

Laos: Immediately release lawyer Lu Siwei and ensure his safety

(Bangkok, 28 August 2023) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) expresses its grave concerns over the disappearance of [Lu Siwei](#), a renowned human rights defender and lawyer from China who was arrested while in transit in Laos.

It has been a month since Lu disappeared.

On 28 July 2023, Lu was [arrested](#) by Laotian police while boarding a train for Thailand. Lu had fled China, with the intention of flying from Thailand to the United States to reunite with his family. Since his detention, Lu has remained in an undisclosed location, likely without any contact to his family, attorneys, or any other person of his choosing.

As a lawyer, Lu took on delicate cases, often representing clients seen as political targets by Chinese authorities. Among his clients were human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng and the [12 Hong Kong activists](#) who attempted to flee to Taiwan on a speedboat in 2020.

For his relentless work, Lu experienced intimidation and harassment, including disbarment in January 2021 for an online speech that allegedly 'endangered national security.' An exit ban was also placed on Lu.

Lu's disappearance is the latest in a long list of Chinese human rights defenders and dissidents who have vanished abroad or have been deported back to China.

For countries like China and Laos, the use of enforced disappearance as a means to spread terror among human rights defenders and society at large is nothing new. Laos is yet to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which it signed in 2008. Meanwhile, China has neither signed nor ratified the convention.

Fears of deportation to China

On 1 August 2023, [FORUM-ASIA](#) alongside 84 civil society organisations and bar associations urged Laotian authorities to halt all processes of Lu's repatriation to China, where he risks being tortured and subjected to cruel treatment.

On 4 August, the Laos Embassy in London wrote a [letter](#) to Chakra Ip—the head of a UK-based group supporting lawyers facing oppression—stating that Lu was arrested in Laos on suspicion of using 'fraudulent travel documents.' If found guilty, Lu 'will be deported,' the letter said.

On 11 August, United Nations experts issued a [public call](#) for Laos to end the arbitrary detention of Lu and to allow him to reunite with his family. If deported to China, Lu would be in danger of being subjected to 'irreparable harm upon return, on account of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.'

Call to action

'Lu Siwei's arrest on Laotian soil reflects how Beijing pursues critics abroad. What happened in Laos shows how ASEAN countries tend to succumb to China's policy to silence, intimidate, and persecute human rights defenders on their turf. It further suggests how the region no longer provides a safe place or escape route for human rights defenders in exile,' said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

'Laos has ratified the UN Convention against Torture, which forbids the return of people to nations where they run the risk of being persecuted or subjected to torture. Hence, it would be against the Laotian Government's obligations under international law to repatriate Lu Siwei back to China,' Bacalso added.

FORUM-ASIA urges the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to disclose Lu's whereabouts and to ensure his physical safety as well as mental well-being. We call on the authorities to allow Lu to reunite with his family in the United States. Likewise, we stand in solidarity with all the other victims of enforced disappearances in Laos and call on ASEAN to not tolerate such actions and to act in solidarity with all human rights defenders in Asia.

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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