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## Laos/China: Human rights lawyer Lu Siwei detained in Laos and at risk of refoulement

On the morning of 28 July 2023, Chinese human rights defender and lawyer **Lu Siwei** was detained by the authorities in Laos at the Thanaleng railway station near the Lao-Thai border, as he was about to board a train to Thailand where he was scheduled to take a flight to the United States to reunite with his family. On 31 July 2023, he has been transferred to and kept at a Department of Immigration facility, which strongly suggests he is facing imminent deportation.

Before his arbitrary disbarment in 2021, [Lu Siwei \(卢思位\)](#) was a human rights lawyer based in Chengdu, in the Sichuan province. He provided legal assistance to victims of human rights violations. His work focused on human rights issues such as freedom of expression, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, forced eviction, and demolition of personal properties. In recent years, he defended other human rights lawyers who were prosecuted and imprisoned on “national security” charges, advocated for an independent investigation into the torture of human rights lawyers during the 2015 [“709” crackdown](#), and provided legal representation to activists who faced prosecution for commemorating the lethal 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing.

According to Lu Siwei’s family in the US, the human rights defender holds a valid Chinese passport with valid visas for both Laos and the US, where his wife and daughter now live after leaving China in 2022. In May 2021, immigration officers at the Shanghai Pudong Airport stopped Lu Siwei from boarding his flight to the United States, where he was due to participate in a fellowship programme. The officers informed him that an exit ban had been imposed against him on “national security” grounds. Since the imposition of his exit ban, the human rights defender continued to face regular surveillance and harassment.

In January 2021, the Sichuan Provincial Judicial Department [formally revoked](#) Lu Siwei’s lawyer’s license in retaliation against his peaceful human rights activities. The revocation of his license came shortly after Lu Siwei’s attempt in the fall of 2020 to provide legal representation to one of the [12 Hong Kong youth activists](#) who were intercepted by mainland Chinese authorities in August 2020 while fleeing to Taiwan by boat. The authorities refused to allow Lu Siwei to meet his client and repeatedly threatened him in a bid to force him to abandon the case.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the detention of human rights lawyer Lu Siwei and the possibility of his imminent deportation. Lu Siwei’s deportation back to China would add to a growing pattern of refoulement of human rights defenders from one country to another in Asia. If deported back to China, the human rights defender is likely to face reprisals, including arbitrary detention and prosecution, as a result of his human rights work. Front Line Defenders recalls that Laos is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), which prohibits it from returning “a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.”

**Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities of Laos to:**

1. Not send Lu Siwei back to China and immediately provide accurate information about his current whereabouts and well-being, as well as the legal basis for his detention;
2. Protect his physical and psychosocial integrity and safety, and ensure he is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment;
3. Fully respect his human rights, including his right to legal representation of his choosing;
4. Upon his release, respect his choices of onward travel, including to Thailand.