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## **Forced evictions in Cambodia: homes razed, lives in ruins**

*“I lost my house, rice and belongings like clothes and utensils. All houses were burned down and destroyed by the excavator and the bulldozer. They kept good-condition corrugated steel and planks of wood for themselves. They even took water jars and looted our chickens and ducks. They never came to evict us like this before.”*

A villager in Sihanoukville, who lost her home on 20 April 2007.

Amnesty International today said that forced evictions are one of the most widespread human rights violations affecting Cambodians in both rural and urban areas. At least 150,000 Cambodians across the country are known to live at risk of being forcibly evicted in the wake of land disputes, land grabbing and development projects.

In sharp contrast to the rhetoric of the government’s pro-poor policies and in breach of international human rights laws and standards, thousands of people, particularly those living in poverty, have been forcibly evicted from their homes and lands, reveals a new Amnesty International report, *Rights Razed – Forced evictions in Cambodia*, launched today.

The Cambodian authorities are not only failing to protect – in law and practice – the population against forced evictions, but are actively involved in these unlawful practices.

“The authorities have been instrumental in demolishing villages, setting homes ablaze and making poor people homeless without due process and at the behest of those who wield economic and political power,” said Catherine Baber, Director of Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Programme. “It is clear that relevant laws are seldom and arbitrarily applied, and the authorities have not protected the human rights of people affected by forced evictions.”

*Rights Razed* shows how affected groups have had no opportunity for genuine consultation before eviction, received little or no information on planned evictions, and had no access to adequate alternative housing. In addition, they have been left with no recourse to justice. The cases presented in the report also show how, contrary to international human rights law, the authorities have opted for eviction long before all other alternatives have been explored.

“Unless the Cambodian government takes immediate and effective steps to ensure that its population, particularly those living in poverty, is protected against forced evictions, its poverty reduction agenda rings hollow. Cambodia urgently needs to end all forced evictions,” said Catherine Baber.

Amnesty International calls on the Cambodian government to:

- End all forced evictions and introduce a moratorium for all mass evictions until legislation and policy is put into place that requires any further evictions to be conducted in full compliance with international human rights laws and standards.
- Ensure that those victimised by forced evictions have access to, at the very least, minimum essential levels of shelter, clean water, sanitation, health services and education, including through the provision of humanitarian assistance where necessary.
- Abide by its obligations under international human right law to give those affected by eviction an opportunity for genuine participation and consultation.

Notes to editors:

Background:

A forced eviction is ‘the permanent or temporary removal against the will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection,’ according to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Forced evictions have been recognized by the UN Commission on Human Rights as a gross violation of human rights, and are also – as in the cases presented here – associated with other human rights violations.

As a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and other international human rights treaties which prohibit forced eviction and related human rights violations, Cambodia has an obligation to stop forced evictions and to protect the population from forced evictions.