



PRESS RELEASE – Phnom Penh, 11 February 2016

CCHR publishes report entitled “Access to Collective Land Titles for Indigenous Communities in Cambodia” and calls for the protection of indigenous land rights

[The Cambodian Center for Human Rights](#) (“CCHR”) has today – 11 February 2016 – published a report entitled, “Access to Collective Land Titles for Indigenous Communities in Cambodia” (the “Report”). The Report is available for download from CCHR’s website in [English](#) and [Khmer](#). The Report is the outcome of research conducted by CCHR’s Land Reform Project on the experiences of indigenous communities and their engagement with the process to obtain collective land titles (“CLTs”) in an attempt to formally protect their traditional lands.

While collective land ownership is recognized in theory in Cambodia, the indigenous population is losing their land at an alarming rate due to outside interests, including large-scale logging of forests and resource extraction, infrastructure projects, land concessions and encroachment by newcomers. Of Cambodia’s 458 indigenous communities, only 11 have received CLTs to date.

This Report seeks to examine the obstacles to registration of collective land for indigenous communities in Cambodia and highlight the shortcomings in the implementation of the CLT process. The Report reveals the astounding complexity of the CLT process that makes it near impossible for communities to complete without sustained external assistance. The Report also reveals numerous pressures faced by indigenous communities throughout the CLT process, such as intimidation, judicial harassment, and pressure to accept private land titles.

Finally, the Report offers concrete recommendations for those with an interest in the CLT process, to promote better implementation of collective land registration and thereby ensure greater land tenure security for Cambodia’s indigenous communities. CCHR strongly urges the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) to accelerate the allocation of CLTs by strengthening the capacity of relevant institutions and allocating an adequate budget for each stage of the process; amend interim protective measures so they guarantee tenure security throughout the process; and disseminate information on how to obtain CLTs to communities and local authorities.

In addition, CCHR, reminds companies operating on or near to indigenous lands to comply with domestic and international law, and to avoid causing human rights violations; urges fellow non-governmental organizations and development partners to increase cooperation and provide technical and practical support to government and communities; and finally, encourages indigenous communities to strengthen community cohesion.

The importance of land for indigenous communities cannot be overstated; not only does land sustain their livelihoods, but it’s also intrinsically linked to indigenous identity, carrying major

spiritual significance as a connection to ancestors and natural spirits. Thus, the loss of indigenous lands threatens the very existence of Cambodia's indigenous communities. As one indigenous community representative revealed to CCHR: *"When we are evicted from here, everything regarding our identity will disappear. Our culture and tradition relies on this land. We will become ordinary Khmer people, we will no longer be [indigenous] Chornng."*

CCHR Land Reform Project Coordinator Mr. Vann Sophath comments:

"CCHR's research reveals the process to obtain formal protection of indigenous lands is beset by a vast array of problems including inefficiency, corruption, and a general lack of political will. Thus, it can take several years for communities to obtain CLTs; such delays often have disastrous consequences, as traditional lands are fast disappearing to outside interests in the interim. While the current situation for indigenous communities is certainly bleak, if a concerted effort is made by all involved there may be hope for Cambodia's indigenous communities yet. I sincerely hope that all stakeholders take into consideration the Report's recommendations to improve the situation of indigenous land rights in Cambodia. Ultimately however, the onus lies on the RGC; if the government is serious about protecting indigenous lands they will accelerate the entire process and make the provision of CLTs for indigenous communities a priority, before it is too late."

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Notes to the Editor:

CCHR, founded in November 2002, is a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights throughout Cambodia.

CCHR is a member of International Freedom of Expression Exchanges (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression. CCHR is also a member of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) SOS-Torture Network.

The Cambodian Human Rights Portal www.sithi.org is the 2011 winner of the Information Society Innovation Fund Award in the category of Rights and Freedoms and the 2013 winner of the Communication for Social Change Award, awarded by the Centre of Communication and Social Change at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.