

Date: March 14th 2020

Joint Statement on the Detention of Mr. Ouch Leng, Head of Cambodian Human Rights Task Force, and Three Other Environmental Activists

The undersigned environmental activists, associations and non-government organizations working on human rights and environmental issues strongly condemn the company Think Biotech Co., Ltd for using private security guards in the detention without reason of four environmental activists, including, Mr. Ouch Leng, head of the non-government organization Cambodian Human Rights Task Force. Mr Ouch was awarded the 2016 Goldman Environmental Prize. The other three activists are Mr. Khem Soky, Mr. Srey Thei, both from the Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN) and Mr. Men Mat, who was physically assaulted by company workers while inside the company compound. The four were held inside the company compound before being sent to the police inspectorate at Sambor district, Kratie province.

Around 9 am, March 13, 2020, all four were detained by Think Biotech security guards and brought into the company at a site called 'Dombouk Sor', in Romoul village, Sambor district, Kratie province. They were questioned and were not allowed to leave or to have any contact with anyone. It wasn't until 4:00 pm that we were informed how the four of them had already been handed over to the police inspectorate at Sambo District.

The day before, all four of them above travelled by motorbike to monitor and investigate illegal logging in Prey Lang forest, Kratie province. That same evening, they decided to spend the night in the Dombouk Sor community, Romoul village, next to a gate belonging to Think Biotech. The next morning, on March 13, around 9am, a group of company-linked security guards approached them and brought the four of them into the company. In addition, environmental activist Man Mat is reported to have been physically assaulted by two company workers.

The detention of the four environmental activists through the use of Think Biotech security guards represents an abuse of power, that the detention of the four activists goes contrary to Cambodia's code of criminal procedure, and that the company must be held responsible for the use of violence against Mr. Man Mat.

Up until the afternoon of March 14th the four had not yet been released and were still being held at Sambo district police station. We see this ongoing detention as a threat to environmental and forest activists who are peacefully monitoring and reporting on deforestation activities in Prey Lang and other forested areas, thus exercising their rights enshrined in the Constitution of Cambodia and the Law on Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Management, both of which encourage the public to actively participate in the protection of the country's environment and natural resources.

All of us acknowledge and appreciate the work and heroism of Mr. Ouch Leng and the other three forest activists in protecting our forest through the monitoring and reporting of forest crimes in Cambodia. They have made a significant contribution to forest protection and conservation, combatting climate change and protection of biodiversity in line with sustainable development goals (SDGs). Once more, we call upon Sambor police to ensure the safety of the four activists and to release them without conditions. We also call for an investigation to be conducted on the irregularities behind the detention of the four activists by Think Biotech and to search for the two perpetrators as well as any other involved individuals who reportedly assaulted Mr. Men Mat so that they are brought to justice and so that the rights of the victims are respected.

For More Information:

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This statement is endorsed by:

1. Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN)
2. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
3. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
4. Cambodian Coalition Farmer Community (CCFC)
5. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC)
6. Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (COMFREL)
7. Cambodian Human Rights Center (CCHR)
8. Not1More (N1M)
9. Mother Nature Cambodia
10. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
11. Cambodian Food and Services Worker's Federation (CFSWF)
12. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
13. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
14. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Union (CATU)
15. Rural Cambodian Technological Support Organization (RCT)
16. Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)
17. Thavara Khmer Youth
18. Dr. Lao Mong Hay
19. Youth Resources Development Program (YRDP)
20. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)
21. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
22. Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID)
23. Independent Student Network – NICET
24. Khmer Student Intelligent League Association (KSILA)