

Declaration on the occasion of the first anniversary of the disappearance of
Sombath Somphone

Exactly one year after Sombath Somphone's disappearance on December 15, 2012, we continue to be gravely concerned about the missing person's well being, someone with whom many of us had an exceptional personal working rapport and who deserves our utmost respect for his untiring commitment to the Lao People. We remind the government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic of its obligation to clarify this matter thoroughly and comprehensively.

We welcome that the Lao government, represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the "High Level Round Table Meeting" on 19 November, 2013, agreed to see to it that those responsible would be found and brought to justice. We further welcome that at a meeting on November 20, 2013, with the development partners, H. E. President Choummaly Sayasone gave assurance that Laos would use all means at its disposal to work towards solving the case and disclosing its findings. In this respect we wish to state that we consider the investigation undertaken so far to be insufficient and unconvincing as regards content. We firmly express that we will not forget the case of the missing Sombath Somphone and that we shall not go back to business as usual as long as no light has been shed on the fate of the missing person. The unexplained circumstances of the disappearance are sufficient cause to put a strain on the international reputation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

A strong civil society is the indispensable pillar in the task of development cooperation. In this respect the past year was a difficult one. Civil society as valuable partner cannot prosper in a climate of intimidation. We express our conviction that only the respect for universal human rights allows for the free development of the individual which in turn places him in a position to better contribute to the positive development of the nation.

As Germans in Laos who are constructively engaged in achieving the conditions for a good future for this country and thriving German-Lao relations, our thoughts and feelings on this sad anniversary are with the family and friends of Sombath Somphone. With them, we hope for Sombath's safe return soon.

Vientiane, December 15, 2013