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Human Rights Now

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Cambodia

HRN express deep concern over the charge against prominent human rights defender, Mr. Chan Soveth

Human Rights Now (HRN), a Tokyo-based international human rights NGO expresses deep concern over the political motivated charges against Mr. Chan Soveth, a prominent human rights defender in Cambodia and a senior investigator of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association(ADHOC), which has been dedicating promotion and protection of human rights for the people in Cambodia with peaceful manner since 1995.

On May 16, 2012, at Broma village in Kratie province, an innocent 14-year-old-girl was shot dead by armed forces and polices aimed to oppress and arrest the residents who opposed the forced eviction. However, the Cambodian government and provincial authorities has yet to take any responsibility on the killing. Instead, authorities assert that villagers in Broma village were planning to secede from Cambodia and create their own state, without reasonable grand. Subsequently, the authority arrested Mam Sanando, the leader of Democratic Association(DA) for aiding these movements.

On June 2012, HRN has sent fact finding mission to Kratie on June 2012 to investigate the human rights violations relating to land disputes including the extrajudicial killing over 14-years-old-girl. Mr. Soveth was the one of the ADHOC members who accompanied with the HRN fact finding team. Mr. Soveth and HRN conducted interview with the family of the 14-years-old-girl, and had meeting with the judge and governor in Kratie aiming to have constructive dialogue toward the peaceful solution of the land dispute. In this regard, HRN was highly surprised the above charge against Mr. Soveth.

According to a Joint-Organization press release of Cambodian human rights NGOs, the summons was issued less than two weeks after a nationally-televised speech by the Prime Minister in which he implored an unnamed NGO worker to “confess” for his role in aiding the Kratie villagers. During the speech, the Prime Minister turned to his staff and asked “Has he been called for questioning? Not yet? Not yet called ...” Records indicate that the criminal case against Soveth was opened a mere 48 hours after the Prime Minister’s speech. Under the circumstances, HRN has strong doubt that this charge is a politically motivated threat against human rights defender by the authority.

In Cambodia, under the name of “Economic Land Concession”, land development has been going on.

However, in the course of land concession, the residents who has been living and cultivating the land for years are being subjected to the forced eviction and lost their house and livelihood. The sacrifice of residents of forced eviction has become serious year by year, and thus, the protest against forced eviction has become widespread phenomena in Cambodia.

According to Cambodian law(Land Law and Civil Code), the householder who continuously possesses the land for a long period shall have the right of ownership and possession itself shall be protected by the law. According to the law, the land concessions failing to have prior consultation with local residents shall be invalid, and the forced evictions that are carried out without procedural guarantee is illegal.

The Cambodian government shall reconsider the land policy in depth based on the legitimate complaints among residents. However, instead of listening to people's voice, the Cambodian Government often takes oppressive measures, such as arbitrary arrest, detention, use of force and ultimately, extralegal killing. The situation has became worse in 2012.

In the Kratie province, the villagers protested to an ongoing land dispute with a company "Casotim" which was granted economic land concession against the 2001 Land Law .Labeling the citizen's movement to protect the land as "secession movement" and putting criminal charge against human rights defender for his work to protect people's land rights is a grave challenge against the human rights activities in Cambodia as a whole.

Mr. Soveth has been summoned to appear for questioning in Phnom Penh Municipal Court on Aug. 24 at 8 a.m. HRN requests the Phnom Penh Municipal Court to maintain its independence in this case, to guarantee rights to fair trial and due process in accordance with the national and international law, and to adhere the principle of the presumption of innocence.

Further, HRN call on the executive branch not to interfere with the judicial process.

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Human Rights Now ~Protecting Human Rights for All~

Human Rights Now is a Tokyo based international human rights NGO comprising a body of experienced legal professionals dedicated to protecting and promoting human rights around the world, with a special focus on Asia. The activity includes monitoring/ fact-finding of human rights, human rights education and advocacy work.
