

Joint Statement
Release and drop the charges against Mr. Chhorn Phalla, a forest activist in Rattanakiri Province

Phnom Penh, 10 February 2022 – We, the undersigned civil society groups, trade unions and communities are extremely disappointed and concerned over the conviction of Mr. Chhorn Phalla, who was sentenced to five years imprisonment by the Rattanakiri Provincial Court on 10 November 2021 after a hearing on 29 September 2021. During that hearing the prosecutor changed the charge against Chhorn Phalla from “fell trees, encroached and cleared forest land, set forest fire, and bulldozed forestlands to claim ownership” under Article 62 of the Law on Natural Protected Areas to “clear forestland and enclose it to claim for ownership” under Article 97 (6) of the Law on Forestry, without substantial evidence to support this change. The change of the charges violated Chhorn Phalla’s fair trial rights, as it affected his right to have adequate time to prepare his defense. The court nevertheless convicted Chhorn Phalla under the new charges and sentenced him to five years imprisonment. During the trial, witnesses stated that Chhorn Phalla did not clear forestland and enclosed it to claim for ownership. Chhorn Phalla himself confirmed that he does not own any piece of land in that area.

Chhorn Phalla has been active in the protection of forests and natural resources in Seda commune, Lumphat district, Rattanakiri province for more than ten years. Along with other activists, he monitors forest and natural resources destruction, collects information and documents evidence of this destruction to file lawsuits against competent authorities who fail to perform their duties in protecting natural resources and forest land, thus allowing perpetrators to destroy the forest and natural resources in violation of the Law on Forestry and the Law on Natural Protected Areas. Due to his activism, Chhorn Phalla was attacked on 8 July 2020 by a group of people close to the authorities, after he raised the issue of deforestation and destruction of natural resources during a forum organized by the authorities in Seda commune hall, Lumphat district, Rattanakiri province. After the attack, Chhorn Phalla filed a complaint to the Rattanakiri Provincial Court. However, no action has been taken against the suspects.

Chhorn Phalla has been detained in Rattanakiri provincial prison for more than four months since his arrest on 20 September 2021 while he was checking the voters’ list at the police station in Seda commune, Lumphat district, Rattanakiri province. The Rattanakiri Provincial Court’s unfair decision against Chhorn Phalla amounts to judicial harassment and aims to threaten, intimidate and frighten him, as well as other environmental activists who are actively involved in protecting forests and natural resources.

We urge the judiciary and relevant institutions to drop the charges against Chhorn Phalla and to release him unconditionally. We hope the government will remember its obligation to

preserve and protect the environment and the natural resources of Cambodia, and to guarantee the rights and freedoms of individuals to take part in the life of the nation.

This statement is endorsed by:

1. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
2. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
3. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
4. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
5. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
6. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
7. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community (CCFC)
8. Youth Resources Development Program (YRDP)
9. Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)
10. Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID)
11. People Center for Development and Peace (PDP Center)
12. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)
13. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
14. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
15. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
16. Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA)
17. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
18. O'Vor Preng Community (Battambang)
19. Pailin Land Community
20. Chakrei Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
21. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
22. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
23. Thmar Da Community (Pursat)
24. O'Chamsrey Tradakpong Community (Kampong Thom)
25. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
26. Peam Ros Community (Kampong Speu)
27. Prey Peay Community (Kampot)
28. Samaki Sangkae Pi Meanrith Community (Preah Vihear)
29. Prey Lang Community (Stung Treng)
30. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
31. Areng Indigenous Community (Koh Kong)
32. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
33. Koh Sralao Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
34. Chi Kha Leu Land Community (Koh Kong)
35. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
36. Bos Snor Community (Tboung Khmum)
37. Sre Prang Community (Tboung Khmum)

38. Tunlung Community (Tboung Khmum)
39. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forest Community (Kampong Chhnang)
40. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
41. Charay Indigenous Community (Rattanakiri)
42. Am Laeng Community (Kampong Speu)
43. Building and Wood Worker's Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)
44. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
45. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
46. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
47. Khlaeng Teok 78 Community (Siem Reap)
48. Tany Land Community (Siem Reap)
49. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
50. Samaki Chek Meas Community (Svay Rieng)
51. Mean Chey Community (Svay Rieng)
52. Prey Lang Community (Kampong Thom)
53. Raksmei Samaki Community (Kampong Speu)
54. Human Right Defender Network (Kratie)
55. Broma Roub Roum Community (Kratie)
56. Sambok Community (Kratie)
57. Tamao Community (Kratie)
58. Da Community (Kratie)
59. Chang Krang Community (Kratie)
60. Kantout Community (Kratie)
61. Saob Community (Kratie)
62. Kra-nhung Senchey Community (Kratie)
63. Kbal Damrei Community (Kratie)
64. Prek Saman Community (Kratie)
65. Human Right Defender Network (Tboung Khmum)
66. Praphat Community (Tboung Khmum)
67. Bey Met Community (Tboung Khmum)
68. Chaom Kravean Community (Tboung Khmum)
69. Trapaeng Pring Community (Tboung Khmum)
70. Chan Moul Community (Tboung Khmum)
71. Kambrers Community (Tboung Khmum)
72. Indigenous Community Network Working Group (Mundulkiri)
73. Tbaeng Commune Land Community (Siem Reap)
74. Khnar Sanday Commune Land Community (Siem Reap)
75. Paek Sneng Commune Land Community (Siem Reap)
76. Leang Dai Commune Land Community (Siem Reap)
77. Svay Leur Community (Siem Reap)
78. Ta Siem Community (Siem Reap)

79. Beong Meala Community (Siem Reap)
80. Samrong Community (Siem Reap)
81. Sre Noy Community (Siem Reap)
82. Spean Thnaot Community (Siem Reap)
83. Chan Sar Community (Siem Reap)
84. Ta Yaek Community (Siem Reap)
85. Romney Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
86. Romtom Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
87. Mlou Prey 1 Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
88. Mlou Prey 2 Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
89. Sa-ang Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
90. Tarsou Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
91. Sangkae 1 Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
92. Reaksa Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
93. Chaep 1 Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
94. Tbaeng 1 Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
95. Tbaeng 2 Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
96. Chamroeun Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
97. Sra Yorng Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
98. Thmea Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
99. Por Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
100. Puttrea Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
101. Ro Ang Commune Community (Preah Vihear)
102. Human Right Defender Network (Steong Treng)
103. Bos Sbov Commune Community (Banteay Meanchy)
104. Poychar Community (Banteay Meanchey)
105. Pich Changva Community (Kampong Chhnang)
106. Anchanh Rong Community (Kampong Chhnang)
107. Choam Sangkea Community (Kampong Speu)
108. Phnom Chi Community (Banteay Meanchey)
109. Kbal Tuek Commune Community (Kampong Chhnang)
110. Boeng Bram Community (Battambang)
111. DonTri Community (Battambang)
112. Sdey Krom Rohal Soung Community (Battambang)
113. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC)