

£CAMBODIA

@New fears about Khmer Rouge abuses

Amnesty International is concerned for the physical safety of 16 Cambodians who are feared to have been detained by security forces of the partie of Democratic Kampuchea ("Khmer Rouge") on 30 September 1991 because they were suspected of being reluctant to carry out Khmer Rouge plans for repatriation of Cambodian refugees from Khmer Rouge-controlled camps in Thailand.

The 16 reportedly included the nine-person leading committee of Site 8, a Khmer Rouge-administered camp south of the Thai town of Aranyaprathet, and seven other camp administrators who served as heads or deputy heads of some of the sections into which the camp is divided. They have been named as Seng Sok, Sok Tauch, Chea Sok, Em Samet, Phao Ly, Khat Man, Sin, Meah Saveuan, Yi, Som Chhuom, Sok Heuan, San, My, San, Nget and Phoum. They had been put in their posts as the result of elections conducted with Khmer Rouge agreement, and they were responsible for various aspects of administering the Site 8 population of some 44,000 Cambodian civilians. They were also responsible for liaison with international and foreign organizations that provide humanitarian aid to the camp population. These include the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and various non-governmental organizations.

The 16 were reportedly summoned by what are believed to be senior Khmer Rouge cadre to attend a meeting in the Phnum Dey area on the Cambodian side of the border. This is understood to be a base of Division 320 of the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge armed forces. The Khmer Rouge have stated that the 16 have simply been transferred to new duties, but there are reports that at least some of them were later seen detained there. Requests by officials of humanitarian organizations to meet freely with them reportedly have not been met.

There are said to be fears that some of the 16 might be subjected to ill-treatment during interrogation or may be at risk of execution for their suspected opposition to Khmer Rouge plans for the repatriation of the population of Site 8 to locations in Cambodia chosen by the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea. Division 320 has reportedly chosen several possible locations to which they want the population to go. A new camp leadership installed at Site 8 and believed to include Division 320 cadre has reportedly informed the population that it should be prepared to move in the immediate future. Soldiers of Division 320 are said to have appeared in the camp at night armed with pistols in what some believe are preparations for a forced night move of the population.

The Khmer Rouge are party to an internationally-sponsored agreement ending the Cambodia conflict that is to be signed in Paris later this month. According to provisions in the peace treaty to which the Khmer Rouge have already proclaimed their agreement,

"repatriation of Cambodian refugees and displaced persons should be voluntary...Choice of the destination within Cambodia should be that of the individual". The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is currently making preparations to carry out a repatriation pursuant to the peace agreement.

Many residents of Site 8 are said to have hoped they would be able to return home according to these principles and with UNHCR assistance, and have therefore decided on places in Cambodia where they would like to go. Some are said to have petitioned the original Site 8 leadership to allow them to go to places of their own choice. According to reports, the Khmer Rouge leadership of Division 320 may have suspected Site 8 administrators of sympathizing with these requests and perhaps of being prepared to cooperate with the UNHCR in thwarting the Khmer Rouge's own repatriation plans. The Site 8 administration is also believed to have long been accused by the Division 320 leadership of running the camp in an excessively "liberal" manner by allowing its residents too much freedom of expression and movement.

Amnesty International's concern about the physical safety of the 16 former administrators of Site 8 is heightened because of the past human rights record of the Khmer Rouge. While in power in the country from 1975 to 1978 the group was responsible for massive extrajudicial executions and routine torture and ill-treatment of suspected political opponents and dissidents. The group has also been accused of serious human rights violations since it fell from power in 1979. Last year, for example, 30 members of National Army of Democratic Kampuchea Division 616 were allegedly executed because they were suspected of being the "ringleaders" of a movement within Khmer Rouge ranks demanding greater personal and economic freedom. Some of more than 70 other people detained for suspected involvement in the movement were allegedly repeatedly and severely beaten during interrogation by Khmer Rouge military police.

Amnesty International is urging partie of Democratic Kampuchea President Khieu Samphan and Vice President Son Sen to act to ensure that the physical safety of the 16 former Site 8 administrators is fully guaranteed. It is also asking them to ensure that officials of humanitarian organizations may meet and talk to them under conditions that will make it possible for these organizations to ascertain whether the circumstances of any of the 16 are such that they would fall under these organizations' mandates for the protection of the human rights of prisoners and refugees.

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