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FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)



Lao Movement for Human Rights (LMHR)

**Joint UPR submission
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FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)

Address: 17, Passage de la Main-d'Or 75011 Paris, France; Tel.: +33 (0)1 43 55 25 18;

Fax: +33 (0)1 43 55 18 80

Website: <http://www.fidh.org/> Email: fidh@fidh.org

Lao Movement for Human Rights (LMHR)

Address: BP 123 - 77206 Torcy Cedex, France; Tel./Fax: +33 (0)1 60 06 57 06

Website: <http://www.mldh-lao.org/> Email: mldh@mldh-lao.org

1. The joint FIDH-LMHR Universal Periodic Review (UPR) submission focuses on the following human rights issues in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) since the second UPR cycle, which began in January 2015: freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of peaceful assembly; freedom of association; enforced disappearances; torture; prison conditions; freedom of religion or belief; the right to participate in the design and implementation of infrastructure and investment projects; and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs. Information presented in this report has been collected from: 1) the analysis of publicly available documents; 2) research using primary sources; and 3) second-hand information which is specifically referenced in endnotes.

Freedom of expression severely repressed

2. Despite its UPR commitment to ensure the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the government has continued to severely limit the exercise of this right.
3. During the second UPR of the Lao PDR, the government accepted four of the 14 recommendations it received with regard to freedom of opinion and expression. Accepted recommendations called on the authorities to ensure the right to freedom of expression, including to fully implement its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and to re-examine legislation that limited dissemination of certain information via the Internet, including through social media.
4. However, the government has failed to live up to these commitments. The state continues to tightly control nearly all media in the country, including TV, radio, and printed publications. In addition, the government has failed to review and amend existing legislation that curtails the right to freedom of expression and is incompatible with Article 19 of the ICCPR.
5. Article 23 of the Constitution stipulates that all "cultural and mass media activities" contrary to "national interests" or "traditional culture and dignity" are prohibited. Article 65 of the Criminal Code ('Propaganda against the Lao People's Democratic Republic') prohibits "slandering the Lao People's Democratic Republic, or distorting the guidelines of the party and policies of the government, or circulating false rumors causing disorder" detrimental to, or for the purpose of weakening the state. Violators face one to five years' imprisonment and a fine ranging from 500,000 kip (US\$57) to 10 million kip (US\$1,145). Decree 327, adopted on 16 September 2014 and enacted on 10 October 2014, criminalizes web users for "disseminating or circulating untrue information for negative purposes against the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the Lao government, undermining peace, independence, sovereignty, unity and prosperity of the country," as well as content that is deemed to "divide the solidarity among ethnic groups."
6. To make the situation worse, since 2015, the Lao PDR has introduced new legislation that further restricts the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Under Decree 377, which was issued on 24 November 2015 and entered into force on 14 January 2016, all foreign media that seek to set up offices in the Lao PDR must obtain approval from the government. Article 14 of

Decree 377 requires all foreign news agencies and reporters who wish to operate in the Lao PDR to submit all news stories to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for review and approval prior to publication.¹

7. Authorities have continued to arrest and imprison individuals who have dared to publicly express their criticism of the government's policies and actions. On 22 March 2017, Somphone Phimmasone, Soukan Chaithad, and Lodkham Thammavong were sentenced to 20, 16, and 12 years in prison respectively under Articles 56 ('Treason to the nation'), 65 ('Propaganda against the Lao People's Democratic Republic'), and 72 ('Gatherings aimed at causing social disorder') of the Criminal Code. Somphone, Soukan, and Lodkham were also fined 210,000,000 kip (US\$24,060), 106,000,000 kip (US\$12,147), and 11,000,000 kip (US\$1,260) respectively.
8. Somphone, Soukan, and Lodkham were arrested in early 2016 as a result of their repeated criticism of the Lao PDR government while they were working in Thailand. They had posted numerous messages on Facebook that criticized the government in relation to alleged corruption, deforestation, and human rights violations.² On 2 December 2015, the three were among a group of about 30 people who protested against their government in front of the Lao PDR embassy in Bangkok. At the time of this submission, all three remained detained. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared their detention arbitrary in an opinion adopted on 25 August 2017.³
9. On 18 September 2015, a court in Vientiane sentenced pro-democracy activist Bounthanh Thammavong, a Lao PDR-born Polish citizen, to four years and nine months in prison.⁴ Bounthanh was arrested in June 2015 on charges of "disseminating propaganda against the government with the intention of undermining the state" under Article 65 of the Criminal Code in connection with a Facebook post that allegedly "criticized the guidelines and policies of the party and government." Bounthanh was released from prison on 19 June 2019.
10. On 21 May 2015, police in Phieng District, Xayaburi Province, detained Phout Mitane without an arrest warrant. Police accused the 26-year-old local woman of posting photos on Facebook allegedly showing police officers extorting money from her brother over a traffic violation.⁵ Phout was released on 4 August 2015 and fined one million kip (US\$115) after a police investigation found that despite taking the photos, she did not post them on Facebook.⁶
11. On 25 June 2015, authorities in Luang Prabang Province detained Chanthaphone, a civil servant from the provincial Natural Resources and Environment Department for a month for posting a "confidential document" on Facebook.⁷ The document contained information about provincial authorities granting a land concession to Chinese investors to develop the area around the Kouangxi waterfalls in Luang Prabang Province.⁸
12. Recommendations:
 - Repeal or drastically amend Article 65 of the Criminal Code, Decree 327, Decree 377, and all other vague legislative provisions that are inconsistent with relevant international standards of freedom of opinion and expression.

- End the arbitrary arrest of all individuals who peacefully criticize the government and exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- Immediately and unconditionally release Somphone Phimmasone, Soukan Chaithad, and Lodkham Thammavong and all other individuals who have been detained for the exercise of their right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- Stop the harassment and arrest of individuals who speak out about the negative impacts of infrastructure and investment projects or expose instances of corruption.

Freedom of peaceful assembly criminalized

13. During the second UPR of the Lao PDR, the government accepted one recommendation that called on the authorities to guarantee the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. However, the government has failed to create an environment that is conducive to the exercise of this right. Inexorable enforcement of draconian criminal legislation against the few individuals who sought to legitimately exercise the right to freedom of peaceful assembly has served as an effective deterrent to the organization of public assemblies by civil society.
14. Article 72 of the Criminal Code ('Gatherings aimed at causing social disorder') criminalizes the "organizing or participating in the gathering of groups of persons to conduct protest marches, demonstrations and others with the intention of causing social disorder." Violators face one to five years' imprisonment and a fine ranging from 200,000 kip (US\$23) to 50 million kip (US\$5,730). Any attempt to organize or participate in such a gathering is also punishable.
15. The Lao PDR authorities have gone so far as to prosecute Lao citizens who have participated in peaceful demonstrations abroad. In late March 2017, the Vientiane People's Court sentenced activists Somphone Phimmasone, Soukan Chaithad, and Lodkham Thammavong to 20, 16, and 12 years' imprisonment under various charges, including under Article 72. These charges stemmed from their participation in a peaceful demonstration against the Lao PDR government in front of the Lao PDR embassy in Bangkok on 2 December 2015. [See above, *paragraph #7*]
16. Recommendations:
 - Repeal Article 72 of the Criminal Code and replace it with legislation that regulates the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in accordance with relevant international standards.
 - Refrain from arresting, detaining, and prosecuting individuals for the exercise of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly.
 - Immediately and unconditionally release Somphone Phimmasone, Soukan Chaithad, and Lodkham Thammavong.

Freedom of association and space for civil society virtually non-existent

17. The space for civil society to conduct activities related to most human rights issues has remained non-existent. According to the Lao PDR government, none of the 147 local civil society organizations, also known as Non-Profit Associations (NPAs), which were registered in the country as of 2016 and for which

information was available, engaged in human rights work, political activism, or advocacy.⁹ On 23 November 2017, the Lao PDR's European Development Partners (the EU, EU Member States, and Switzerland) revealed that "almost no NPAs" had registered since 2012.¹⁰

18. During the second UPR of the Lao PDR, the government accepted five of the 14 recommendations it received concerning freedom of association, including recommendations that called on Vientiane to enable civil society and NGO groups to fulfill their roles and conduct activities, and one recommendation that called on the government to reconsider decrees and guidelines that are overly burdensome on domestic and international civil society organizations.
19. Since 2015, the government has enacted new legislation that has imposed additional restrictions on the right to freedom of association. On 15 November 2017, a new Decree on Associations (Decree 238) came into effect and replaced Decree 115. Decree 238 imposed further restrictions and controls on the activities of domestic NPAs. Decree 238 was drafted and adopted into law without any genuine input from civil society.¹¹ Under the new decree, only NPAs whose registration has been approved by the Ministry of Home Affairs are legally allowed to exist. Decree 238 gives the government power to approve the formation of associations; criminalizes unregistered associations; imposes strict operational requirements on associations, including a review of their assets; and bars associations from carrying out any human rights-related activities. In addition, NPAs that want to receive "funds and assets from foreign individuals, legal entities, or organizations" have to seek approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹² At the beginning of 2018, reports emerged of associations expressing their concern over the restrictive regulations and cumbersome registration procedures imposed on NPAs under the new decree.¹³ Civil society representatives have said the new decree would force many associations to shut down.¹⁴
20. The climate of fear among members of civil society in the Lao PDR since the disappearance of civil society leader Sombath Somphone in December 2012 [See below, *paragraph #24*] remains and has allowed the government to successfully isolate Lao civil society from its regional counterparts. For example, the government decided not to host the 2016 ASEAN Peoples' Forum/ASEAN Civil Society Conference (APF/ACSC).¹⁵ The APF/ACSC is an annual gathering of members of civil society from across Southeast Asia, held just before the ASEAN Summit. Chair of the pro-government Lao CSO Committee Maydom Chanthanasinh related that among the reasons for the cancellation of APF/ACSC were that "foreigners" would use the event to criticize ASEAN governments and that the government could not guarantee the safety of "extremist" activists whom he claimed had planned to attend the meeting.¹⁶ This was the first time the APF/ACSC was not held in the country holding the ASEAN Chair since the meeting's inception in 2005. In mid-April 2015, information surfaced that the government had pressured Lao civil society organizations to omit key concerns, such as land rights, the impact of hydropower dams, and enforced disappearances, from the list of human rights issues that could have been discussed during APF/ACSC.¹⁷

21. Recommendations:

- Drastically amend the Decree on Associations (Decree 238) to bring it into line with international standards of freedom of association.
- Respect the rights of all human rights defenders, activists, and members of civil society and cease all threats, intimidation, and other acts of harassment against them.

Enforced disappearances remain unaddressed

22. Despite its UPR commitments, the Lao PDR government has remained unable or unwilling to address the issue of enforced disappearances in the country. This includes the authorities' failure to conduct thorough, credible, and impartial investigations into cases of enforced disappearances in the country and to determine the fate and whereabouts of the victims. These includes three cases of disappearances that occurred after 2015.
23. During the second UPR of the Lao PDR, the government accepted nine of 22 recommendations concerning enforced disappearances, including five to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) and four to undertake an impartial and in-depth investigation into the disappearance of civil society leader Sombath Somphone.
24. With regard to Sombath Somphone's disappearance, during the review of the Lao PDR's initial report by the UN Human Rights Committee (CCPR) in July 2018, the government said it had been "trying very hard" to investigate Sombath's disappearance. However, this statement has been contradicted by the government's refusal to accept international assistance in conducting the investigation and to provide any details about the progress of its probe. Lao authorities have failed to disclose any new findings from their investigation into Sombath's case to the public since 8 June 2013 and have met with his wife, Shui Meng Ng, only twice since January 2013.
25. The fate and whereabouts of at least 13 other individuals remain unknown: two women, Kingkeo Phongsely and Somchit, and seven men, Soubinh, Souane, Sinpasong, Khamstone, Nou, Somkhit, and Sourigna, who were detained by security forces in November 2009; Somphone Khantisouk, the owner of an eco-tourism business, who was abducted in Luang Namtha Province in January 2017; and Ittiphon Sukpaen, Wuthipong Kachathamakul, and Surachai Danwattananusorn, three Thai monarchy critics living in exile in Laos who disappeared in June 2016, July 2017, and December 2018 respectively. The government has not provided any information on, or launched any investigation into the fate or whereabouts of these 13 individuals.
26. The Lao PDR has also yet to ratify the ICPPED. In July 2018, during the CCPR review of the Lao PDR, the government justified its ongoing delay in the ratification of the ICPPED by saying that the convention was "very complex and very unique" and that Vientiane needed to "raise awareness and [the] capacity of officials concerned" before it could ratify the ICPPED. The Lao PDR signed the convention in September 2008.

27. Recommendations:

- Ratify the ICPPED and incorporate its provisions into domestic legislation, and implement it in practice.
- Establish a new commission tasked with carrying out a prompt, thorough, independent, and impartial investigation aimed at determining the fate or whereabouts of Sombath Somphone.
- Thoroughly investigate all cases of enforced disappearance in the country, provide regular updates on the status and progress of the investigations, and hold the perpetrators accountable.

Prison conditions below international standards, torture of inmates “common”

28. The government has failed to implement recommendations it accepted during the second UPR of the Lao PDR concerning the use of torture. Authorities have also failed to improve detention conditions in the country and to bring them in line with relevant international standards.

During the second UPR of the Lao PDR, the government accepted four of the 11 recommendations it received on torture; two on the inclusion of a definition of torture in line with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) in relevant legislation, and two specifically aimed at ensuring that detained persons are treated humanely and without violence, and that allegations of torture are properly investigated.

29. The Lao PDR’s legal system does not contain a definition of torture in accordance with the CAT, to which the Lao PDR is a state party. According to testimonies collected by LMHR from foreign former inmates, punishment practices witnessed in some prisons in the Lao PDR amount to torture and ill-treatment.
30. Many former prisoners described the practice of punishing inmates by locking their legs in wooden stocks for most of the day as “common.” This type of punishment can last up to several months. Other former inmates reported witnessing prison officers kicking and severely beating prisoners using their hands and batons, and burning their genitals and other body parts with cigarettes.
31. The government does not release up-to-date information and statistics concerning the Lao PDR’s prison population. In addition, independent organizations are not allowed to monitor conditions of detention. Despite these documentation challenges, information received by LMHR points to a situation in which prison conditions are well below international standards.
32. The government’s repeated claim that the penitentiary system ensures the rights, humanity, and dignity of all persons deprived of their liberty is contradicted by statements that lawmakers made in late 2017.¹⁸ In October 2017, National Assembly members raised concerns over the growing prison population and the deteriorating conditions in prisons across the country.¹⁹ In her report to the National Assembly, the Chair of the body’s Justice Committee said prisons were overcrowded, and in some cases, suspects who had been remanded in pre-trial custody were not kept separate from convicted prisoners.

33. According to a testimony by a former prisoner in Phonetong Prison, located on the outskirts of Vientiane, some inmates placed in solitary confinement were never allowed to leave their cells. In some cases, this type of solitary confinement occurred for more than 10 years. Many prisoners were kept in 4m² cells without windows or lights. Some inmates, who had completed their sentences, were unable to leave the prison because they were unable to pay the ‘exit tax’ – amounting to the equivalent of a few US dollars.
34. Official statistics concerning deaths of prisoners are not available. FIDH and LMHR are aware of two relatively high-profile cases of custodial deaths that have not been adequately investigated and that could be indicative of a more widespread phenomenon.
35. On 29 January 2018, Somsavanh, one of the 14 residents of Ban Yeup Village, Thateng District, Sekong Province, who were detained on 25 July 2017, died in a jail in Lamam District, Sekong Province [See below, *paragraph #47*].²⁰ Prison authorities claimed Somsavanh committed suicide, a version of events disputed by an eyewitness, who accused authorities of torturing Somsavanh to death and reported having seen bruises on his chest.²¹ In an unrelated case, in April 2018, Sy Phong, a villager from Salavan Province who had been detained without trial since 2011 for protesting against land confiscation, died in Salavan provincial prison.²²
36. Recommendations:
- Take measures aimed at improving prison conditions in line with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the ‘Nelson Mandela Rules’) and the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the ‘Bangkok Rules’).
 - Conduct thorough, independent, and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, and deaths in custody, hold those responsible accountable, and provide adequate compensation to the victims and their families.
 - Allow external independent monitoring of conditions in prisons across the country.
 - Provide up-to-date information and statistics on: 1) the total prison population (disaggregated by sex, age, sentence length, and type of offense); 2) the number of prison facilities and the official capacity of the penitentiary system; and 3) the number of prison officers and medical staff for each prison.
 - Amend domestic legislation in order to incorporate a definition of torture that complies with Article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
 - Become a state party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

Religious persecution continues

37. Despite the government’s UPR commitment to ensuring the respect for the right to freedom of religion or belief, the Lao PDR authorities have continued to harass, arrest, and discriminate against Lao Christians in various parts of the country.

38. During the second UPR of the Lao PDR, the government accepted three recommendations that called for the respect of the right to freedom of religion and for the protection of individuals belonging to religious minorities.
39. Since 2015, authorities have continued to persecute Christians for practicing their religion. In July and August 2015, authorities repeatedly harassed a group of about 50 Christians in the villages of Nhang and Don Keo, Nakai District, Khammouane Province, seizing Bibles and barring them from holding religious ceremonies.²³ In early September 2015, local authorities detained four Christian villagers in Nakai District, Khammouane Province, and threatened to put them in jail unless they signed a document recanting their beliefs.²⁴ On 8 September 2015, authorities arrested two Christian adherents in Nong-hang Village, Khammouane Province, and charged them with “spreading the Christian religion.”²⁵
40. On 18 November 2018, police officers arrested four Christians in a raid conducted during a church service in Keovilai Village, Vilabouly District, Savannakhet Province, for conducting religious services without permission from the authorities. The four individuals included a 78-year-old woman and three men. All four were released a week later.²⁶
41. Acts of harassment against Christians also occurred towards the end of 2017 and 2018, in connection with Christmas celebrations. Arrests and detentions of Christians were reported in Phin District, Savannakhet Province, in December 2017 and December 2018, and in Vientiane Province In December 2018.²⁷
42. Authorities have also cracked down on foreign Christians who attempted to proselytize in the Lao PDR. On 8 April 2019, police in Luang Namtha Province arrested and subsequently detained three US citizens with the organization Vision Beyond Borders for distributing Bibles and other religious material. The three were accused of “disseminating religion” without government approval and eventually released and deported to Thailand on 18 April.²⁸
43. Recommendations:
- End the harassment and arrest of individuals who exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief.
 - Repeal Decree 315 on the Management and Protection of Religious Activities and ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief is respected.

Denial of the right to participation in the context of infrastructure and investment projects

44. Land rights remain one of the most pressing issues of concern for individuals and communities in the Lao PDR.²⁹ During the second UPR of the Lao PDR, the government supported the three recommendations it received pertaining to land rights, namely: 1) to ensure that the economic, social and cultural, as well as civil and political rights of all affected persons are fully respected in the elaboration of the national land policy; 2) to enforce the moratorium on new land concessions and reform the system for the management of land leases and concessions; and 3) to review existing land concessions and cancel or sanction those found to be violating the law.

45. Despite such commitments, the Lao PDR government has continued to implement infrastructure and investment projects (particularly in the hydropower, mining, and commercial agriculture sector) that have resulted in widespread land confiscation and forced relocation without adequate compensation. These infrastructure and investment projects have been regularly designed and implemented without adequate consultation with affected communities. Whole communities have been forced from their land, which has had a detrimental impact on their livelihoods, as well as their way of life and cultural expression.
46. The denial of the right of individuals and communities to participate in decision-making processes related to the design and implementation of infrastructure and investment projects in a free, meaningful, and active manner has been compounded by the lack of recourse for those who have been negatively affected by such projects. In fact, authorities have continued to arbitrarily detain villagers and farmers who protested against the negative impacts of infrastructure and investment projects.
47. On 25 July 2017, police detained 14 residents of Ban Yeup Village, Thateng District, Sekong Province, for cutting down rubber trees on land that had been confiscated by the government and leased to the Vietnamese-owned Lao-Vietnam Friendship Rubber Company in 2006.³⁰ As of the time of this submission, at least nine of the villagers remained detained without trial in Sekong Province. Some of the villagers who had been detained since July 2017 were also among a group of eight Ban Yeup residents who were previously arrested in June 2012 and detained for several weeks for submitting a letter of complaint to authorities a month earlier over the ongoing land dispute.³¹
48. Concerns also remain over the ongoing lack of compensation for communities whose land has been confiscated by the authorities to make way for the construction of the 417km high-speed railway connecting the Laos-China border town of Boten to Vientiane. Construction of the railway began in December 2016 and is expected to be completed by December 2021. As of the end of February 2019, 61% of the project had been completed. The railway construction affects over 3,830 hectares of land and 3,346 buildings along with crops and forestry in 167 villages in 13 districts in five provinces.
49. More than two and a half years since the start of the railway construction, a significant number of the villagers affected by the project had not received any compensation. In addition, displaced villagers who did receive compensation reported that the amounts were insufficient to cover the expenses of building their new houses.³² In November 2018, it was reported that 94% of the land required for the railway had been acquired.³³ As of January 2019, many of the 4,400 families affected by the railway construction had not received compensation for their loss of land, livelihood, and income.³⁴ The government planned to complete the payment of all compensations by 2019.³⁵ However, in November 2018, Public Works and Transport Deputy Minister Rattanamong Khounnivong said that only US\$156 million (or 52%) of the US\$300 million that the government had to pay out in compensation for losses related to the project had been paid.³⁶

50. Recommendations:

- Create a body responsible for resolving land-related grievances in a swift, competent, independent, impartial, and effective way. This entity must be empowered to enforce the implementation of relevant laws and regulations.
- Immediately and unconditionally release all detained residents of Ban Yeup Village and cease the arrest and detention of all individuals who seek redress for the negative impact they suffer as a result of the implementation of infrastructure and investment projects.
- Ensure that all decision-making processes related to the design and implementation of all infrastructure and investment projects involve the free, active, and meaningful participation of affected individuals and communities.
- Ensure fair and adequate compensation is awarded to all families affected by the construction of infrastructure projects, including compensation for their loss of land, livelihood, and income.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OP-ICESCR).

Elections still not “genuine” in the one-party state

51. The Lao PDR’s legal framework prevents the development of a multi-party political system because it allows only one party, the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP), to legally exist and operate. This remains the greatest obstacle to the Lao people’s rights to take part in the conduct of public affairs and to vote and to be elected in genuine periodic elections, in compliance with Article 25 of the ICCPR. During its second UPR, the Lao PDR did not receive any recommendations related to elections.

52. On 20 March 2016, the Lao PDR held its sixth legislative election since the establishment of the National Assembly in 1991. The polls elected 149 members to the National Assembly for a five-year term. Despite an official turnout of 97.9%, as with the past legislative elections, the polls failed to meet most of the benchmarks that define a competitive, free, fair, inclusive, and participatory electoral process.

53. According to Article 13 of the Law on National and Provincial Elections, all candidates must be selected, approved, and proposed by the LPRP or a state-sponsored mass organization. The LPRP tightly controls nearly every aspect of the electoral process through the National Election Committee (NEC). Members of the NEC are appointed by the President from a list of nominees submitted by the National Assembly. Ahead of the March 2016 election, the 17-member body was headed by the country’s former Vice-President and new President-designate Bounnhang Vorachit. All NEC members were LPRP members. Fourteen of them were members of the LPRP’s Central Committee.

54. Recommendations:

- Take measures to ensure competitive general elections that allow the registration and participation of other political parties and independent candidates.
- Establish an independent body tasked with the management of all electoral processes.

- Lift all restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association that pose an obstacle to the creation of conditions that are conducive to holding genuine elections.

¹ Decree On the Press Activities of Foreign Mass Media Agencies, Foreign Diplomatic Missions, and International Organizations in the Lao PDR, No. 377/GOV, 24 November 2015, available at: <http://laoservicesportal.gov.la/index.php?r=site%2Fdisplaylegal&id=93>

² RFA, *Lao Police Publicly Confirm Arrest of Trio of Workers For Criticizing State*, 27 May 2016

³ FIDH, *UN body says detention of government critics is “arbitrary” and urges their release*, 7 September 2017

⁴ RFA, *Lao Court Jails Polish Activist Following Online Criticism of Government*, 1 October 2015; RFA, *Wife of Jailed Lao Activist Asks Poland’s Justice Ministry For Help With Extradition*, 8 October 2015

⁵ RFA, *Lao Woman Detained After Posting Police Extortion Photos to Facebook*, 28 May 2015

⁶ RFA, *Lao Authorities Free Woman Detained For Alleged Extortion Photos*, 12 August 2015

⁷ RFA, *Laos Frees Woman Detained For Publishing Concession Document Online*, 6 August 2015

⁸ RFA, *Laos Frees Woman Detained For Publishing Concession Document Online*, 6 August 2015

⁹ Human Rights Committee, *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure – Laos*, 10 April 2017, UN Doc. CCPR/C/LAO/1, Para. 136

¹⁰ EEAS, *European Development Partners’ Statement at the Lao PDR’s 2017 Round Table Implementation Meeting - Vientiane*, 23 November 2017

¹¹ FIDH, *Interview with foreign aid worker in Laos*, December 2017

¹² FIDH, *New Decree on Associations is the last nail in the coffin for civil society*, 21 November 2017

¹³ RFA, *Civil Society Groups in Laos Delayed Funding, Forced to Disband Under New Law*, 24 January 2018

¹⁴ RFA, *Civil Society Groups in Laos Delayed Funding, Forced to Disband Under New Law*, 24 January 2018

¹⁵ RFA, *Laos Refuses to Host Meeting of ASEAN Civil Society Groups*, 12 October 2015

¹⁶ RFA, *Laos Refuses to Host Meeting of ASEAN Civil Society Groups*, 12 October 2015

¹⁷ RFA, *Lao Civil Society Pressured to Drop Rights Issues From ASEAN Forum*, 22 April 2015

¹⁸ Human Rights Committee, *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure – Laos*, 10 April 2017, UN Doc. CCPR/C/LAO/1, Paras. 75 and 82

¹⁹ Vientiane Times, *NA raises concerns over growing jail population*, 1 November 2017; Vientiane Times, *Raise legal, ethical standards, NA tells judicial bodies*, 27 October 2017

²⁰ RFA, *Lao Detainee Dies in Custody, Relatives Doubt Official ‘Suicide’ Claim*, 21 February 2018

²¹ RFA, *Lao Detainee Dies in Custody, Relatives Doubt Official ‘Suicide’ Claim*, 21 February 2018

²² RFA, *Lao Villager Dies After 8 Years in Jail Over Land Grab Protest*, 20 May 2019

²³ RFA, *Lao Authorities Threaten to Jail Christians For Practicing Their Religion*, 10 September 2015

²⁴ RFA, *Lao Authorities Threaten to Jail Christians For Practicing Their Religion*, 10 September 2015

²⁵ RFA, *Lao Authorities Threaten to Jail Christians For Practicing Their Religion*, 10 September 2015

²⁶ Morning Star News, *Police in Laos Arrest Grandmother, Three Other Christians During Worship*, 14 December 2018

²⁷ RFA, *Lao Christians Detained For ‘Breaking Rules’ on Christmas Celebration*, 22 December 2017; Release International, *Thank God for the release of Lao Christians!*, 16 February 2018; BosNewsLife, *Laos Detaining Seven Christians For ‘Illegal’ Christmas Service*, 1 January 2019

²⁸ RFA, *US Citizens Were ‘Disseminating Religion’ in Laos Without Approval: Police*, 16 April 2019; RFA, *Laos Releases, Deports US Citizens Accused of Unauthorized Missionary Work*, 18 April 2019

²⁹ Vientiane Times, *Hotline helps government administration*, 23 February 2018

³⁰ RFA, *Lao Police Beat Villagers Arrested in Lengthy Land Dispute in Sekong Province*, 27 September 2017

³¹ RFA, *Lao Police Beat Villagers Arrested in Lengthy Land Dispute in Sekong Province*, 27 September 2017

³² RFA, *Displaced Villagers in Laos Still Waiting for Railway Compensation*, 16 July 2019

³³ Vientiane Times, *Laos govt to pay compensation to families displaced by railway*, 25 November 2018

³⁴ RFA, *Chinese Railway Project in Laos Leaves Farmers in the Lurch*, 10 January 2019

³⁵ Vientiane Times, *Compensation payments for Laos-China railway slated for completion in 2019*, 15 November 2018

³⁶ RFA, *Chinese Railway Project in Laos Leaves Farmers in the Lurch*, 10 January 2019