

AI Index: PRE 01/260/2013
03 June 2013

Cambodia: Release mother imprisoned for housing rights activism

The Cambodian authorities must release housing rights activist Yorm Bopha who was imprisoned after an unfair trial, Amnesty International said ahead of her appeal hearing this week.

On 27 December 2012, the Municipal Court in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh convicted Yorm Bopha, 31, for "intentional violence with aggravating circumstances", sentencing her to three years' imprisonment.

She was accused of planning an assault on two men in August 2012. But during the trial witness testimonies were inconsistent, sometimes conflicting with each other, and some witnesses admitted to being intoxicated when the alleged crime occurred.

"The lack of credible evidence against Yorm Bopha suggests that the charges were baseless and she should not have been convicted. Yorm Bopha should be released immediately and unconditionally," said Isabelle Arradon, Amnesty International's Deputy Asia Pacific Director.

"Yorm Bopha is one of an increasing number of Cambodian human rights defenders who have faced harassment, spurious legal action and violence over the past year."

Yorm Bopha has been in jail since her arrest on 4 September 2012, leaving behind her young son and husband who is in ill health.

Until then, she had been actively defending the right to housing of her community at the former Boeung Kak Lake in Phnom Penh, where thousands of people have been forcibly evicted from their homes since the land was leased to a company in 2007.

She played a leading role in the campaign for the release of 13 female community activists – the "Boeung Kak 13" – when they were convicted and sentenced to up to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment in May 2012, after a peaceful protest.

"In reality, it seems that Yorm Bopha has been convicted for her legitimate work defending her community's human rights and her calls last year for the release of the Boeung Kak 13," said Arradon.

"Amnesty International considers her a prisoner of conscience, jailed for exercising the right to freedom of expression through her peaceful activism."

The Boeung Kak Lake community has faced violence for demonstrating peacefully for Yorm Bopha's release. On 13 March 2013, security forces attacked the community as they demonstrated peacefully near the Cambodian Prime Minister's house, with one woman suffering a broken arm and another in her 70s knocked unconscious.

On 26 March 2013, Cambodia's Supreme Court rejected Yorm Bopha's application for provisional release while she appealed her conviction. The decision followed public comments one week earlier by the Cambodian Prime Minister, who effectively said that Yorm Bopha was guilty.

"The case appears to be another example of Cambodia's courts being used to persecute human rights defenders," said Arradon.

"We hope that Cambodia's development partners – such as the US, the EU, Japan and ASEAN member states - will join Amnesty International and others in supporting the Boeung Kak Lake community's calls for Yorm Bopha's freedom."

Further information

["Cambodian human rights defenders convicted"](#), 30 January 2013

["Cambodia: Women face jail for defending housing rights"](#), 17 December 2012