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## **Cambodia: Release peaceful protesters detained over forced eviction**

The Cambodian authorities must immediately release 24 women and six children detained yesterday while peacefully protesting their forced eviction.

The group of 30 were arrested while protesting last week's violent forced eviction of some 300 families from the poor Borei Keila neighbourhood of Phnom Penh.

"These people never should have been arrested in the first place," said Donna Guest, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Asia-Pacific.

"The women and children are some of Cambodia's poorest, most vulnerable people – and when they've stood up for their legitimate rights they've been rounded up and locked away. This kind of heavy-handed intimidation must stop."

On 3 January, the families' homes were destroyed by construction company workers accompanied by a heavy security presence. Human rights monitors and media reported that security forces used tear gas and rubber bullets against residents in an apparent use of excessive force.

Rocks, logs and bottles were thrown during clashes, and at least eight residents were arrested and remain in detention. More than 64 people were reportedly injured in the eviction.

"The authorities need to initiate a full and independent investigation into allegations of excessive force, and into why the forced eviction happened in the first place," said Donna Guest.

The 30 women and children detained on 11 January are being held in Prey Speu Social Affairs Center in Phnom Penh, a facility regularly used by authorities to arbitrarily detain homeless people, drug users and sex workers rounded up from the streets. Human rights NGOs have reported that some detainees there have been raped or even murdered in the past.

"We have serious concerns that the 30 women and children arrested yesterday are at risk of ill-treatment," said Donna Guest.

Amnesty International is also calling for the eight people detained during the 3 January eviction to be released, pending further investigation.

Forced evictions are a breach of Cambodia's obligations under international human rights law, which prohibits evictions without assurances of adequate alternative accommodation, adequate notice, proper consultation, or legal safeguards.

Most of those evicted have been moved to two separate sites. Conditions at one site, Srah Po, are

reportedly poor with no adequate sanitation or housing. Some families are living under tarpaulins, and others have not been given any land to settle on at all.

Borei Keila has been the home to a large poor urban community for many years. The government designated the area as a 'social land concession' in 2003, sharing land with a private developer which promised to build housing for the poor.

However in April 2010, the developer claimed that it could not afford to build all of the housing it had promised. The 300 families have been protesting against the company and local authority since then.