

URGENT ACTION

‘MULTIMEDIA MONK’ FACES BASELESS CHARGES

The Venerable Loun Sovath, a Cambodian Buddhist monk and human rights defender known as the “multimedia monk” faces trial on baseless charges of incitement. If convicted he could be sentenced to up to two years’ imprisonment and a heavy fine. If imprisoned, he would be considered a prisoner of conscience.

The trial hearing, scheduled for 25 November at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court, is part of a complex long-running attempt, which started in November 2011, to bring judicial proceedings against **Venerable Loun Sovath**. He is charged with incitement to commit a felony under Article 495 of Cambodia’s Penal Code, for his participation in peaceful protests over forced evictions at Chi Kreng, in Siem Reap province and Boeung Kak Lake, in Phnom Penh. The authorities initially tried to link Venerable Sovath with a case against an individual labelled a “terrorist” by the government and who lives in the USA. A trial took place in August 2012, with both men absent. The judge ordered that the two should be prosecuted separately and stated that there was not enough evidence against Venerable Sovath for a conviction. The case has unexpectedly been renewed.

Venerable Sovath is a prominent human rights defender, supporting communities affected by land disputes and forced evictions throughout Cambodia. Known as the “multimedia monk” he has collected video evidence of communities caught up in land disputes and forced evictions, and has supported activists taken to court and imprisoned for peacefully standing up for their rights. He has used the videos and his own songs and poetry to raise awareness of human rights violations. As a result, he has faced harassment, including death threats, physical and verbal abuse and the threat of imprisonment.

Venerable Sovath has received several awards for his work, including the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in October 2012. Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience if he is convicted of the baseless charges against him, which are a reprisal for the lawful exercise of his human rights.

Please write immediately in Khmer, English, French or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to drop the groundless charges against Venerable Loun Sovath, stating that if convicted Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience who should be immediately and unconditionally released;
- Calling for an end to the harassment of Venerable Loun Sovath and other human rights defenders who should be allowed to carry out their peaceful activities without risk of legal sanction, threats or intimidation.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 JANUARY 2015 TO:

Minister of Interior and Deputy Prime

Minister

Sar Kheng

#75 Norodom Blvd

Khan Chamkarmon

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Fax: + 855 23 880 624

Email: moi@interior.gov.kh

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs and

International Cooperation

Hor Nam Hong

No. 3 Samdech Hun Sen Street

Khan Chamcar Mon

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Fax: + 855 23 216 141

Email: mfaic@mfa.gov.kh

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The trial of Venerable Sovath follows the summary trials of 11 housing rights defenders from Boeung Kak Lake during the week of 10 November 2014. All were arrested for taking part in peaceful protests and quickly tried. Each was sentenced to one year's imprisonment and a USD 500 fine. At the same time, arrests of opposition party members are ongoing, with 17 currently either in pre-trial detention or on bail on allegations of participating in or leading an "insurrection" for involvement in a July protest at which clashes broke out with district security guards.

Venerable Sovath's peaceful actions began with the 2009 forced eviction of his home village of Chi Kreng, in Siem Reap province. Around 175 families, including his brother and nephews, were forcibly evicted from the farmland they had depended on for food and livelihoods since the 1980s. Police opened fire and injured four villagers during the eviction. Venerable Sovath, who was not present at the time, collected footage from others who had filmed it on mobile phones. He did capture the aftermath, filming those who were shot and injured, including members of his own family.

Thousands of people have been forcibly evicted from their homes on and around Boeung Kak Lake, in Phnom Penh since 2007, when the land was leased to a company for development. In August 2011, the Prime Minister allocated 12.44 hectares of the land for onsite housing for the more than 900 families who remained. Although most of the families have now received land titles, protests have continued for the dozens who have been excluded. The former lake was also filled in with sand, which has led to serious flooding in the neighbourhood during periods of heavy rain.

Name: Venerable Loun Sovath
Gender m/f: m

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