



CCHR Human Rights Defenders Alert – Phnom Penh, 3 July 2023

11 land activists were arrested in Koh Kong Province for attempting to submit a petition to the Ministry of Justice

Date of the incident: 29 – 30 June 2023
Category of HRD: Land activists
Location: Koh Kong Provinces
Nature of threat: Freedom of Assembly

At around 11 am on 29 June 2023, the Koh Kong Province's Sre Ambel district police arrested 11 land activists who were attempting to reach the Ministry of Justice to submit a petition seeking its intervention. The petition requested that the Koh Kong Provincial Court drop all the charges that were brought against their community members over their land rights activism, and called for legal action against those who violated their land rights. The activists are Phav Nheung, Deth Hour, Reuk Seung, Heng Chey, Sok Chey, Lam Cheav, Seng Lin, Yoeurn Khmao, Yi Kunthea, Tin Tang, and Sourn Theng. All are members of three communities composed of 197, 175, and 80 families which have been struggling with a land dispute since 2006. One of the detained activists was accompanied by her seven-year-old girl, who was also taken alongside her mother.

Immediately after their arrest, the activists were sent to the Sre Ambel police station for questioning. They were then taken to the Koh Kong provincial police commissioner for further interrogation, which lasted until around 1 am on 30 June 2023, according to one activist. One of the activists was eventually released at this stage, while the others were sent to the Koh Kong Provincial Court for further proceedings in the morning on 30 June 2023. The Court charged Phav Nheung, Deth Hour, Heng Chey, Sok Chey, Lam Cheav, Seng Lin, Yoeurn Khmao, Yi Kunthea, Tin Tang, and Sourn Theng with “incitement to commit a felony” and sent them to pre-trial detention at the Koh Kong provincial prison.

The activist who had brought her seven-year-old daughter with her was released on bail. She was placed under judicial supervision, and has to comply with the following requirements or face arrest: she cannot change her residential address, she has to respond to the summons of the investigating judge, and she has to appear before the investigating judge every two months. It is worth noting that Phav Nheung's 18-month-old son, who had followed her to the Court on 30 June 2023, was staying in prison alongside the activist at the time of drafting.

On 1 July 2023, the Koh Kong provincial prison prevented the families of the detained activists from seeing them, arguing there was an infectious outbreak in the prison. They were, however, allowed to leave food for their relatives.

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