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## **Cambodia urged to drop charges against Boeung Kak Lake activists**

Cambodian authorities must drop politically-motivated charges against four women involved in peaceful protests about the situation at Boeung Kak Lake in Phnom Penh, where almost 20,000 people have been forcibly evicted since 2008, Amnesty International said today.

Bo Chhorvy, Heng Mom, Kong Chantha and community leader Tep Vanny -- were charged with “obstructing public officials” and “insult” – crimes that carry hefty fines and prison sentences of up to one year.

Police and security officials used excessive force to break up Monday’s protest involving about 50 women outside a government building in the Cambodian capital. At least six demonstrators were injured and two reportedly attempted suicide.

Women have been at the forefront of a campaign to halt the eviction of families to make way for development around the Boeung Kak Lake area in heart of Phnom Penh. Peaceful protests take place regularly.

“Cambodian authorities must stop targeting activists who are peacefully defending their communities’ rights,” said Sam Zarifi, director of Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Programme.

“The politically-motivated charges against Tep Vanny and the other women, used in an attempt to silence legitimate protest, must be dropped. Authorities must immediately halt the use of excessive force against peaceful protestors.”

The four women spent Monday night in police detention in Phnom Penh and were denied full access to lawyers and medical care. Today they were charged and released under court supervision.

“The authorities’ decision to charge the four women reflects a worrying trend in Cambodia, where the space for legitimate public debate is narrowing,” said Sam Zarifi.

“Those seeking to peacefully claim their rights and voice their concerns are finding it increasingly harder to do so. Such a trend has worrying implications for the peaceful development of the country,” said Sam Zarifi.

In 2007, the Cambodian government granted the Boeung Kak Lake area, through a land concession, to a private development company, Shukaku. Many of the 4,000 families that lived around the lake have been forcibly evicted.

Authorities announced in August that the 779 families that remained near the lake would be allotted 12.44

hectares for development.

However, a number of families were excluded from this arrangement, and the homes of eight families were destroyed in September 2011. Meanwhile, the process of granting land in the onsite development area has stalled.

### **Background**

For Amnesty International's recent report in forced eviction in Cambodia – [Eviction and Resistance: Five women tell their stories](#) please see: