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PRESS RELEASE

Cambodia: Eleven human rights defenders jailed

Bangkok-Geneva-Paris-Phnom Penh, November 13, 2014. *The Cambodian Government must end the repression of land rights defenders and immediately release those imprisoned on November 11-12, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, an FIDH-OMCT joint programme, said today.*

“The government’s latest wave of repression of peaceful protests is extremely troubling. Under no circumstances should an individual be put in jail for a year for demonstrating over the authorities’ inaction to prevent floods,” said FIDH President Karim Lahidji.

On 11 November 2014, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court sentenced seven women, all human rights defenders from the Boeung Kak Lake community, to a year in prison and a two-million riel (about US\$500) fine after finding them guilty on charges of obstructing public traffic under Article 78 of the Traffic Law.

The seven women human rights defenders were identified as **Nget Khun, Tep Vanny, Song Srey Leap, Kong Chantha, Phan Chhunreth, Po Chorvy, and Nong Sreng**. They are currently detained in Prey Sar Correctional Center 2 Prison in Phnom Penh.

On 10 November, mixed security forces arrested the seven women in front of Phnom Penh City Hall after the group had placed a bed frame in the middle of Monivong Boulevard. The peaceful protest was designed to draw attention to the chronic and severe flooding of their neighborhood during the rainy season. Residents blame the flooding on the filling-in of Boeung Kak Lake by Shukaku, a housing construction company owned by Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) Senator Lao Meng Khin. The protesters also demanded that local authorities immediately fix inadequate drainage in the neighborhood.

Nget Khun, Tep Vanny, Song Sreyleap, Kong Chantha, and Phan Chhunreth had previously been jailed for more than a month in May 2012 on charges of obstructing public officials and illegally occupying land when they protested against forced evictions in Boeung Kak Lake to make way for the development project implemented by Shukaku.

On the morning of 11 November, authorities detained four other persons – three women land rights activists **Heng Pich, Im Srey Touch, and Phoung Sopheap** and Buddhist monk **Seung Hai** from Stung Meanchey Pagoda – who gathered outside of Phnom Penh Municipal Court to protest the arrest of the seven women. On 12 November, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court sentenced all four to a year in prison and a two-million riel (about US\$500) fine on charges of aggravated obstruction of public officials under Article 504 of the Criminal Code.

“If the imprisonment of the seven women activist is deplorable, the incarceration of the other four three women and the monk for protesting a day later is even more shocking,” said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock. ***“The government must immediately and unconditionally release them.”***

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