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Prisoners of conscience

29 June 1999

CAMBODIA

Kim Sen (Kim San)] Human rights
Meas Minear] workers

The two Cambodian human rights workers named above are to go on trial on 8 July 1999, charged with inciting demonstrators to use violence. Their trial is not expected to last more than two days, and if convicted they could face several years in prison. Amnesty International believes the charges against the men are politically motivated, and would consider them prisoners of conscience if they were convicted.

Kim Sen and Meas Minear work for the Cambodian human rights group LICADHO (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights). The charges against them relate to riots in the coastal town of Sihanoukville, where large quantities of toxic waste were imported and dumped by a Taiwanese company in November 1998. When local people became ill and one died, panic spread throughout the area. In December, a protest by local people turned violent and the house of the first deputy governor was attacked. The LICADHO office in Sihanoukville had received many complaints about the toxic waste. Kim Sen and Meas Minear went to monitor the situation on the day of the riots, but were not participating in the demonstration, nor did they organize it.

They were arrested without warrants on 21 December 1998, on the orders of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sar Kheng. After a month in prison they were released on bail by the Appeal Court on 20 January 1999, for lack of evidence against them. There have been many violations of proper procedures in the course of the case, and Amnesty International's own investigation has found no evidence against them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A new Cambodian government was formed in November 1998, after elections held in July. The elections were followed by opposition demonstrations, which were violently dispersed in September 1998. During the demonstrations, human rights workers were involved in monitoring the situation in the capital Phnom Penh. They were heavily criticised by Hun Sen, who is now Prime Minister, and accused of leading the demonstrations and supporting the opposition.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or French or your own language:

- urging that the charges against Kim Sen and Meas Minear be dropped;
- asking the authorities to ensure that human rights workers in Cambodia can go about their legitimate work without fear of arrest and detention.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Hun Sen

Office of the Prime Minister
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

Faxes: +855 23 42 6106 (if voice, ask for fax)

Telegrams: HE Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Salutation: Your Excellency

Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng

Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

Faxes: +855 23 42 6134 (if voice, ask for fax)

Telegrams: HE Sar Kheng, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Salutation: Dear Deputy Prime Minister

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Minister of Justice Ouk Vithun
Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia
Faxes: +855 23 426322
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Cambodia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 August 1999.