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Cambodia: Release of 13 women a victory for their community

Today's decision by Cambodia's Appeal Court to release 13 women imprisoned for peacefully protesting against a forced eviction is a victory for their community, but their convictions must now be overturned, Amnesty International said.

On 24 May, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court sentenced the 13 human rights defenders to two and a half years in prison after an unfair trial. Their arrest followed a peaceful demonstration against the destruction of homes and the forced eviction of thousands of families living around Boeung Kak Lake, in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh.

"We are delighted that the 13 women will be released and reunited with their families and community," said Rupert Abbott, Amnesty International's Cambodia researcher.

"They should not have been arrested in the first place, and their imprisonment has caused unnecessary distress to both them and their families."

"We consider the women's release to be a victory won by the Boeung Kak Lake community. They have not been cowed and have continued to demonstrate peacefully for the women's release, setting an inspirational example for other human rights defenders in Cambodia."

"But Cambodia's Appeal Court should have overturned the women's convictions, not simply suspended the remainder of their sentences and allowed the convictions to stand. The charges against the women were baseless, and their original trial was grossly unfair."

"The convictions of the 13 women must be overturned, and the charges against Ly Chanary and Sao Sarouen, the two Boeung Kak Lake activists released on bail earlier this month, must also be dropped."

"And there should be an investigation into reports of police violence against Boeung Kak Lake community members outside the Appeal Court today" he said.

Notes to Editors

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