City to get a passport on Feb. 2, 2024.

He was staying at a relative's house in Sonxay Village, Kaysone City

He's the only one at home; the homeowner had gone to work

When the homeowner came from work and didn't see him, he asked the people near his house, they said three people came to him and physically hurt him and put him in a car

(This is someone who knows him and has money problems)

Later there was no contact at all.

If you are still alive, please come back to our home. If you are still alive, please come back to our home. Parents, brothers and sisters at home are worried.

Mother brothers and sisters are heartbroken and everyone who sees them will tell me so

If anyone finds it, please contact me with the phone number

020 97516312 (Sayphin)

Disappeared and unreachable for two days. I asked everyone to send it on.

The reporter: Sayphin

Here is another Facebook post that is still published today but with a change in the sentence that the 3 people who physically hurt Mr. Chlikham are people who know him and with whom he has money problems.

Whereas this first Facebook post from Channel 6 was deleted on February 5th.



2. The Case of Ms. Muay

Brief background: Ms. Houayheuag Xayabouly alias Ms. Muay born 04 Nov. 1988 from Salau Village, Champasack Province, organized help for those affected by the dam disasters herself after seeing that the government's disaster relief efforts were insufficient. She then criticized the Laotian government's disaster management on social media. On September 12, 2019, Ms. Houayheuag was also arrested by the security authorities in Phontong City, Champasak Province. The charge is: violating Section 117 of the Civil Code and Decree 327, which effectively prohibit freedom of expression in Laos. Ms. Houayheuag now faces a 5-year prison sentence and a fine.

Ms Xayabouly's criticism was very general and was mainly directed at the local authorities. Neither the government nor the communist party were insulted or mentioned in your videos. According to the UN Human Rights Convention, such criticism is expressly permitted and even encouraged. However, the government of Laos ignores this. As we have since learned, Ms. Muay was only allowed to see her child once a week. The child was initially in the care of the grandparents, where it could not be adequately cared for, since the grandparents are poor and Ms. Muay's ex-husband is in a relationship with a new woman and was initially unable to take care of the child intensively. But the situation has obviously changed over time, because the child is now with his father.

In early 2022, Ms. Muay was transferred to another prison. The new prison is located in Pathoumthong City, Champasak Province. Corruption in the old prison was given as the reason for this move. However, the fact is that the prisoners in the new prison do not get enough food, so the prison inmates have to rely on food gifts from relatives. We know from internal sources that the prison terms and conditions for political prisoners are designed to intimidate the population.

Because of the ongoing malnutrition, Ms. Muay complains of health problems. Painful inflammation of the lower jaw was added to the weight loss caused by malnutrition in the previous detention center. Since Ms. Muay was denied any medical treatment, Ms. Muay's father, without having any medical knowledge, got his daughter antibiotics, but without therapeutic success.

After a long ordeal, Ms. Muay was finally released from prison in September 2024. However, she was prohibited from contacting Laotians living abroad and was banned from traveling abroad.

More information here:



Ms. Muay after her detention



Ms. Muay during her disaster help

3. The case of three bloggers

In 2016, the three bloggers, Mr. Sukane Chaythat, Ms. Lodkham Thammavong and Mr. Somphone Phimmasone were arrested in March 2016 and sentenced to 16, 12 and 20 years in prison for criticizing the regime on the internet and petitioning the government of Laos in front of the Laotian Embassy in Thailand, where they were migrant workers. They did not receive adequate legal counsel and were publicly humiliated on Lao state television.

Despite a motion for a resolution by the European Parliament (2017/2831(RSP)), nothing has happened on this matter so far. We have now contacted one of the prisoners. Establishing contact is a great risk for him and only takes place under the greatest secrecy. He tells us about abuse and mistreatment of prisoners from prison. Apparently due to a lack of money, the food rations of the prisoners, in particular the rice rations, were reduced. The medical care is inadequate, the prisoners have to pay for the medication they need themselves at a significantly inflated price. Ordinary criminals such as drug dealers can reduce their sentence by paying a fine. Political prisoners do not

have this option. If the prison guards find out that a prisoner has contact with the outside world, or if a mobile phone is found on the prisoner, the prisoner is killed with lethal injection. The official cause of death is an illness. The jailed blogger who is in contact with us fears for his life and is urgently appealing for help.



3. The case of Mr. Od Sayavong

As previously reported by us in 2019, the case began with the disappearance of Mr. Od Sayavong. Mr. Od Sayavong was a member of a group called Free Laos. This group was in Thailand as migrant workers and, among other things, took part in a demonstration for human rights and democracy for Laos there on June 16, 2019. Od Sayavong has been missing since August 26, 2019. The same happened to his collaborator Mr. Savang aka Oudone Phalend on April 22, 2023.

RFA report of August 25, 2020:



As Thai Police Investigation into Lao Activist's Disappearance Stalls, Rights Leaders Demand Answers

2019-11-20

Facebook share button and social media icons.



Lao democracy advocate Od Sayavong reads a statement at a protest in Bangkok, Thailand, June 16, 2019.

At first it was believed that Mr. Sayavong was murdered and his body was thrown into the Mekong. However, the ADL has received fresh evidence that Mr Od Sayavong was taken to Tanpeo prison, north of the capital Vientiane, along with other political prisoners. This is obviously an illegal kidnapping by the secret police of Laos in Thailand.

4. The case of Mr. Phetpouthon Philachanh

We know from close quarters that Mr Phetpouthone wanted to take part in a demonstration in the capital Vientiane after his return to Laos in 2019. Although the demonstration was prevented by the arrest of the main organizer, he still went to the agreed meeting point. During his stay in Vientiane, he stayed at his father's brother's house. Following Mr. Phetpouthone's disappearance, his sister asked her father if he knew more. However, the father replied: "These are adult matters, you have nothing to do with them!"

Update: According to our investigation, Mr Phetpouthone is being held in Tanpieo Prison north of the capital, Vientiane, along with Mr Od Sayavong. The arrest apparently took place at the Patuxai, the triumphal arch of Laos.



5. The case of Mr. Oudone Phaleud

We have also learned that Od Sayavong's comrade-in-arms, Mr. Savang aka Oudone Phaleud, was arrested at his home without warning by police in the province of Savanakheth between 11:00 and 12:00 on April 20, 2023. He was forbidden from contact with his family, so that initially nobody knew anything about his whereabouts or his condition.

Not only was Mr. Savang a member of the Free Lao Group, he was also a member of the Free Lao Worker Federation. The organizations ceased their activities after Od Sayavong disappeared



Mr.Oudone Phaleud

According to our information, Mr Phetpouthone is in Tanpeo prison, where Od Sayavong is also being held.

6. The case of Ms. Dom Konebuapha

The case of Ms. Dom Konebuapha alias Kingkeo (55) born in Ban Tanpeo Village, Khongxedon City, Salavan Province was only reported to us at the end of April 2023. Ms. Konebuapha was a human rights and democracy activist in Laos and was arrested for her activities on November 4, 2009 while she was driving home from Talat in a car. Nothing has been heard from her since then. Her husband Mr. Khamsing Phong Masseng (56), with whom she has three children (2 girls, 1 boy), was forced to flee to Thailand due to the threatening situation. The family is currently staying in Ban Saeungthong (Thailand).



Ms. Dom Konebuapha

6. The disappearance of Sombath Somphone

Sombath Somphone disappeared on December 15, 2012. The officials still denies any knowledge about the ongoing of this case; instead of allowing and independent investigation they publish Conspiracy theories.



Sombath Somphone

Recommendations:

1. Here too, the cases of the disappearance of human rights activists must be enlightened by an independent commission under the supervision of the UN.
2. Human rights activists must not be impaired in their freedom of expression and need.
3. Every person can and must get his human rights. It is not enough to enshrine this in a law; it also has to be implemented in reality. The enforceability of human rights in Laos must be guaranteed. For this, the country needs profound reforms in all institutions. Only through independent separation of powers, which is also implemented in reality.
4. Stop Decree 117, Decree 238 on the work of NGOs must be overturned. The NGO law needs to be redone so that the NGOs are free and able to move independently according to international standards.
5. The separation of powers in Laos must finally become a reality. Political interference in judicial matters must be avoided. Like the independent judiciary, Laos must enforce its freedom of choice. Convictions of suspects without legal representation do not meet international standards. This also means that judgments made without legal representation are invalid and may need to be retried. The torture of suspects also does not comply with the UN's general human rights and must be stopped immediately. Violations by police officers should be punished. The proportionality of the penalties must be examined. Judgments from higher authorities can be helpful in this regard. These must be carried out as quickly as possible.
6. The preference of the party cadres must be ended. All people are equal No one is allowed to be above the law.

Land grabs

Corruption and land grabs go hand in hand in Laos. In most land grab crimes, money goes to corrupt officials so these foreign companies can grant land concessions and initiate evictions. Anyone who protests against the land grabs is immediately arrested or threatened by members of the Lao authorities.

The Laotian government wants to turn land into capital. More and more land is now owned by foreign investors, about 50 percent of Laos, most of it from Vietnam and China. In the capital city of Vientiane, we stand up for our right to residents' property that has been taken from local people by the government. It has confiscated property from people in several provinces across the country and leased it to foreign investors for up to 99 years, regardless of population.

Now the government has created a new land law. The people have to pay more fees for their land title certificates; the problem is that the fee is more than the people can pay. Each village and town has a different fee; there is no national regulation on how much people have to pay to the authorities.

Land grabbing in Laos is leading to increasing poverty. Most of the projects carried out in the land-grabbed areas hardly create any jobs for Laotians. Foreign investors usually bring the workers from

their home countries with them. This refutes the government's thesis that the country is developing as a result of these projects.

The ADL has received new cases of land grabs in the Lao People's Republic.

Case 1: In 2016, Air Force Battalion 703 General Mr. Sitat extorted 50 people from their families in Wa Tha Village, Sikottabong District, Vientiane. He chased people out of the area and blackmailed the residents into making a concession for a Chinese investor to build a casino. Three people resisted because they did not accept the blackmail. These three people were subsequently arrested and imprisoned in 2019. They are Ms. Namphan, Mr. Po and Mr. Wann. The latter was recently released from prison. The whereabouts of the other two detainees are still being determined by the ADL. General Sitat is very influential in Laos. He was also involved in land grabs for the large casino Phou Khaokhuay.

Case 2: On April 18, 2023, there was a clash between the police and residents in Ban Vangveun City Xaysanasomboun Province Campasak to build a banana plantation for a Chinese investor along the road through the People's Park.

A video of this incident is here:



Case 3: In 2022, another land grab took place in Xaysavang Village in Xaythani Town near the capital Vientiane by Chinese investor Zhao Wie, who had already built the King Romans Casino in Bokeo. This is an area of 1,000 hectares for another casino. The area is leased to Zhao Wei for 99 years. It is a forest area that was highly valued by the population as a nature reserve and is now to be cut down despite a ban on logging and a forest protection agreement with the EU.

Case 4: On November 23, 2021, 36 families in Ban Phonsinuan Village, Sisadthanak Town, Vientiane Capital were ordered by the police to leave their country. The families refused to leave the country and even protested with placards. The families demanded fair compensation for their dispossession of 1million. THB which has traded down to just 200,000 THB which is roughly US\$5,800. The lawsuit was dismissed in two instances.

More information here:



Case 5: On May 14, 2023, it was reported to us that in Huaykhom area, Xaydonkhong Village, Sanamxay District, Attapeu Province, villagers resisted an investor who wanted to take the land away from the locals for a coffee plantation.

A video can be viewed here:



Case 6: On May 13, 2023, the next case was reported to us from Donkhong in Champasack province. Apparently construction workers came here who wanted to plow the land of the residents without warning for an investor. This case was also documented by those affected and posted online.



Case7: Another land grab took place in the city of Sanamxay, Attapeu province, against which local residents protested to the Lord Mayor on May 14, 2023. However, he was not interested in solving the problem for the residents. We received a video in which the local residents had to watch helplessly as the Chinese investor's excavators were destroying their land. This video was made secretly because the authorities forbade local residents from filming and even broke some cellphones



We fear that these reported cases are just the tip of the iceberg and that the impact is far worse than anyone can imagine. According to some experts, the reason for this massive increase in land grabs may be that the country is on the verge of bankruptcy and is trying to save itself. But at some point there will no longer be a country that can be sold or where the local population can still live humanely.

But the issues in the ADL human rights report from the beginning of 2023 are still an issue in Laos and neighboring countries:

Case 8 Special economy zone in the Bokeo province: A Chinese investor was given free land here, on which the King Roman Casino now stands. Most of the local population had to leave the country and is now being settled by the Chinese. The casino is strongly suspected of being involved in illegal business. These include drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal hunting of endangered animals, human trafficking and prostitution. The Thai media have reported about it several times. But the Laotian authorities seem powerless here, as their own Chinese security forces have the upper hand here.

More information can be found here:



The ongoing land grabs in Laos are not just affecting residents near dam projects. In the meantime, other cases of land grabbing have become public knowledge

Case 9 The residents of the village of Yeub: In 2017, 14 residents of the village of Yeub were arrested for opposing land grabs from foreign investors. One of the activists died in custody. These are just two of many examples of land grabbing in Laos.

The relatives of the arrested reported on September 19, 2017 that some of the prisoners were beaten by police officers in prison with beatings bloody and unconscious; they should be Mr Souvanh and Mr Bounleng. Mr. Mak was treated with electric shocks in a schoolyard until he was completely unconscious before being taken to prison. In prison, Mr. Vikhan was so much psychologically pressured by the authorities until he wanted to commit suicide. It was only with the help of other prisoners that he was stopped. The relatives of the detainees also reported that they had to pay 20,000, -KIP (U \$ 3, -) each time to the police, for each visit. This equates to a half-day salary in Laos. Nobody in the population dares to talk about it, because the authorities threaten the people who want to report on it, with imprisonment.



Residents of the village of Yeub

The projects listed below were particularly striking in our research on projects related to land grabbing:

Case 10 Special Economic Zone in Bokeo Province and others: Here a Chinese investor was left with free land on which the King Roman Casino now stands. Most of the local population had to leave the country and is now settled by the Chinese. The casino is strongly suspected of being involved in illegal business. These include drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal hunting of endangered animals, human trafficking and prostitution. The Thai media have reported about it several times. But the Laotian authorities appear powerless here, since their own Chinese security forces have supremacy here.

You'll find further information here:



More cases:

1. The Casino at Phou Khao Khouay in Vientiane Province
2. The Savan Vegas Hotel and Casino in Savannakhet Province.
3. Siphandone mega-project in the 4,000 islands area. A nature reserve is to be developed here for tourism, including a shopping center.

More informations here:



4. The "Smart City Project" in the capital Vientiane, which was officially opened on January 13, 2022, covers an area of 1,500 hectares. The prime minister's son Mr. Phaiboun Phongsavanh, managing director of Phongsavanh Bank, is behind the project. The Phoungsavanh Group itself wants to cultivate 300Ha of it. This affects 5 villages: Chomsi Village, Nakwai South Village, Nakwai Middle

Village, Nano Village and Nahai Village, plus 7 villages in Beach Phong District, namely: Dongphon Khanh Village, Kham Charoen Village, including the associated agricultural area of all villages.

Pictures of the planned project:



6. The express train from China through Laos with a length of 414km so far. Since Laos cannot finance itself, it was agreed that the Chinese would be allowed to use 5 km on either side of the rails without restriction. This has already led to further evictions and land grabs in many areas.

More information can be found here:



Case 11: The Vientiane-Vang Vieng highway was built by Chinese investors. Another highway from Vientiane to Phaksé is planned. The number of Chinese projects has increased rapidly in recent years.

More information can be found here:



Case 12, the dam projects in Laos not only cause significant damage to nature, but also a not inconsiderable number of forced resettlements, in which the resettled residents are only insufficiently compensated or are resettled in unfavorable locations.

More information can be found here:



Case 13: Another cause of land grabs are the mining projects in Laos. We have reported about this repeatedly in recent years. According to information from the population, we can confirm that the situation is still unchanged.

Recommendations:

1. The landing of the Laotian population must be ended.
2. The land rights of the local population must have priority.
3. Large projects must be checked for the benefit for the population and, if necessary, revised.
4. Land modifications that are related to corruption must be reversed and the population must be adequately compensated.
5. Foreign investments are only meaningful if they are required to engage local workers. Exceptions may only be made if specialists who are not available in their own country are needed. A quota of 90% of domestic workers should be a minimum.
6. The trade unions must be independent. It is not sensible to bind union and party because the interests are not always the same. For this purpose, the NGO law in Laos must be changed.
7. Fighting corruption under public scrutiny needs to be promoted, as this is the only way to ensure that the funds for civil servants do not disappear and that the spiral of corruption continues to revolve.

Corruption

Although the People's Republic of Laos has improved its ranking in the Corruption Index, overall corruption has not improved over the past year. Transparency International reports a slight improvement, but this should be taken with a pinch of salt.

One reason the Laos government has been ineffective in curbing corruption is its inability to influence the actions of provincial governments. After the passage of the Anti-Corruption Law, great efforts were made to educate provincial officials. Although the Lao state is highly centralized in theory, the central government has traditionally been weak compared to the provinces. Most of the revenue is collected by the provincial governments, which only provide part of their revenue to support the national government in Vientiane. Obviously, this does not give the Laos government much leverage over provincial governors. The revenue structure made it difficult to implement national policies and allowed provinces to obstruct national initiatives to promote transparency and prevent corruption. Ultimately, high officials are protected from criminal prosecution by regular transfers and the people don't notice anything about it. Only minor officials or ordinary citizens are punished for corruption.

However, Laos does not have the lowest cost of living in the region, and private labor costs are not competitive with China and Vietnam. In order to even come close to the salaries of the private sector, the salaries of civil servants would have to be increased by a factor of ten to twenty. Since civil servants cannot possibly live on their salaries, many government officials see no problem in receiving what they perceive to be nothing more than gratuities, similar to those waiters might receive in the United States; they do not see themselves as participating in a corrupt practice. International aid funds also fall victim to corruption, with the victims of the flood disasters of recent years receiving little or no state aid. Other development aid projects are also regularly victims of corruption.

There is strong opposition to auditing systems, and many local governments have financial controls on expenditure but not revenue, creating ample opportunity for public money to be diverted. Since the judiciary in Laos is also under state and party control, there is also a lack of prosecution of corrupt officials. In general, party officials have no sense that there is anything wrong with corruption, although some stalwarts still cling to the socialist ideals of their youth.

More information on corruption can be found here:

**Recommendations:**

1. Public orders must be made public and require the participation of the population.
2. Comprehensive fighting corruption with the help of international institutions is inevitable.
3. A reform of the judiciary for more independence is enforced when clarifying corruption.

Human and drug trafficking in Laos

In the past we have repeatedly reported on the problem of human trafficking and the related problem of drug trafficking.

Here's what activists in Laos and neighboring countries tell us:

Above all, young Laotians, women and men, are recruited by dubious agencies for jobs or apprenticeships in neighboring countries, mostly in Thailand. Due to economic hardship and a lack of future prospects in Laos, most accept such an offer. In the case of minors, officials are often bribed to provide these minors with forged papers which then identify the minors as adults. Abroad, most are then forced into forced labor (slave labor), forced prostitution or forced marriage.

Since this situation seems hopeless to many, many take refuge in drug use or become drug dealers themselves. Largely hidden from the world public, Laos remains one of the largest producers of opium products and meth-amphetamines. Recently, Thai media revealed that the Boten Casino in Bokeo Province's Special Economic Zone, run by a Chinese investor with excellent connections to government officials, serves as a drug hub.

But what is the Laos communist government doing to combat the problem? We are told by local and German tourists in Laos that drugs and drug-infused foods like tea are very easy to come by. Locals say drugs are being distributed like candy. The police officers on the street don't seem to care what's happening in front of their eyes. While in the neighboring countries of Thailand and Malaysia one can certainly observe that the police there bust up whole smuggling rings, in Laos one sees that mostly only small drug dealers are caught by the police. We only see a pure alibi function in the actions of the authorities. Drug addicts who are caught by the authorities or turn themselves in to the authorities are sent to camps, where they are often mistreated. There can be no talk here of a therapy of the kind customary in the EU countries. As with drug trafficking, the authorities deal with trafficking in human beings. The large gangs of traffickers are spared, but individual forced laborers or forced prostitutes are occasionally punished.

After analyzing all the facts, our employees come to the following conclusion:

Obviously the government has no interest in a sustainable solution to these problems. This is mainly due to the fact that far too many in the state apparatus earn money from corruption or are even directly involved in all these problems. On the other hand, Laos is so dependent on foreign investors getting involved; We remind you of the Bokeo Special Economic Zone that the authorities are practically forced not to do much about these abuses.

Lately we have been receiving more and more videos and reports of torture of Laotian workers in Chinese Special Economic Zones. This disturbing video leaked from the golden triangle on March 4th, 2023:



Also Radio Free Asia has already reported on some cases of torture and other criminal events from the Bokeo Special Economic Zone:



Recommendations:

1. Drugs and human trafficking can only be combated with strict cooperation between the police and authorities of all neighboring countries from Laos.
2. State help for the victims also require urgent increase with the support of the United Nations.

Religious freedom in Laos

Religious freedom is guaranteed in the constitution of the Lao People's Republic. However, the reality is very different. While the large group of Buddhists in Laos can largely practice their religion, which was not always the case, the Christians in the country in particular are discriminated against. We keep getting reports of destroyed churches, persecutions of Christians and expulsions. Christians are often denied access to education. Christians get no work from the state. Arrests of Christians without warning or for no reason occur again and again.

Time and again there is discrimination and arrests of Christians in Laos. This is all the more disturbing, because the population of Laos is mostly Buddhist and therefore very tolerant. Responsible for these cases are again and again the authorities and government offices in the country.

Attacks are repeated, particularly on representatives of the Christian Church. For example, the Christian pastor Thongkham Pilawan (49) died on July 23, 2024 after an attack by two motorcyclists from the village of Vanghai, Xay district, Oudomxay province.

More information here:



Recommendations:

1. Religious freedom must be better guaranteed by the state, training and seminars for authorities have to be significantly expanded.
2. The cases of attacks on representatives of religions must be informed of an independent side.

The foreign influence in Laos

Laos is one of the five remaining communist countries in the world. In 1975, the Lao communist party in violation of the ceasefire agreement under the Vientiane Peace Treaty of 1973 took over power and control of the country and replaced the existing legitimate constitutional monarchy with a single-party Communist regime under the name of 'Lao People's Democratic Republic'.

In the immediate aftermath, more than eighty- thousands of Laotians, including the King, Queen, the Crown Prince and other members of royalty, ministers and other leaders of the government, civil servants, military and police officials, civilians and ordinary citizens were rounded up and sent off to so-called 're-education camps' which were in reality concentration camps. There, many thousand's perished under brutal prison conditions, disease, starvation, torture or execution. Most are still missing and unaccounted for.

The state symbols have been replaced. So the traditional Flag, the three Elephants Flag has to go the new one is the so called "moon Flag"

The Vietnamese influence

Furthermore, the Lao-Viet Special Treaty of Friendship which was signed by Pham Van Dong and Kaysone Phomvihane on July 18, 1977 for a term of 25 years and renewable every 10 years gave control in all aspects to Vietnam at an enormous disadvantage to Laos.

Even now, Vietnam is still trying to take over Laos in many ways and forms. At every important level of the government of the Lao PDR there are Vietnamese technical advisors who are closely monitoring and tightly directing the activities of Lao officials. Vietnamese troops in and out of uniforms are stationed at the provinces and localities to intimidate Lao people from speaking up and from governing themselves.

Vietnam has blatantly took our valuable natural resources for destination in Vietnam. Massive amounts of timber have been cut and transported from southern Laos to Vietnam for commerce under the supervision of the Vietnamese military while Lao citizens are forbidden from cutting timber just to build a home. The same thing is happening with the valuable minerals that are being taken freely to Vietnam day and night.

At the same time, Vietnam is looking for ways to destroy Lao culture and education. The leaders of the Lao PDR have been forced to allow the building of Ho Chi Minh monuments in many cities. Lao children are forced to learn Vietnamese in Lao schools all over the country. Historical Lao names of historical places are changed to Vietnamese names.

The developments outlined above highlight the one-sided relationship between the two countries with all the benefits going to Vietnam at the detriment of Laos. But nothing causes more alarm than the establishment of the special zones on many Lao provinces bordering Vietnam where Vietnamese nationals are allowed to settle and occupy permanently 15 km inside of Laos. Ostensibly, this is for the security of Laos and to control the drug trade, human trafficking and other undesirable social activities. But in actual fact, these activities increased considerably following the Vietnamese settlements.

A very disturbing problem is the confiscation of Lao lands in many areas along the Lao border with Vietnam. At the Xiang Khouang border, the takeover of Lao lands stretches as deep as 30 kilometers into Laos. Many villages in the southern provinces have been expropriated and the villagers forced to speak Vietnamese.

The Chinese influence in Laos

Meanwhile, Vietnam is attempting to defend its dominant influence in Laos. Countless meetings are currently taking place between representatives from Vietnam and Laos at many levels. At the same time, Vietnam holds a large number of festivals to celebrate Vietnamese-Lao relations. All in all, our people in Laos are witnessing increasingly aggressive competition for dominance in Laos between Vietnam and China. In the past, the power apparatus and institutions in Laos were infiltrated by Vietnam and today China is on the rise. We know from an internal source that the Laos government believes they get more money from China and have had to give too much to Vietnam, so they are gradually giving way to China. In recent years we have reported that schools in Laos clearly prefer Vietnamese as a foreign language. It has now changed. A large number of Chinese language schools are currently being opened. Students are told they need Chinese to even get a good job. In fact, a further alienation of the Laotians from their culture is taking place.

There are now 953 Chinese projects in Laos. This is a cause for great concern among the people of Laos. Many of these projects have led to an ever-increasing land grab from the population. We are also getting more and more complaints from the people of Laos that most Chinese neither obey the law nor respect the local culture.

But time is changing. With a mass of investors and mega-projects, China is pushing its competitor Vietnam to the side. The ever-increasing influence of China is viewed with suspicion by some ASEAN countries, but also by others. Laos is becoming more and more dependent on China and is increasingly losing its own room for maneuver.

China has gained an advantage in Laos with several special economic zones. In these special economic zones, such as in the province of Bokeo or Vientiane, settlement areas exclusively for the Chinese, so-called Chinatowns, were built.

For the local population, the areas are often not accessible or with great difficulty. In this Chinatown there is a Chinese administration and even a Chinese police force. Laotian authorities and police have no access here.

200,000 Chinese are now settled in Bokeo province and 10,000 Chinese in Vientiane capital. When you consider that Laos has only 7.2 million inhabitants and that the Chinese are immigrating very quickly, there is a real danger that the Laotians will become a minority in their own country.

Various major Chinese projects are being implemented in these special economic zones. These include dam projects, mining, a highway, casinos and a bullet train across Laos. As a thank you for this train, the property 5 km next to the track was handed over to the Chinese investors for free use. None of these projects serve to develop the economy of Laos. On the contrary, 90% of the workers in these zones come from China, and only unskilled work is offered for the Laotians. More than 40% of Laos' land area is now owned by foreign investors. Not much is left for the local population. Here is a case in point of how local residents are treated when Chinese investors get land in Laos. Reported by Laos People's News on 01/30/2023:

At the village of Selve-Lee-Sue, in the town of Yod-Ou , In the province of Phong Saly. A brawl broke out between the Chinese projects dealers of Unan One-Way Mining Cooperation and a group of Lao people which include the villagers, property owners of lands in concession, the village guards plus the head of the village . The dispute of unsettled claims of unfair payments broke out many times before, but never had a satisfactory response, neither from the Lao authorities nor from the Chinese dealers. The latest incident, as in the video clip at hand explains, is involved the brawl of an unforeseen chaos, where gun shots were fired by the Chinese into the running away of the Lao guards and the villagers. At the end, a plea was made by the villagers to the Lao authorities concerned to intervene and resolve the matter by law immediately. Comments were made by the news that this is the 'By Law government' where authorities are above the law, and nothing can be done against the outlaws.

More Information here:



Recommendations:

1. The one -sided dependency of the Laotian nation of China and Vietnam must be converted into an aftermeal partnership at eye level.
2. All contracts and agreements between the countries require public control on mutual benefits.
3. Contracts and agreements that do not serve the Laotian population must be revised.



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