

URGENT ACTION

CAMBODIAN LAND ACTIVIST BEATEN BY POLICE

Cambodian activist Suong Sophorn was severely beaten by police officials as he intervened to stop the destruction of houses in Boeung Kak Lake, Phnom Penh, on 16 September. Around 100 armed riot police and security guards stood by as eight properties were demolished without warning. Another 90 families are at risk of forced eviction.

The forced eviction began when men driving two excavators arrived at the Lake and first reduced the homes of three families to rubble, then moved on to demolish another five more homes and businesses. **Suong Sophorn** began peacefully calling for residents to join hands to stop the destruction of more houses, when he was surrounded by police who kicked and beat him with batons, and hit him on the head with a brick. He was left lying unconscious and bleeding. He was taken to hospital with a serious head wound and a broken finger. He has previously been targeted by the authorities for peacefully opposing forced evictions at Boeung Kak Lake.

Some residents whose homes were affected were able to retrieve their belongings before the houses were destroyed; others lost everything. Some have now erected tarpaulin tents over the rubble of their homes for shelter, as they have nowhere else to go. It is feared that around 90 other families are at risk of being forcibly evicted.

There are only 779 out of some 4,000 families who remain living in the Boeung Kak Lake area. The others have either accepted inadequate compensation or resettled to a site 20km away, following a campaign of threats and intimidation since work began to fill the lake with sand in August 2008. On 11 August, the prime minister authorized 12.44 hectares of land within the Boeung Kak Lake development area to be handed over to the remaining 779 families for onsite housing in plots with legal ownership. However, the Municipality of Phnom Penh has excluded 96 families in villages 6, 22 and 24, which it claims do not live within the 12.44 hectares. This interpretation of the prime minister's order appears to be flawed and arbitrary. The families whose homes and businesses were destroyed on 16 September are among these 96 excluded households.

Please write immediately in English, Khmer or your own language:

- Urge the authorities to bring to justice those police officials responsible for the beating of Suong Sophorn and ensure that he receives proper medical care for his injuries;
- Call on the authorities to stop any further forced evictions of the remaining Boeung Kak Lake residents;
- Call on the authorities to ensure that all the remaining 779 families are given housing plots and legal ownership according to the prime minister's order.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 OCTOBER 2011 TO:

Governor

Phnom Penh Municipality
Kep Chuktema
#69 Blvd. Preah Monivong
Khan Daun Penh
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: + 855 23 725 626
Email: info@phnompenh.gov.kh
Salutation: **Your Excellency**

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister

Interior
Sar Kheng
#75 Norodom Blvd
Khan Chamkarmon
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: + 855 23 721 905
Email: moi@interior.gov.kh
Salutation: **Your Excellency**

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs and
International Cooperation
Hor Nam Hong
No 3 Samdech Hun Sen Street
Sangkat Tonle Bassac
Khan Chamcar Mon
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: + 855 23 216 141

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 63/11. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA23/001/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since filling of Boeung Kak lake began, police and company workers have threatened and harassed the residents, and attempted to prevent them from holding meetings and from peacefully protesting against the forced eviction. In October 2010, police used unnecessary force, including electric batons, to break up a peaceful protest by Boeung Kak Lake villagers during the visit of the UN Secretary-General. Resident and young activist Suong Sophorn was beaten unconscious and detained by police until the departure of the Secretary-General. He had previously been arrested and fined in 2009 for painting "Stop Eviction" on his house.

According to the Municipality of Phnom Penh, the 133 hectares leased to Shukaku Inc are to be turned into "pleasant, trade, and service places for domestic and international tourists", but beyond that few details have been disclosed. The agreement between the company and municipality was reached without any consultation with the affected population. In early 2008 representatives of the people affected told Amnesty International that they had only[?] learnt about the agreement and the plans through the television news.

While the 11 August decision to hand over 12.44 hectares of the land for onsite housing is welcome, this decision comes too late for the thousands of families who have already been adversely affected and lost their homes and livelihoods without proper consultation or procedures in accordance with international law.

The forced eviction of residents living around Boeung Kak Lake has been under further scrutiny because of a case brought to the World Bank by the community and three NGOs. This case alleges that the residents were denied the opportunity to register their claims to land ownership under the World Bank administered Land Management and Administration Project (LMAP) which was designed to provide land titles throughout Cambodia.

Thousands of people around Cambodia are adversely affected by forced evictions, land grabs and land disputes, some in connection with economic land concessions granted to powerful companies and individuals. Increasing numbers of communities and individuals are protesting and petitioning the authorities in defense of their right to housing.

Cambodia is a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR) and other international human rights treaties which prohibit forced eviction and related human rights violations, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR). The government therefore has an obligation to stop forced evictions and to protect the population from forced evictions.

Forced evictions are evictions carried out without adequate notice and consultation with those affected, without legal safeguards and without assurances of adequate alternative accommodation.

Name: Suong Sophorn
Gender m/f: Male

Further information on UA: 63/11 Index: ASA 23/008/2011 Issue Date: 19 September 2011