Summary prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 15 (c) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and paragraph 5 of the annex to Council resolution 16/21

Lao People’s Democratic Republic

The present report is a summary of 18 stakeholders’ submissions to the universal periodic review. It follows the general guidelines adopted by the Human Rights Council in its decision 17/119. It does not contain any opinions, views or suggestions on the part of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), nor any judgement or determination in relation to specific claims. The information included herein has been systematically referenced in endnotes and, to the extent possible, the original texts have not been altered. As provided for in Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, where appropriate, a separate section is provided for contributions by the national human rights institution of the State under review that is accredited in full compliance with the Paris Principles. The full texts of all submissions received are available on the OHCHR website. The report has been prepared taking into consideration the periodicity of the review and developments during that period.

* The present document was not edited before being sent to United Nations translation services.
Information provided by stakeholders

A. Background and framework

1. Scope of international obligations
   1. Human Rights Watch (HRW) recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and enact appropriate implementing legislation.2
   2. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) called on the State to ratify without further delay the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance signed in 2008, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the International Criminal Court, and incorporate their provisions into domestic law and implement them.3
   HRW also recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic make the necessary amendments to its legislation and ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.4

2. Institutional and human rights infrastructure and policy measures
   3. Joint Submission 1 (JS1) recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic establish an independent national human rights institution in conformity with the Paris Principles.5
   4. China Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS) noted that trainings on international law and human rights had been organized for Government officials, law enforcement agencies, judges, lawyers, law school students, civil society organizations and general public at the central and local levels.6

B. Cooperation with human rights mechanisms

1. Cooperation with treaty bodies
   5. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) noted that despite its commitment to “enhance the level of cooperation with treaty bodies and special procedures mandate holders, which implies submitting overdue national reports, such as in the case of CERD and CESCR, and give consideration to responding to questionnaires and requests for visits of the mandate holders” during the first UPR in 2010, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic had not complied with its reporting deadlines to treaty bodies.7

2. Cooperation with special procedures
   6. ICJ noted pending requests from three special procedures mandate holders, namely the Special Rapporteurs on summary executions, adequate housing and the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.8 JSI recommended that the State issue a standing invitation to United Nations special procedures.9
C. Implementation of international human rights obligations

1. Equality and non-discrimination

7. Lao Women’s Union (LWU) noted that the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED), 2011 – 2015, and the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (2011 – 2015) and the Lao Women Development Plan (2011 – 2015) prioritized gender equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, including violence.10

8. LWU recommended that gender mainstreaming be clearly mentioned in the next NSED (2016 -2020) in order that it be implemented not only at all levels of Government sectors, but also in families and in society.11

2. Right to life, liberty and security of the person

9. ICJ recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic amend its Penal and Criminal Procedure Codes to include a definition of torture in line with the CAT and specific offences of relating to torture and other ill-treatment.12

10. Joint Submission 4 (JS4) stated that Government opponents, human rights activists and ethnic and religious minorities were often detained without valid legal justifications. Charges of threats to national security were largely used to arrest members of minority communities, in particular Hmong individuals who are commonly stereotyped as untrustworthy anti-government forces.13

11. CSHRS noted that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic had adopted several laws and regulations to prevent and combat trafficking and assist victims, and that the Government adopted a national action plan to combat human trafficking and was in the process of formulating a law on combating trafficking.14 Alliance for Democracy in Laos (ADL) noted that the Government neglected hundreds of thousands of youth, girls and boys, who become victims of slave labourers and prostitutes in the black market in a neighbouring country.15

12. Jubilee Campaign (JUBILEE) noted that lack of resources, poor training and corruption prevented the Government from effectively complying with the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking. Women were trafficked into neighbouring countries, but the Lao People’s Democratic Republic was primarily a transit country for the traffic of women from neighbouring countries to another neighbouring destination country.16

13. JUBILEE also noted that forced labour was a major form of human trafficking and the Government had taken no effective measures to prevent it. Men comprised about one-third of the number of victims trafficked. They were ineligible to receive victim services since the majority of services are only available to women.17

14. ADL noted that a year-and-a-half on after the disappearance of Sombath Somphone, a Lao civil society leader on 15 December 2012 when he was allegedly taken off from a police outpost in Vientiane. His fate remained unknown18 APHR noted that up to June 2014, Lao authorities had turned down all offers of assistance to solve the Sombath case. APHR noted that in spite of widespread international calls for an urgent investigation Sombath’s whereabouts remained unknown and there had been no progress in the investigation into the circumstances of his enforced disappearance.19 Similarly, ICJ expressed concern that to date, no suspects had been identified and no formal investigation or criminal proceedings had been initiated by prosecutor against any persons allegedly responsible for the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone.20 APHR called on the Government to provide meaningful, detailed information about the progress of the
investigations to Sombath’s family, lawyers and others with a legitimate interest, including the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the UN Working Group on enforced and involuntary disappearances.

15. JS1 further that the disappearance of Sombath Somphone was not an isolated case. To date, the whereabouts of 10 other activists who campaigned for respect of land and environmental rights remained unknown. JS1 recommended that the Government undertake a thorough, impartial and effective investigation into all allegations of enforced disappearances, including those of the nine activists arrested on 02 November 2009 in connection with planned peaceful demonstrations calling for democracy, justice and respect of their land rights.

16. ICJ recommended that the Government amend the Penal Law in order to criminalize all acts of enforced disappearance, and provide for corresponding penalties in the light of the extreme seriousness of these acts.

17. HRW stated that detainees in Somsanga Drug Detention Centre lived in a punitive and heavily controlled environment. Those who tried to escape were sometimes brutally beaten by “room captains”, trusted detainees whom police and centre staff designate to play a central role in the daily control of other detainees, including through serving the centre as adjunct guards and punishing detainees who infringe centre rules.

18. HRW recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic carry out prompt, independent and thorough investigations into allegations of arbitrary detention and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in Somsanga and other drug detention centres. HRW also recommended that the Government stop the arbitrary arrest and detention of people who use drugs and other “undesirables” such as homeless people, beggars, street children and people with mental disabilities. Further, HRW recommended that the Government instruct the Ministry of Health and other relevant ministries and departments to expand access to voluntary, community-based drug dependency treatment and ensure that such treatment is medically appropriate and complies with international standards.

19. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (GIEACPC) noted that corporal punishment of children was unlawful in schools and the penal system. It was not fully prohibited in the home, alternative care settings and day care. GIEACPC recommended that the Government enact legislation explicitly prohibiting all corporal punishment, including in the home.

3. Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law

20. ADL stated that the judiciary was not independent but subservient to the dictates of the communist party leadership, in particular in the prosecution of dissidents.

4. Freedom of religion or belief, expression, association and peaceful assembly, and right to participate in public and political life

21. While noting that there has been a substantial reduction in the number of Christian prisoners of conscience detained in connection with their beliefs, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) stated that religious minorities were often subjected to discrimination and various infringements on their rights ranging from arrest and detention, eviction and fines to forcible renunciations of faith and participation in animist ceremonies. CSW further stated that there had been continuing alarming reports of violations perpetrated against religious minorities by both state and non-state actors.

22. According to ADL, the practice of religion is under tight state control. The beliefs of ethnic minorities which continue to suffer harsh persecutions like banishment, church
confiscation, forced renunciation or conversion to animism, arrest and incarceration are particularly affected.  

23. JUBILEE stated that the Government had introduced some control measures against churches, church leaders, and Christian citizens regarding the practice of their faith. More specifically, JUBILEE noted that churches were required to register with the Government and apply for approval for building, construction, printing religious texts and contacting foreign religious affiliates. Any type of gathering, including in private homes, must be approved in advance by local officials.

24. HRW noted that the Penal Code contained broad limitations that prohibit “slandering the state, distorting party or state policies, inciting disorder, or propagating information or opinions that weaken the state.” HRW also stated that the Government strictly controlled all TV, radio and printed publications. HRW recommended that the Government end its control of the media and reform media ownership and licencing rules to allow media organizations to function freely and without fear of government reprisal for their reporting.

25. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) noted that defamation and misinformation were criminal offences carrying lengthy prison terms and even the possibility of execution.

26. ISHR recommended that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic should lift restrictions in the Penal Code on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly; decriminalize defamation and misinformation; and not enact the planned legislation to restrict online communications.

27. Joint Submission 2 (JS2) stated that Lao-based international and local non-governmental organizations that are not led by ex-government officials did not feel free or safe to make submissions to the UPR as they feared negative consequences for their organization and for the security of their local staff. JS2 recommended that the Government repeal or amend all laws that restrict the rights to freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including the Decree on Associations, the Media Law, the Law on Publications and various restrictive provisions in the Penal Law. JS2 further recommended that the Government ensure that all new laws, including the proposed draft Decree on Associations and Foundations are in full compliance with international human rights norms and standards, and undertake broad-based, inclusive and meaningful consultations with civil society in the drafting process.

28. ADL noted that political speech and writing critical of the party lines or state positions and policies were prohibited. Further, political opposition and dissenting opinions were strictly forbidden and brutally repressed. Dissidents were subjected to intimidation, abduction, arrest, incognito detention, trial and imprisonment with no due process and faced death from starvation, sickness, torture or execution in prisons.

29. ADL also noted that information, including non-political material was closely scrutinized in advance of publication. Lack of legal protection and fear of disapproval and punishment by the Government had propagated endemic self-censorship. Further, ISHR stated that human rights defenders in Lao People’s Democratic Republic exercised extreme self-censorship. Defenders generally did not attend international human rights meetings or engaged with UN mechanisms due to fear that they would be branded as anti-government.

30. ADL stated that the Government continued in practice to restrict the people’s right to join or organize associations. Party control covered all national mass organizations and some non-political organizations. ADL also noted that while the stated aim of the 2009 Decree on Association is to provide a legal basis for the establishment of non-profit associations (NPAs), in practice, it was used as control mechanism to rein in civil society.
As such, the Government selectively allowed Lao NPAs to be registered through a system of registration that involves a highly intrusive screening process, including comprehensive in-home police background checks.42

31. JS2 noted that the Government created obstacles to the work of civil society organizations after their official registration. Registered associations were required to acquire separate permissions for all projects and activities as a matter of government policy. Acquiring permits for projects and activities that focus on, among others, LGBT and reproductive and sexual rights and issues relating to the rights of ethnic groups were particularly difficult.43 ISHR noted that on 07 December 2012, the Government expelled Anne-Sophie Gindroz, the country director of Helvetas, a Swiss NGO focusing on agricultural development, for criticizing the country’s form of government in a letter to certain international donors.44

32. APHR recommended that all restrictions in law and in practice that infringe upon the work of civil society organizations be lifted and legal provisions on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association be brought in line with international human rights standards.45

33. ADL further stated that the Government forbade public demonstrations and protest marches.46

34. LWU stated that women’s participation at the political level had made progress with approximately one quarter of National Assembly members being women, and with the increasing involvement of women in government and local administration at all levels.47

35. Alliance for Democracy in Laos (ADL) noted that elections were not free, and that the people could not elect representatives of their choice since the candidates for the legislature are all handpicked by the Lao communist party from among well-connected party members.48

5. Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work

36. HRW stated that the Government violated the right of workers to freedom of association in law and in practice. HRW stated that the Government effectively prohibited workers from exercising the right to strike.49

6. Right to health

37. LWU stated that access to health services had steadily increased.50

38. According to LWU, infant and under-five mortality rates show a steady decline over time. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic has already achieved the national MDG target for under-five mortality rate, set at 80 per cent per thousand live births.51

7. Right to education

39. LWU stated that there was good progress towards universal primary education. Gender parity had steadily improved in the three levels of education in the country.52

8. Persons with disabilities

40. Joint Submission 3 (JS3) stated that currently there was limited legislation that supports the rights of persons with disabilities. The Decree on Disability no. 137/PM was an important first step, but there was still significant progress needed in developing national policy and action plans that translate the decree into actions.53 JS3 added that there were no guidelines for Government departments to ensure participation of persons with disabilities in policy processes.54
41. JS3 stated that public buildings did not have ramps, accessible entrances, toilets, and accessible signage and this limited access of persons with disabilities to public services and employment for persons. Public transport infrastructure was also not accessible to many persons with disabilities, which further impacted on access to services and economic and social participation of persons with disabilities.55

42. In addition, JS3 noted that people living in rural areas had less access to information due to geographical distance, which affects access to commonly-used media for information dissemination. In many rural communities, lack of literacy skills and use of ethnic dialect further restricted access to written and spoken information. Publically available information was rarely provided in accessible formats and no sign language interpreter schemes existed in public services. The use of Braille, sign language, and easy-to-read materials such as simplified text and pictures for those with intellectual and learning impairments was generally not available even in special schools.56

43. JS3 stated that there were limited services to support persons with disabilities to gain and maintain work and employment. JS3 recommended that the Government take the responsibility of funding services that support persons with disabilities to gain and maintain work and employment such as Linking Employers to Employees with Disability (LEED).57

44. JS3 stated that although there was basic health infrastructure available at the village cluster level, more substantial health services were located at the district or provincial level. Most of these services were not physically accessible to persons with disabilities. They often needed to travel long distances to receive such services, which typically entailed additional transportation costs making it very difficult for persons with disabilities living in the rural areas to benefit from such health services. According to JS3, most healthcare providers, including as doctors and nurses, are inadequately trained on how to communicate, and better serve patients with disabilities.58

45. JS3 noted that there was little understanding of, and information available about, the rights of children with disabilities to access mainstream education. The capacity of teachers to support children with disabilities in mainstream school was low, and there was a lack of resources for schools. There was also limited training and support for teachers in inclusive education.59

46. JS3 also noted that there was disparity between urban and rural areas in access to education for children with disabilities in terms of accessibility and availability. Although law relating to education promotes inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, most schools remained physically inaccessible and did not provide accessible formats or adapt teaching methodology.60

9. Minorities and indigenous peoples

47. Lao People’s Revolutionary Youth Union (LPRYU) recommended that the Government should provide more support for the preservation and expansion of the Lao traditional and cultural heritages that are beneficial and for enhancing the living conditions of the multi-ethnic Lao people.61

48. According to JS4, a major issue faced by indigenous peoples in the country is the allocation of their customary lands to companies for industrial exploitation. The allocation of land often takes place through land-grabbing practices that force indigenous communities to relocate against their will. JS4 also stated that internally displaced indigenous groups ran the risk of further impoverishment as they became landless and deprived of their means of subsistence.62

49. Congress of World Hmong People (CWHP) stated that the Hmong indigenous people in the Phou Bia region were facing starvation and severely lacked medical support.
CWHP stated that these people were moved constantly from one place to another from Government aggression.  

50. JS4 noted that in 2013, a surge of political and ethnic violence led to the killing of a number of Hmong civilians by the Laotian security forces. JS4 noted that the Lao People’s Democratic Republic military closely monitored the Hmong indigenous communities. Their daily social life and economic sufficiency were continuously being destroyed resulting in hunger diseases, malnutrition and lack of medication.

51. JS4 stated that Hmong communities living in remote rural areas were the most affected by food insecurity and did not have access to basic services such as healthcare facilities. Lao’s high rates of child malnutrition and child mortality severely increased in the Northern Highland provinces, where most Hmong communities live.

10. Refugees and asylum seekers

52. JS4 noted that in 2009 and 2010, several Hmong refugees in a neighbouring country were forcibly repatriated to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and some of them disappeared after their arrival. JS4 also noted that one of the biggest refugee camps is the Phonekham village in Borikhamxay province, where returnees endure difficult living conditions and severe restrictions of their freedoms, including their right to movement. JS4 highlighted the fact that refugees reported that they were not allowed to move beyond a five kilometres radius from the camp.

53. JUBILEE noted with concern reports that in May 2013, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic used trafficking as a justification for repatriating nine orphan refugee children from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea placing their lives at risk. JUBILEE further stated that vulnerable refugee children should be protected and not forcibly repatriated to a country which will imprison, torture, and starve them.

11. Internally displaced persons

54. JS4 noted that relocation issues were caused by the construction of dams on the Mekong River, which resulted in the resettlement of entire villages to inadequate housing facilities, the villagers’ loss of their own means of subsistence and environmental damage.

12. Right to development, and environmental issues

55. Joint Submission 5 (JS5) noted that the progress on the part of the Government in UPR implementation was low. JS5 observed that although the Government had made a five-year national master plan for achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), many government programmes could not be implemented due to the shortage of financial and technical resources especially in remote rural areas. JS5 recommended that the Government disseminate the UPR recommendations widely among civil society organizations across the country.

56. JS1 stated that the human rights implications of large-scale land leases and concessions were serious, far-reaching, and inconsistent with the Lao PDR’s commitments made during its last UPR review. The ongoing award of long-term land leases and concessions to domestic and foreign investors had resulted in widespread land confiscation without adequate compensation. Whole communities had been forced from their land, which had negatively affected their livelihoods. JS1 recommended, inter alia, that the Government: reform the current system for the approval and management of all land leases and concessions with a view to increasing transparency and accountability; establish a publicly accessible database that contains documents related to the approval process for all existing and proposed land leases and concessions and lease and concession contracts; and create an agency responsible for resolving grievances related to land issues in a swift,
competent, independent, impartial and effective way empowered to enforce implementation of relevant laws and regulations.\footnote{57}

57. ADL stated that lack of popular participation coupled with a suppressed domestic press and media was silencing the people, particularly those with the most critical needs, such as the rural poor and ethnic minorities, out of the development and political-decision making process.\footnote{58} Lao Front for National Construction recommended increasing funding for development to Lao multi-ethnic people living in remote areas.\footnote{59}

58. ADL also noted that the Government had allowed foreign businesses to invest substantially in the country, which resulted in the lands being forcibly taken over without fair compensation. Those landowners who protest had been arrested, incarcerated and tortured without due process.\footnote{60}

59. According to ADL mining and logging operations are depleting the country’s natural resources causing devastating and irreparable damages to the environment in the process.\footnote{61}
Notes

1 The stakeholders listed below have contributed information for this summary; the full texts of all original submissions are available at: www.ohchr.org.

Civil society

Individual submissions:

- ADL: Alliance for Democracy in Laos, (Hagen, Germany);
- APHR: ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (Jakarta, Indonesia);
- CSHRS: China Society for Human Rights Studies, (Beijing, China);
- CSW: Christian Solidarity Worldwide (New Malden, United Kingdom);
- CWHP: Congress of World Hmong People (Saint Paul, Minnesota, United States of America);
- GIEACPC: Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, London (United Kingdom);
- HRW: Human Rights Watch, New York (United States of America);
- ICJ: International Commission of Jurists, Geneva (Switzerland);
- ISHR: International Service for Human Rights, Geneva (Switzerland);
- JUBILEE: Jubilee Campaign USA, Fairfax, VA (United States of America);
- LFNC: Lao Front for National Construction, Vientiane (Lao People’s Democratic Republic);
- LPRYU: Lao People’s Revolutionary Youth Union, Vientiane (Lao People’s Democratic Republic);
- LWU: Lao Women’s Union, Vientiane (Lao People’s Democratic Republic).

Joint submissions:

- JS1: Joint submission 1 submitted by: International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Paris (France) and Lao Movement for Human Rights (LMHR), Torcy Cedex (France);
- JS2: Joint submission 2 submitted by: Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Bangkok (Thailand) and International Organising Committee of the Asia-Europe People’s Forum (AEPF – IOC), (United Kingdom);
- JS3: Joint submission 3 submitted by: Lao Disabled People’s Association (LDPA), (Lao People’s Democratic Republic), Intellectual Disabilities Unit, (Lao People’s Democratic Republic), Ban Saine Souk Cerebral Palsy Service Unit, (Lao People’s Democratic Republic), Association of the Deaf (AFD), (Lao People’s Democratic Republic), Association of the Blind (LAB), (Lao People’s Democratic Republic), Lao Disabled Women’s Development Centre (LDWDC), (Lao People’s Democratic Republic), Association for Autism (AFA), (Lao People’s Democratic Republic), and Aid Children with Disability Development Association (ACDA), (Lao People’s Democratic Republic);
- JS4: Joint submission 4 submitted by: Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), The Hague (The Netherlands) and Congress of World Hmong People (CWHP), (Saint Paul, Minnesota, United States of America);
- JS5: Joint submission 5 submitted by: Vulnerable Youth Development Association, Vientiane (Lao People’s Democratic Republic) and Women’s Rights Study Association, Vientiane (Lao People’s Democratic Republic).

2 HRW, p. 5.
3 APHR, Recommendation paras. 3-4, p. 7. See also JS1, para. 63.
4 HRW, p. 6.
5 JS1, para. 65.
6 CSHRS, p. 3.
7 ICJ, para. 28.
8 ICJ, para. 29.
9 JS1, para. 64. See also JS2, para. 39.9.
10 LWU, para. 5.
LWU, para. 8.
ICJ, para. 30 (c).
JS4, p. 2.
CSHR, p. 3.
ADL, p. 5.
JUBILEE, para. 1, p. 2.
JUBILEE, para. 2, p. 3.
ADL, p. 5.
APHR, para. 3. See also JS2, para. 36.
ICJ, para. 23.
JS1, para. 48.
JS1, para. 62.
ICJ, para. 30(b).
HRW, p. 3.
HRW, p. 6.
GIEACPC, para. 2.1.
ADL, p. 2.
CSW, paras 2 – 3.
ADL, p. 3. See also JS4, p. 5.
JUBILEE, para. 1., p. 1.
JUBILEE, para. 7., p.1
HRW, p. 2.
HRW, p. 5.
ISHR, p. 1.
ISHR, p. 2.
JS2, para. 3.
JS2, paras, 39.3. – 39.4.
ADL, p. 2.
ADL, p. 3.
ISHR, p. 1.
ADL, p. 3. See also JS2, paras. 11 and 14.
JS2, para. 16.
ISHR, p. 1.
APHR, Recommendation para. 10, p. 7.
ADL, p. 3.
LWU, para. 6.
ADL, p. 2.
HRW, p. 4.
LWU, para. 6.
LWU, para. 6.
LWU, para. 6.
JS3, para. 7.
JS3, para. 11.
JS3, para. 18.
JS3, para. 20.
JS3, paras. 38 and 43.
JS3, paras. 45 – 46.
JS3, para. 30.
JS3, para. 31.
LPRYU, p. 2.
JS4, p. 4.
CWHP, para. 10.
JS4, p. 2.
JS4, p. 4.
JS4, p. 3.
67 JS4, p. 3.
68 JUBILEE, para. 7., p. 3.
69 JS4, p. 4.
70 JS5, para. 33.
71 JS5, para. 35.
72 JS1, para. 3.
73 JS1, paras. 54 – 56.
74 ADL, p. 2.
75 LFNC, p. 2.
76 ADL, p. 4.
77 ADL, p. 4.