

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 23/29/98

UA 314/98

Fear for safety/
possible prisoner of conscience

21 December 1998

CAMBODIA Kim San (m)

Meas Minear (m)

Two human rights workers from LICADHO, the Cambodian League for the Defence of Human Rights, are in detention after observing demonstrations in the coastal town of Sihanoukville. Kim San and Meas Minear were arrested on the morning of 21 December 1998 on the orders of Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng. They were interrogated in court and then transferred to Sihanoukville Prison. They have been denied access to lawyers, human rights workers and their families. Torture and ill-treatment in detention is common in Cambodia and Amnesty International fears for their safety.

Riots broke out in Sihanoukville on 20 December, following the discovery of large quantities of toxic waste there, apparently dumped in Cambodian waters by a Taiwanese company. The house of the first deputy-governor of Sihanoukville was attacked, and a custom house ransacked. The local office of LICADHO had received many complaints about the toxic waste and Kim San and Meas Minear had gone to observe the demonstrations, but according to information received by Amnesty International are likely to be charged with organizing riots.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A new Cambodian government was formed in November, after elections in July. These were followed by opposition demonstrations which were violently dispersed by police in September. 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 of the new government, and accused of leading the demonstrations and supporting the opposition. Several human rights workers received death threats and had to leave the country for their own safety. Amnesty International has evidence of the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment in places of detention in Cambodia; forced confessions obtained under duress are often used as the basis of convictions in Cambodia's courts.

Cambodia has a thriving human rights community with large numbers of local organizations involved in all aspects of human rights work. LICADHO, one of the oldest human rights NGOs, has extensive programs throughout the country, including monitoring human rights violations.

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

- urging that Kim San and Meas Minear are not ill-treated and that they be given immediate access to lawyers, medical personnel and their families;
- urging that, if the men are detained solely for their non-violent monitoring of the riots in Sihanoukville, they be immediately and unconditionally released.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Hun Sen
Office of the Prime Minister
Phnom Penh

Kingdom of Cambodia

Faxes: +855 23 42 6134 (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)

Salutation: Dear Deputy Prime Minister

Mok Mareth

Minister of Environment
Ministry of Environment
48 Preah Sihanouk Blvd
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

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 1 February 1998.

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment"

Article 5 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Visit the Amnesty International UDHR campaign website on <http://www.amnesty.excite.com>