

URGENT ACTION

WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS RELEASED

Thirteen women human rights defenders from the Boeung Kak Lake community in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, were released from prison on 27 June. Cambodia's Appeal Court suspended the remainder of their two-and-a-half year prison sentences, but upheld their convictions. Police used violence against other members of the community waiting outside the court for the verdict, causing some injuries.

On 24 May, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court sentenced the 13 human rights defenders to two and a half years in prison after a grossly unfair trial. Their arrest followed a peaceful demonstration protesting the destruction of homes and the forced eviction of thousands of families living around Boeung Kak Lake. They were prisoners of conscience.

At the Appeal Court hearing on 27 June, no evidence was produced against the women, and three out of four defence witnesses were denied access to the court. The court decided to uphold the convictions, but suspend the remainder of the sentences for the women because of their responsibilities as mothers and grandmothers. They had already served one month and three days. Although their release is welcome, the 13 women - **Chan Navy, Cheng Leap, Heng Mom, Kong Chantha, Nget Khun, Ngoun Kimlang, Bov Sopea, Phan Chhunreth, Soung Samai, Song Srey Leap, Tep Vanny, Tho Davy, and Tol Srey Pov** – are now at risk of re-arrest for any future activities they may engage in to protect the housing rights of all the Boeung Kak Lake families. Two other protesters, **Ly Chanary** and **Sao Sarouen**, who were held in pre-trial detention from 24 May on related charges, were released on bail on 15 June. The charges against them are still pending.

Riot police blocked community residents who came to support the women from reaching the court. Local NGOs report that a police officer kicked a pregnant woman, resulting in the loss of her unborn child, and that 11 community members including seven children were beaten by police and needed medical treatment.

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

- Welcome the release of the 13 Boeung Kak Lake human rights defenders;
- Call for their convictions to be overturned, as they never should have been arrested in the first place;
- Call for the charges against Ly Chanary and Sao Saroeun to be dropped;
- Demand an immediate, independent investigation into the police violence which resulted in injuries to Boeung Kak Lake community members outside Cambodia's Appeal Court on 27 June, and for those responsible to be held accountable.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 AUGUST 2012 TO:

Deputy Prime Minister and

Minister of Interior

Sar Kheng

75 Norodom Blvd.

Khan Chamkarmon

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Fax: + 855 23 426 585

Salutation: Your Excellency

Governor of Phnom Penh Municipality

Kep Chuktema

69 Blvd. Preah Monivong

Khan Daun Penh

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Fax: + 855 23 430 681

Email: info@phnompenh.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 insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 148/12 Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA23/007/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the arrest and imprisonment of the 13 women human rights defenders, the Boeung Kak Lake community has campaigned tirelessly for their release, holding almost daily public events and presenting petitions to various Cambodian authorities, as well as to diplomatic representatives in Phnom Penh. The women's release is a victory won by their community.

Thousands of people have been forcibly evicted from their homes on and around Boeung Kak Lake in Phnom Penh since 2007, when the land was leased to a company for development. The residents were subjected to harassment and threats to accept inadequate compensation or relocation to a place far from work opportunities and lacking basic services and infrastructure. Women were at the forefront of campaigning to remain in their homes.

In August 2011, the Prime Minister allocated 12.44 hectares of the land for onsite housing for the more than 900 families who remained. In implementing this order, the Phnom Penh Municipality has excluded around 90 families, claiming that their homes do not fall within the designated area. Since then more than 600 families have received land titles, but protests continue for those who have been excluded.

Security forces have used increasing levels of violence against peaceful protesters during recent months in Cambodia. Human rights defenders and land activists are harassed and face imprisonment on spurious charges.

Thousands of people across Cambodia are adversely affected by forced evictions, land grabs and land disputes, many in connection with economic land concessions granted to powerful companies and individuals. Forced evictions are evictions carried out without adequate notice and consultation with those affected, without legal safeguards and without assurances of adequate alternative accommodation.

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

Names: **Chan Navy, Cheng Leap, Heng Mom, Kong Chantha, Nget Khun, Ngoun Kimlang, Bov Sopea, Phan Chhunreth, Soung Samai, Song Srey Leap, Tep Vanny, Tho Davy, Tol Srey Pov, Ly Chanary, Sao Saroeun**

Gender m/f: All female except Sao Saroeun

Further information on UA: 148/12 Index: ASA 23/012/2012 Issue Date: 28 June 2012