

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety

09 February 2004

CAMBODIA

Vieng Thi Hong, 20 (f)
Nguyen Thi Noeung, (f), her mother

Vieng Thi Hong was arrested by police at her home in Prey Veng province on 9 February. It is thought that she has been taken to the capital, Phnom Penh, for questioning. Her connection a high-profile murder case places her at serious risk of ill-treatment in custody, and Amnesty International is gravely concerned for her safety.

Vieng Thi Hong lives in village 6, Prek Sai Kar commune, Peam Ro district, and is the girlfriend of Born Samnang, who was arrested on 28 January 2004 in Prey Veng for the 22 January murder of prominent trade unionist Chea Vichea. She was arrested at the same time, but released two days later. She and her mother, Nguyen Thi Noeung, have provided Born Samnang with a credible alibi which places him outside Phnom Penh at the time of the murder, according to the English-language *Cambodia Daily* newspaper of 9 February.

Amnesty International has serious concerns about the conduct of the police investigation into the murder of Chea Vichea. Born Samnang confessed one day after he had publicly proclaimed his innocence, and complained of police brutality used to force him to confess to the crime. His fellow suspect Sok Sam Oeun, 36, also publicly complained at the same police press conference broadcast on television on 29 January of having been beaten by the authorities to confess. Both men have been paraded in public confessing their guilt, and UN and human rights workers have not been given any access to them.

Vieng Thi Hong is of Vietnamese ethnicity. Cambodia has a long tradition of anti-Vietnamese sentiment. This and the alleged police misconduct in the Chea Vichea case have heightened concern for her safety, and for that of her mother

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Chea Vichea, human rights defender and President of the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia, had received death threats in the months leading up to his shooting, as had other anti-government activists. His assassination, in broad daylight in a crowded Phnom Penh street, by two men on a motorbike, marks a serious escalation in political violence during the present constitutional crisis and political stalemate.

National elections were held in July 2003. The Cambodian People's Party, led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, won the largest number of votes, but not sufficient to form a government. Negotiations to form a new government with the two other political parties who won votes, FUNCINPEC and the Sam Rainsy Party, have been difficult and increasingly tense. No agreement has been reached on the formulation for a new government.

Chea Vichea's murder led to widespread international criticism. His death and subsequent police investigation has led to a climate of fear in Phnom Penh and widespread doubt about the validity of the investigation process, and treatment of the suspects.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern for the welfare and safety of Vieng Thi Hong and Nguyen Thi Ngoeun;
- urging the authorities to immediately reveal the whereabouts Vieng Thi Hong;

- urging the authorities to allow her access to UN and NGO human rights monitors, her family, independent legal counsel and proper medical treatment, in accordance with international human rights standards;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Vieng Thi Hong is not ill-treated while in police custody;
- reminding the Cambodian authorities that confessions made under duress have no validity in law, as detailed in Article 15 of the Convention against Torture, to which they are a state party;
- calling on the authorities to release Vieng Thi Hong unless she is accused of a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

Please note faxes may be switched off outside office hours. Cambodia is GMT +7

Prime Minister Hun Sen
Office of the Prime Minister
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

Telegram: Prime Minister, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: + 855 23 88 10 45 (c/o Council of Ministers)
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Sar Kheng
Deputy Prime Minister & Co-Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
275 Norodom Blvd
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

Telegram: Interior Minister, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: + 855 23 21 27 08
Salutation: Dear Minister

Om Yentieng
Minister & President of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee
Office of the Prime Minister
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

Telegram: President Cambodian Human Rights Committee, Phnom Penh,, Cambodia
Fax: +855 23 21 11 62 or +855 23 88 10 45 (c/o Council of Ministers)
Salutation: Dear Minister

Niev Sithong
Minister of Justice
14 blvd Sothearos
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

Telegram: Justice Minister, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: + 855 23 21 63 22 or + 855 23 36 41 19
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Hor Nam Hong
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister of Foreign Affairs
161 Preah Sisowath Quay
cnr rue 204
Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia

Telegram: Minister Foreign Affairs, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
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and 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 22 March 2004.