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Cambodia: Injustice prevails despite activist's release on bail

The provisional release of housing rights activist Yorm Bopha is a great relief both for her family and community but does not go far enough, Amnesty International said, after Cambodia's Supreme Court today released her on bail and sent her case back to the Appeals Court.

"Yorm Bopha's release is good news, but it is disappointing that her conviction still stands and the case is not over," said Rupert Abbott, Amnesty International's Researcher on Cambodia who attended today's appeal hearing.

"She should never have been imprisoned, locked up and separated from her young son and family," he added.

Amnesty International designated Yorm Bopha a prisoner of conscience, having determined that the real reason for her imprisonment was her human rights activism. She had been defending her community's rights at the former Boeung Kak Lake in the capital Phnom Penh, where thousands of people have been forcibly evicted since 2007.

"Yorm Bopha's case is symbolic of a worrying trend in Cambodia over recent years where human rights defenders face harassment, threats, arrest, imprisonment and worse for their peaceful activism," said Abbott.

"Human rights defenders in Cambodia should be able to do their important and legitimate work unhindered."

A 30-year old mother of one, Yorm Bopha has been imprisoned since her arrest in September 2012 on accusations of planning an assault on two men. She was convicted in December last year for "intentional violence with aggravating circumstances", despite no evidence against her and inconsistent witness testimonies.

In June 2013, Cambodia's Appeal Court upheld Yorm Bopha's conviction with one year of her three-year sentence suspended. She was not due for release until September 2014. But today, 22 November, Cambodia's Supreme Court released her on bail and ordered the Appeal Court to reconsider her case.

Yorm Bopha's is among 12 cases selected for Amnesty International's flagship campaign Write for Rights 2013, the world's biggest human rights campaign.

Together with her community and other activists in Cambodia, thousands of Amnesty International's members in almost 40 countries around the world have been calling on Cambodia's government to release Yorm Bopha, signing petitions and sharing their photos and messages of support online to show their solidarity with the imprisoned housing rights activist.

"The release of Yorm Bopha, albeit on bail, proves that campaigning and activism can really make a difference in the lives of people who are victims of human rights abuses and violations," said Rupert Abbott.

"We will continue to campaign until she is acquitted and released unconditionally," he said.