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## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

### **EU and Laos hold Working Group on Human Rights and Governance**

The European Union and Laos held on 19 May 2014 in Brussels the fifth round of their annual Working Group Human Rights and Governance.

The EU delegation was led by Mrs Anette Mandler, acting Director for Human Rights and Democracy in the European External Action Services. The Lao delegation was led by Mr Phoukhong Sisoulath, Director General, Department of Treaties and Law, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Lao PDR Representative to the AICHR, Secretary-General to the Lao National Steering Committee on Human Rights.

The working group opened with a minute's silence in remembrance of the victims of the airline accident in Lao PDR on 17 May 2014.

The Working Group was conducted in a frank and open atmosphere and allowed the two sides to exchange views on a wide range of issues. It provided an opportunity to express concerns about the implementation of international standards in Laos and in the EU. It also allowed for a constructive exchange of experience about how to translate such standards into domestic practice.

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The two sides reviewed recent developments in human rights, including issues such as freedom of expression, assembly and association, death penalty as well as civil society and human rights defenders. The EU also raised the exercise of freedom of religion and belief, LGBTI and right of persons with disabilities. Other items discussed included gender equality, human trafficking, conditions in prisons and drug rehabilitations centres, labour standards as well as land policies and rights.

The EU also raised a number of individual cases of concern, in particular the case of the disappearance of Mr Sombath Somphone, a prominent civil society activist. Mr Sombath's disappearance is seen by the EU with grave concern and remains unexplained.

The EU stressed the importance of a vibrant civil society environment in order to contribute to the development of an inclusive and open society. In this respect the EU expressed concern regarding the limitation of freedom of expression, particularly the freedom of the media. It welcomed the commitment of Lao to improve the transparency of registration of local civil society organisations but showed concern regarding how long the registration process takes.

#### **For more information**

The EU's relations with Lao PDR: [http://eeas.europa.eu/laos/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/laos/index_en.htm)

The EU and human rights: [http://eeas.europa.eu/human\\_rights/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/index_en.htm)