

NEWS RELEASE



Attempted Murder of Lao Youth Democracy Activist Demands Independent Investigation

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#JUSTICEFORJACK

#ຂັບເຄື່ອນດ້ວຍຄືບອດ

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#JusticeForJack: Attempted Murder of Lao Youth Democracy Activist Demands Independent Investigation

May 2, 2023, Bangkok – Anousa Luangsouphom, also known as “Jack,” a fearless 24-year-old youth democracy activist known for his calls for justice and human rights in Laos, was brutally gunned down by an individual on April 29, 2023, at the local bar ‘After School Chocolate&Bar’ in Vientiane, Laos[1]. Recent available report indicates that he is currently in the hospital.

The brutal attempted murder of Jack is the latest in a string of similar attacks in recent years targeting Lao human rights activists who speak out against the authoritarian government, furthering the cycle of political violence and suppression of dissenting voices in the country. Lao authorities have a record of oppressing, repressing, and forcibly disappearing activists and human rights defenders, as well as taking part in transnational repression to silence dissent among diasporas and exiles[2].

“Jack is a young activist who simply used to share his thoughts, in a peaceful manner,” said [Joseph Akaravong](#), a Lao public figure, citizen journalist, and human rights defender (HRD), also Jack’s friend, who lives in exile in France to escape the grip of the Lao dictatorial regime.

The High Cost of Truth: When Speaking Out Comes at a Steep Price

Jack is one of the administrators of a closed Facebook group “Laos Drama” [3], which was set up in April 2020 by citizen journalists to discuss democracy and human rights issues in Laos, counting more than 7,000 members, using the hashtag #ຖ້າການເມືອງລາວດີ (if only Lao politics were good)—a hashtag created among members of the Milk Tea Alliance across Asia. In March 2022, together with other three passionate activists, Jack created a public Facebook page [ຂັບເຄື່ອນດ້ວຍຄືບອດ](#) [4] (“The Power of the Keyboard”) to tell the truth about **#WhatsHappeningInLaos** and call for true democracy.

Like its counterpart, this group is committed to uncovering and denouncing instances of human rights abuses in Laos, relentlessly scrutinizing the government’s actions, and calling for the end of one-party rule that dominates all aspects of politics and stifles civil liberties. Their mission also involves advocating for the eradication of China’s influence over Laos. The motto of the group is: **“Fighting for Laos’ Survival so we don’t become China’s slave.”**

The group administrators went beyond encouragement by posting calls to action for the youth to protest for a better government at That Luang, a revered national monument and symbol in Laos. They regularly shared democracy-related content from Joseph Akaravong, who was forced to flee his homeland in August 2018 [5], living in secrecy for several years in Thailand where he faced transnational repression, until being granted asylum in France. Joseph has now gained more than 322,600 followers on Facebook and powers Youth’s public opinion [6].

An Extrajudicial Killing Attempt in the Hands of the Lao Government?

“We received strong indications that the attempted murder of Jack is extrajudicial, perpetrated in the hands of Lao authorities wanting to stop any Pro-democracy youth movement to grow from inside the country. Voices of dissent cannot be stifled by the barrel of the gun,” said Emilie Palamy Pradichit, Founder & Executive Director of Manushya Foundation, a feminist human rights organization monitoring the situation in Laos.

“The Power of the Keyboard” Facebook page rapidly gained supporters, featuring fearless young people speaking their truth to power. As a consequence, the Facebook page’s administrators have been under surveillance since February 2023 and have forged a friendship with an undercover police officer, known under the name of [‘Lar Nanthavong.’](#) Although an independent investigation must be undertaken to confirm the allegations, Lao people are accusing him of the attempted murder. One Lao netizen wrote: “You are a grown-up adult and you shot a young boy who was probably of the same age as your children. What were you thinking?” [7]. Further evidence may confirm this connection in due time.

Given the Lao government's notorious history of curtailing civil liberties through legislation, exerting media control, conducting surveillance, and employing illicit methods to suppress fearless human rights advocates—ranging from threats, arbitrary arrests and detentions to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings—Jack and his friends found themselves embroiled in a grave predicament against the backdrop of the oppressive Lao authoritarian regime.

A Call for Justice Driven by Young People in Laos on Social Media

Transparency and accountability must be restored with respect to the people complicit in the attempted murder of Jack. The government must publicly commit to taking steps to ensure that such an incident and other egregious human rights violations never happen again.

“Accountability is the cornerstone of justice, and without it, those in power hold the keys to continued extrajudicial atrocities. Lao Youth are aware of this and are taking over social media, demanding #JusticeForJack and fighting to secure their fundamental right of free expression,” added Emilie Pradichit.

A groundswell of passionate and fearless young people wants nothing less than full justice and the swift persecution of Lar Nanthavong, the suspected perpetrator. With unwavering determination, they have ignited a powerful movement that is spreading like wildfire across social media, sharing their growing distrust in the Lao authorities [8].

“It is unacceptable that Jack was targeted for speaking his mind. The Lao government must thoroughly investigate the case, bring justice to Jack and hold the perpetrator into account,” concluded Joseph Akaravong.

Manushya Foundation calls on the Lao authorities to start a prompt, independent, impartial, and exhaustive investigation into Jack’s attempted murder. The investigation should be conducted by an independent body with no ties to the government. We also urge that the authorities hold accountable those responsible to ensure that the perpetrators of the attempted murder, including the person who masterminded it, do not get away with impunity. The authorities must also provide timely and relevant information to Jack’s family, as well as prompt and adequate reparations.

We also call on the international community to draw attention to this heinous crime, and to pressure the Lao government to comply with its international human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which it ratified in September 2009.

To learn more about the case, check out our video-storytelling into the attempted murder of Jack ↪
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D93moSBLXiY>

All you need to know about Manushya Foundation’s previous work on Laos:

- [News Release](#): Responsible governments and implicated companies must ensure safety and effective access to information of communities living near the Nam Theun 1 dam in Laos, August 23, 2022.
- [News Release](#): Lao Government and Implicated Companies Must Deliver Justice for Survivors of 2018 Attapeu Dam Collapse, July 26, 2022;
- [Follow-up UN Complaint](#) to seek Justice for the Survivors of the Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy Dam Collapse, in Attapeu Province, Laos, February 28, 2022;
- [Individual Complaint](#) to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) concerning the case of Houayheuang (“Muay”) Xayabouly, December 15, 2020;
- [Joint Complaint](#) to the United Nations on the Human Rights Violations faced by Ms. Houayheuang Xayabouly (Muay), Lao Woman Human Rights Defender, March 30, 2020;
- [#Freemuay from jail in Laos](#): Campaign to Free Lao woman human rights defender Ms. Houayheuang Xayabouly (Muay) and stop the human rights violations against her;
- [Manushya’s Foundation UPR Factsheet to inform Lao PDR’s Third UPR](#): Overview of the Human Rights Situation in Lao PDR - Legal Framework, Challenges, Case Studies & Community-led UPR Recommendations, January 2020;
- [Joint Statement](#): One year after Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy dam collapse, civil society from Korea and the Mekong call for immediate accountability and redress, July 23, 2019;
- [Joint Submission](#) with the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for Lao PDR Third UPR Cycle, July 21, 2019;
- [Manushya Foundation's Submission](#) to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights on the situation in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), March 2019;
- [Statement](#) of the Thai Business & Human Rights Network on the Lao Dam Collapse, August 20, 2018;
- [News release](#): Laos must undertake transparent and independent investigation to ensure effective remedies for the victims of the dam collapse – and Thailand should also bear responsibility, August 20, 2018

ENDNOTES

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