

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Cambodia: Women hit hard by wave of forced evictions**

Cambodian women are increasingly at the forefront of the battle against a wave of forced evictions sweeping the country, Amnesty International said today in a new report that urges the government to halt the practice.

Eviction and resistance in Cambodia: Five women tell their stories details, through first-hand testimony, the stories of Hong, Mai, Sophal, Heap and Vanny, women who have faced or continue to resist forced eviction from their homes and land.

“In Cambodia, women are at the forefront of the fight against forced evictions. Many have taken the lead in their communities’ struggle for justice, putting themselves at risk to defend their communities,” said Donna Guest, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Deputy Director.

“The Cambodian authorities must bring about an end to the practice of forced evictions, which contravene international human rights treaties and tear families apart.”

“They must ensure that genuine consultations are held with the people affected, and that residents receive sufficient notice and compensation or adequate housing where there is no alternative to eviction. The government should listen to the women who are trying to protect their homes and families,” she said.

Tens of thousands of people have been forcibly evicted across Cambodia, in both rural and urban areas while Indigenous people face expulsion from their traditional land, including Hong, who tells her story in the report.

Mai, 48, a mother from the province of Oddar Meanchey, in north-west Cambodia, was pregnant in 2009 when she watched her home go up in flames. “My house, possessions, clothes, all went up in smoke. Nothing was left,” she said.

Her house and 118 others in her village, Bos, were bulldozed and burned to the ground by 150 police, military, and others believed to be workers employed by a company that was granted a concession over a large swath of land, including Bos village, for a sugar plantation.

In October 2009, Mai was imprisoned for eight months for violating forestry laws when she travelled to the capital Phnom Penh to complain to the prime minister about the eviction. She was released in June 2010, but only after signing an agreement to relinquish the rights to her land. She now has little to provide for herself and her eight children.

“Women not only face impoverishment from forced eviction but threats and imprisonment when they try to resist, with no protection from the law,” said Donna Guest.

In the Boeung Kak Lake area of central Phnom Penh, nearly 20,000 people have either been evicted from their homes or are at risk of losing them since a commercial development company was granted a 99-year lease in the area in 2007.

Thirty-one year old Vanny helps lead community resistance to the Boeung Kak Lake eviction.

On 11 August 2011, the community achieved a partial victory when the prime minister ordered a portion of land to be handed over to the remaining 800 families for onsite housing in plots with legal ownership.

Vanny said: “A lot of people think that this is the first success of people’s demonstration... it’s a great example for other communities all over the country,” she said. Yet Vanny still feels insecure. “When I leave my house, I don’t know whether I can expect to come home or not.”

Vanny has good reason to be concerned, as she now faces a defamation charge brought by the Municipality of Phnom Penh. In addition, eight more homes on the edge of Boeung Kak Lake were destroyed by bulldozers on 16 September, the families left homeless.

Rapid economic development within a newly privatized land market has seen an increase in forced eviction across Cambodia.

“Tens of thousands of people across Cambodia are unlawfully losing their homes because of the demands of big business,” said Donna Guest.

“The Cambodian government must not sacrifice human rights in the name of economic development.”

Forced eviction often leads to loss of possessions and livelihood, the break up of communities, and a deterioration of a family’s mental and physical wellbeing.

Access to education and health services can be disrupted. Many victims of forced eviction receive inadequate compensation and are resettled in remote areas. Husbands may need to spend long periods of time away from home seeking work, leaving their wives to cope alone.

“The loss of one’s home and community is a traumatic experience for anyone, but women in their role as primary caregivers for their family face a particular burden. Forced evictions also threaten the gains made in reducing poverty in Cambodia over the last 20 years,” said Donna Guest.

### **Background Information**

Amnesty International exposed the Cambodian authorities’ systematic failure to protect people from forced evictions in a 2008 report.

Forced evictions violate a person’s right to adequate housing, and are banned under international human rights treaties to which Cambodia is a state party.