

Joint Statement

Immediately Drop Charges Against 10 Koh Kong Land Activists; Release All Unconditionally

Phnom Penh, 06 July 2023

We, the undersigned, call for the baseless charges of incitement against 10 land activists from three communities in Koh Kong province to be immediately dropped, and for their unconditional release. These activists did nothing but peacefully raise concerns and speak out in defence of their land and fellow community members, but have been harassed and imprisoned for doing so.

The 10 activists were arrested and charged with incitement under Articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code on 29 June 2023. Nine of them are currently in pre-trial detention in Koh Kong provincial prison; one was released on bail with restrictive conditions. The charges followed their attempt to peacefully travel to Phnom Penh to submit a petition to the Ministry of Justice. If convicted, each activist faces up to two years in prison and a fine of up to 4 million riel (about US\$1000).

The 10 activists are Ms. Phav Nheung; Ms. Det Huor; Ms. Yi Kunthea; Mr. Sok Chey; Mr. Heng Chey; Ms. Tin Tang; Mr. Lang Cheav; Ms. Seng Lin; Mr. Yoet Khmao; and Ms. Soung Theng. Theng is the only activist released on bail with restrictive conditions. The other nine activists (together with Nheung's 18-month-old baby) remain in Koh Kong prison. The prison is horrendously overcrowded and was at nearly 300% capacity last month. Furthermore, the activists were only granted access to legal representation on 3 July, after spending three days in pre-trial detention.

The activists were taken into custody after police blocked community members' vans in Sre Ambel district and prevented them from travelling to Phnom Penh to deliver the petition on 29 June. The petition requested that Minister of Justice Koeut Rith intervene and for the prosecution to drop the charges against 30 land activists from across five communities.

Police also threatened around 20 other community members with arrest when they gathered in front of the provincial police station on 30 June to support their representatives. Community members were similarly prevented from gathering outside the Koh Kong provincial court.

The activists have endured numerous disputes dating back as far as 2006, after companies linked to tycoons Ly Yong Phat and Heng Huy established sugar plantations on community land. However, the activists' efforts to protect their land have been continually met with authority-led harassment.

We call for an immediate end to this harassment of Cambodia's land activists, including for the charges of incitement against them to be dropped, and their immediate and unconditional release from pre-trial detention.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
2. 243 Families of Pro Lean Land Community (Koh Kong)
3. Am Leang Community (Kampong Speu)
4. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
5. Bos Snor Community (Tbong Khmum)
6. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
7. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
8. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)

9. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
10. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
11. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
12. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
13. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
14. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
15. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
16. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
17. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
18. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
19. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
20. Kamprers Community (Tboung Khmum)
21. Kleang Toek 78 Community (Siem Reap)
22. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
23. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
24. Lor Peang Community (Kampong Chhnang)
25. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
26. Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC)
27. Ou Vor Preng Community (Battambang)
28. Pailin Land Community
29. People Center for Development and Peace (PDP)
30. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
31. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
32. Prey Lang Community (Kampong Thom)
33. Prey Peay Land Community (Kampot)
34. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
35. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
36. Samaki Romeas Haek Community (Svay Rieng)
37. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
38. Social Action for Community and Development (SACD)
39. Sre Prang Community (Tboung Khmum)
40. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
41. Skun Community (Siem Reap)
42. Ta Ni Land Community (Siem Reap)
43. Ta Pen Community (Siem Reap)
44. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
45. The Messenger Band Cambodia (MB)
46. Tonlung Community (Tboung Khmum)
47. Transparency International Cambodia (TIC)
48. Trapeang Chan Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
49. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)
50. Trapeang Pring Community (Tboung Khmum)
51. Youth Resources Development Program (YRDP)