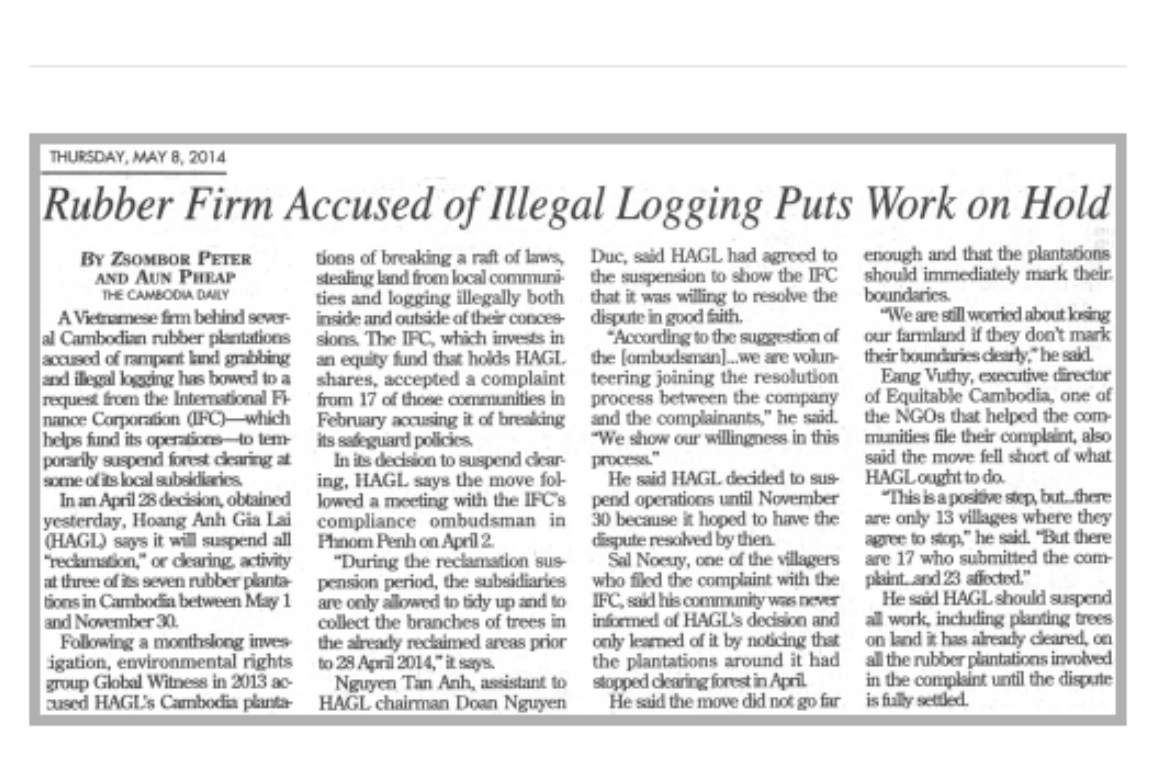
Archives: Rubber Plantation

8 MAY

IMAGE

Rubber Firm Accused of Illegal Logging Puts Work on Hold



THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2014

Rubber Firm Accused of Illegal Logging Puts Work on Hold

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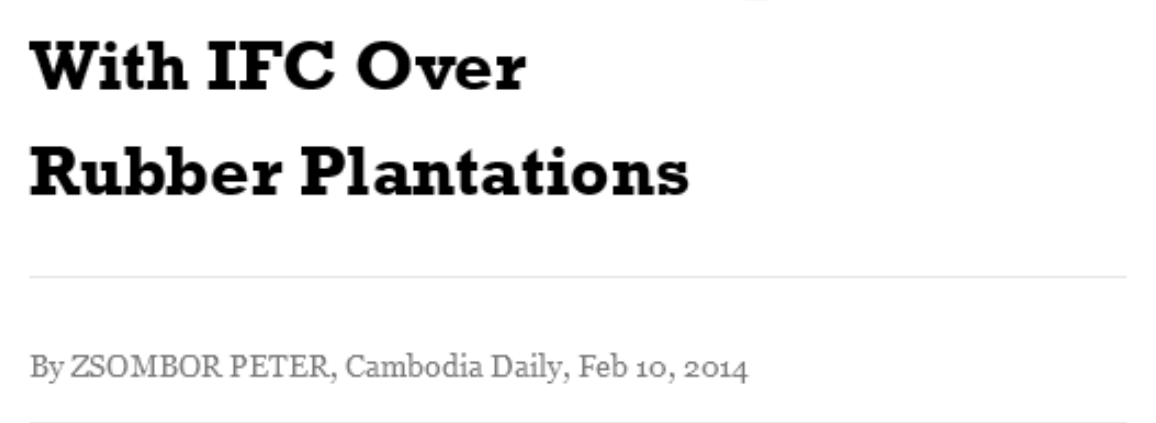
10 FEB

Families to File Complaint With IFC Over Rubber Plantations

By ZSOMBOR PETER, Cambodia Daily, Feb 10, 2014



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2014

Families to File Complaint With IFC Over Rubber Plantations

By Zsombor Peter
The Cambodia Daily

Some of the hundreds of families losing land and community forest to Vietnamese-owned rubber plantations in Cambodia's northeast will this week file a complaint with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) over the investment it has made in the plantations' parent company.

Eang Vuthy, executive director of Equitable Cambodia, one of several NGOs working with the affected families, said the complaint would be filed with the IFC's compliance adviser ombudsman today or tomorrow.

The IFC's interests in Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL) was first revealed by the U.K. environmental watchdog group Global Witness in May, at the end of a months-long investigation concluding that investments by both the IFC and Deutsche Bank were helping to finance illegal logging and land grabbing by the firm's many rubber plantations here.

According the Global Witness, the IFC at the time had $15 million invested in a Vietnamese fund holding nearly 5 percent equity in HAGL.

By November, Deutsche Bank had dumped most of its stake in HAGL. The IFC has not.

Mr. Vuthy said the complaint accuses the IFC, the private sector lending arm of the World Bank Group, of breaking its own policies meant to guarantee that its investments are used ethically.

"Based on IFC policy, they have to monitor their policies, and the company [HAGL] has to comply with these policies," he said.

But rather than seeing the IFC simply divest as Deutsche Bank did, the families want it to use its financial stake in HAGL to pressure the plantations into returning their farms and to stop forest clearing and land grabbing.

"We want them to help stop the clearing and to try to facilitate dialogue between the communities, the company and the IFC," Mr. Vuthy said. "Some of the communities are in the middle of the [plantations], so it's a really bad situation."

Immediately after the Global Witness report, the IFC in its defense said that it preferred investing in funds, like the one invested in HAGL, rather than individual firms in part because the risk that came with funds was easier to manage. The IFC also said it would study the report as part of its ongoing monitoring of the fund.

HAGL has denied any wrongdoing on the part of its plantations in Cambodia.

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26 JAN

University expands its faculty for rubber

May Kunmakara, Phnom Penh Post, Jan. 26 2012

Following rising yields from plantations and growing demand from global markets, rubber will receive its own faculty at the Royal University of Agriculture (RUA) by mid-year, officials said.

The initiative had been proposed by the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Chan Sarun last year to coordinate with the sharp expansion of rubber plantations in recent years, according to the officials.

"We noticed local and foreign investment companies who maintained rubber plantations were getting year-on-year yield increases to go along with the increasing global consumption, but our human resources to serve that area were lagging," RUA rector Ngo Bun Than said.

A rubber faculty already existed at RUA, but previously was small, according to Ngo Bun Than. It now requires a separate faculty in order to become specialised in the industry, he said, adding that he had already drafted the curriculum after meeting with experts.

He said he expects the program to launch mid-year.

Cambodia hopes to transform itself into one of the top 11 major rubber producers in the Association of Natural Rubber Producing Countries (ANRPC) in the next few years, according to statements from officials to the Post last December.

Ly Phalla, director general of the General Directorate of Rubber, could not be reached for comment. He previously said the Cambodian government's goal is to eventually increase total plantation area to 300,000 hectares, which will produce around 290,000 tonnes by 2020. Total hectares in 2010 were 181,400.

Lim Sunleang, owner of the Memot Rubber Plantation in Kampong Cham province, said he supported the decision for a new rubber faculty.

"That's good for the development of human resources for these expanding rubber plantations … because right now we have a shortage of human resources and experts in the field," he said.

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23 JAN

2011 rubber prices surge 132 per cent on demand

Sieam Bunthy, Phnom Penh Post, Jan. 23 2012

Cambodia's 2011 rubber exports and export prices grew by 55 per cent and 131 per cent respectively, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce obtained by the Post. The data shows rubber exports last year totalled 46,727 tonnes, compared to 30,040 tonnes in 2010. Export prices also rose to $200.9 million from US$86.76 million in 2010. Last year's surge was primarily due to rising foreign demand and larger production hauls, Ly Phalla, general director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' rubber department, said last week.

This rapid increase was not expec-ted to become a trend, he said. "The world's demand for rubber in 2012 is predicted to exceed that in 2011 by only 5.5 per cent due to a recovering Cambodian economy and slowed production in other fields," Ly Phalla said. Exports will continue to grow, he said, albeit at a slower pace. Mak Kim Hong, president of the Cambodian Rubber Association and the owner of Kampong Cham's Chub Rubber plantation, said his comp-any's rubber exports reached about 12,000 tonnes, exceeding 2010's yield by around 1,000 tonnes. "There are now more rubber trees being planted to add to the benefits," Mak Kim Hong said.

According to Ly Phalla, rubber-tree plantations in 2010 covered 181,450 hectares, increasing by 21 hectares in 2011. By 2020, there would be at least 30 more hectares, he estimated. Ly Phalla said one tonne of rubber currently fetched about $3,300 on the market. Rubber prices had increased for the first nine months of 2011, he added. The Cambodian government is drafting policies concerning the production and processing of rubber, as well as developing plans to increase rubber exports.

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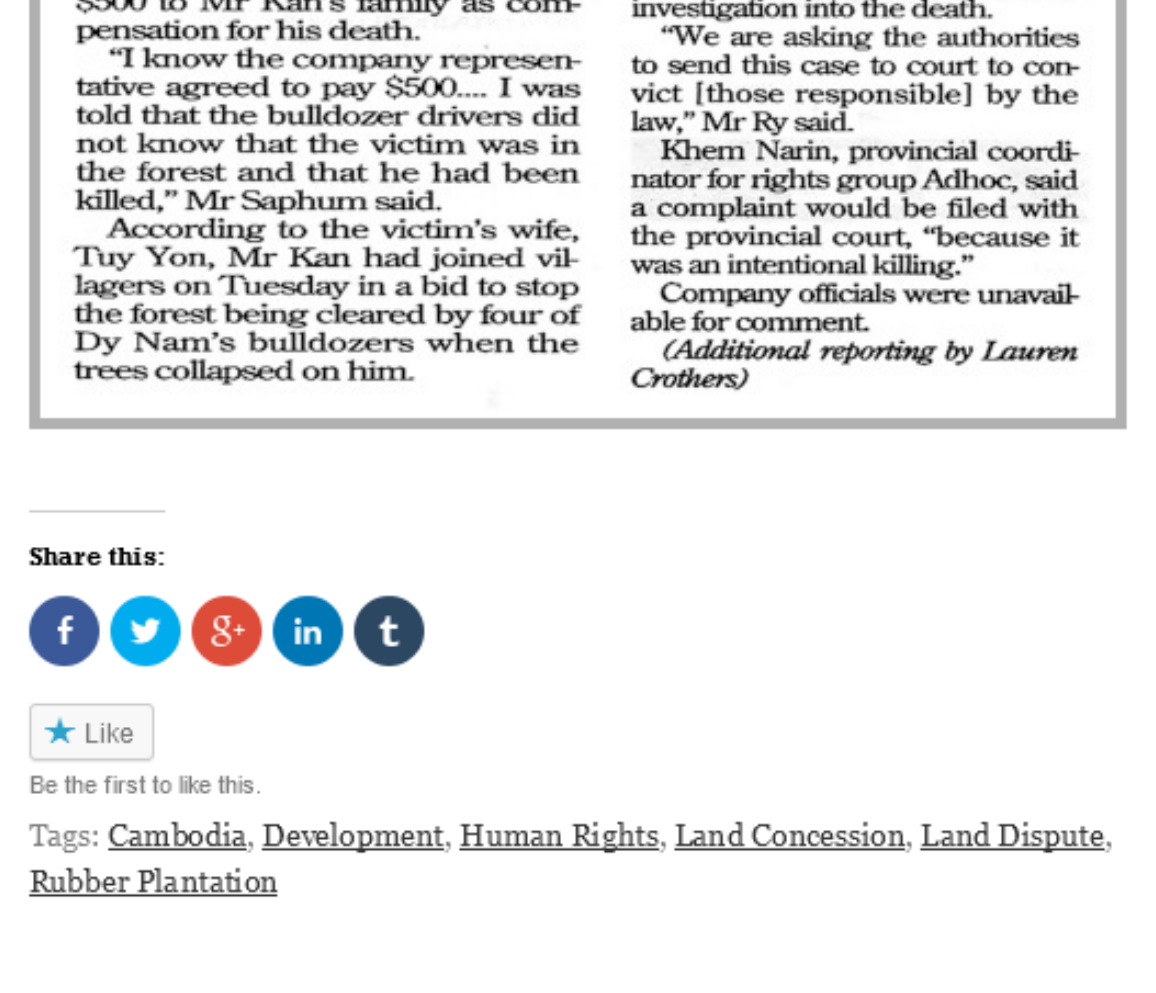
21 NOV

Man Guarding Land Crushed By Buldozer

Eang Mengleng, The Cambodia Daily, Nov. 21 2011



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2011

Man Guarding Land Crushed By Bulldozer

By Eang Mengleng
The Cambodia Daily

A 54-year-old man in Kratie province's Snuol district was crushed to death under trees felled on Tuesday morning by bulldozers belonging to Vietnamese rubber company Dy Nam, an official said.

District governor Iv Saphum said that Khem Kan, a representative of 77 families involved in a land dispute with the company in Khyoem commune, died because he did not leave the forested area after bulldozer operators instructed people in the area to get out of the way as they moved in to clear land for the plantation. He added that the company had offered $500 to Mr Kan's family as compensation for his death.

"I know the company representative agreed to pay $500.... I was told that the bulldozer drivers did not know that the victim was in the forest and that he had been killed," Mr Saphum said.

According to the victim's wife, Tuy Yon, Mr Kan had joined villagers on Tuesday in a bid to stop the forest being cleared by four of Dy Nam's bulldozers when the trees collapsed on him.

"I found his body under the tree in the soil in the afternoon," Ms Yon said. Ms Yon said she was approached by a company representative yesterday, who asked her if she would prefer compensation rather than to file a complaint with the court.

"I need the compensation because I am poor with seven children," Ms Yon said. "He did not ask me how much or when it would be paid."

SRP spokesman Yim Sovann condemned Mr Kan's death and labeled it as "political" and called for a police investigation.

SRP lawmaker for Kratie, Long Ry, joined Mr Sovann's call for an investigation into the death.

"We are asking the authorities to send this case to court to convict [those responsible] by the law," Mr Ry said.

Khem Narin, provincial coordinator for rights group Adhoc, said a complaint would be filed with the provincial court, "because it was an intentional killing."

Company officials were unavailable for comment.

(Additional reporting by Lauren Crothers)

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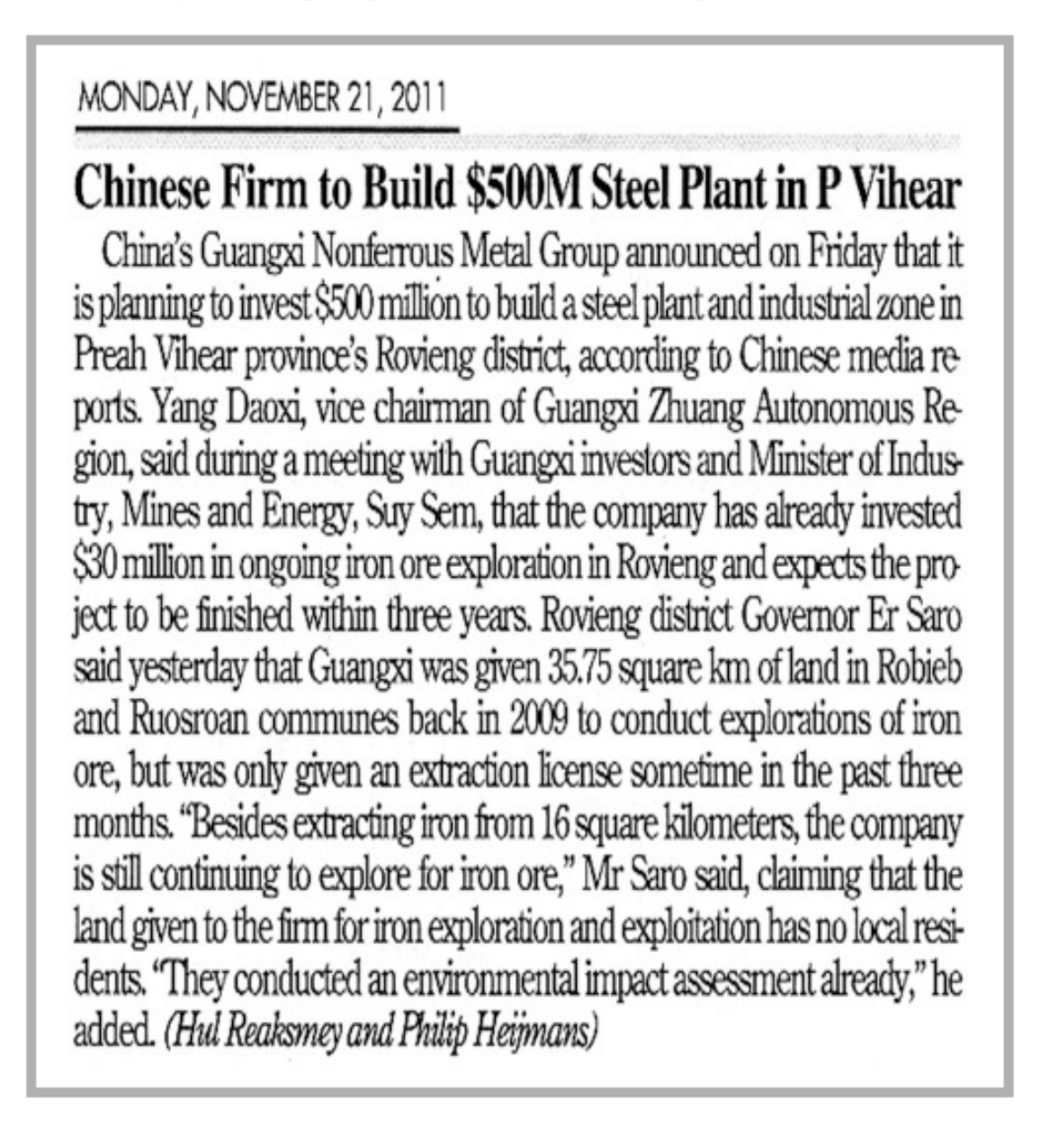
21 NOV

Chinese Firm to Build $500M Steel Plant in P Vihear

Hul Reasmey and Philip Hiejmans, The Cambodia Daily, Nov. 21 2011



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2011

Chinese Firm to Build $500M Steel Plant in P Vihear

China's Guangxi Nonferrous Metal Group announced on Friday that it is planning to invest $500 million to build a steel plant and industrial zone in Preah Vihear province's Rovieng district, according to Chinese media reports. Yang Daoxi, vice chairman of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, said during a meeting with Guangxi investors and Minister of Industry, Mines and Energy, Suy Sem, that the company has already invested $30 million in ongoing iron ore exploration in Rovieng and expects the project to be finished within three years. Rovieng district Governor Er Saro said yesterday that Guangxi was given 35.75 square km of land in Robieb and Ruosroan communes back in 2009 to conduct explorations of iron ore, but was only given an extraction license sometime in the past three months. "Besides extracting iron from 16 square kilometers, the company is still continuing to explore for iron ore," Mr Saro said, claiming that the land given to the firm for iron exploration and exploitation has no local residents. "They conducted an environmental impact assessment already," he added. *(Hul Reaksmey and Philip Heijmans)*

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17 NOV

Land titles sought in Kampong Thom

May Titthara, Phnom Penh Post, Nov. 17 2011

The Kampong Thom provincial governor issued a letter on Tuesday to villagers living in Santuk district, ordering them to provide documentation confirming their ownership of land they reportedly "purchased" from brokers after it had already been assigned to relocated families, officials said yesterday. Deputy district governor Som Vanthorn said about 1,750 families who relocated to Thmor Samleang village, in Kraya commune, in 2009 had received 20m by 40m plots of land for their homes, but that only 77 families of disabled military veterans had received the promised hectare of farmland that was to come with each plot.

Villagers, many of them military veterans, began settling in Kraya commune's Banteay Ragneang village in 2004 and received official recognition as landowners from local authorities in 2005. In 2007, however, the Vietnamese company Tin Bien was awarded an 8,100-hectare land concession for a rubber plantation in the area. Families were evicted in December, 2009 and later offered land in Thmor Samleang village. Som Vanthorn said the letter requested documentation from people, mostly from Phnom Penh , who claimed they had bought the land from brokers.

"We set up a one-month deadline for them. If they do not come to show their documents, we have to withdraw that land and provide it to villagers," he said. Provincial governor Chhun Chhorn said that officials would gather information from villagers claiming ownership of land in Thmor Samleang village and report to the provincial land management committee by December 15. Luon Bunthy, a former resident of Banteay Ragneang village who fled the village to avoid arrest, said he had not received any land because he was afraid police would apprehend him. "Police accused me of burning down an excavator, so I lost my land and also did not get land in exchange, and a lot of families are waiting for farmland," he said. Provincial Licadho monitor Poe Oumoete said at least 11 other families were claiming land ownership in the area.

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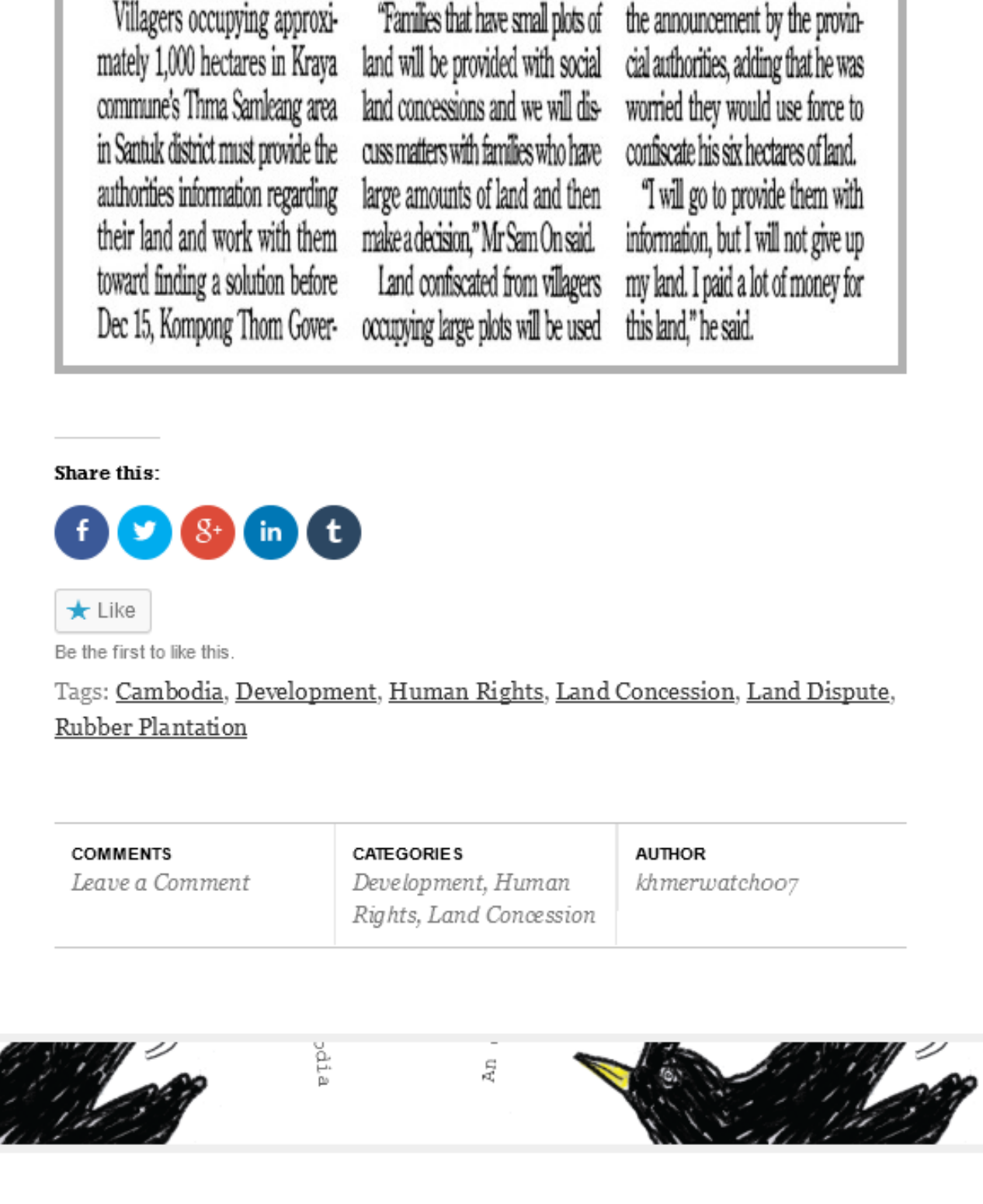
17 NOV

Officials in K Thom Say Villagers Must Cooperate

Chhorn Chansy, The Cambodia Daily, Nov. 17 2011



THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2011

Officials in K Thom Say Villagers Must Cooperate

By Chhorn Chansy
The Cambodia Daily

Authorities in Kompong Thom province have announced that more than 200 families they accuse of illegally occupying state land must report to authorities to discuss the dispute and come to an agreement within the next month.

If the villagers refuse to cooperate, the authorities will automatically seize their land and hand it over to victims of another land dispute, who lost their land in 2009 when they were forced to make way for a rubber plantation.

Villagers occupying approximately 1,000 hectares in Kraya commune's Thma Samleang area in Santuk district must provide the authorities information regarding their land and work with them toward finding a solution before Dec 15, Kompong Thom Governor Chhun Chhorn said in a statement issued on Nov 8.

"When the deadline expires, if you don't come to provide the information and help us solve this issue, the provincial committee for land management will consider your land not in use, and the provincial authority will confiscate it," Mr Chhorn said.

Uch Sam On, provincial deputy governor, said the authorities wanted data on precisely how many families lived on the occupied land, how big their plots were and what kind of crops they grew.

"Families that have small plots of land will be provided with social land concessions and we will discuss matters with families who have large amounts of land and then make a decision," Mr Sam On said.

Land confiscated from villagers occupying large plots will be used to resettle about 600 families who were evicted from the Bateay Ra'ngeang area after it was earmarked for a rubber plantation owned by Vietnamese company Tan Bien-Kompong Thom Rubber Development Company.

"The land will first be divided up for families with disabled family members and then used to relocate the rest of the families," Mr Sam On said, adding that the authorities wanted to do this before year's end.

Neth Sao, 57, a villager in Thma Samleang area, said he and his neighbors had not heard about the announcement by the provincial authorities, adding that he was worried they would use force to confiscate his six hectares of land.

"I will go to provide them with information, but I will not give up my land. I paid a lot of money for this land," he said.

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16 NOV

Common cause: Villagers unite to seek aid in dispute

May Titthara, Phnom Penh Post, Nov. 16 2011

Representatives from villages in three districts in Kampong Cham province embroiled in land disputes had joined forces to deliver petitions to provincial governor Hun Neng requesting his intervention in the pending eviction of more than 3,000 people, villagers there told the Post yesterday. Long Sokhum, from Chamkar Leu district, said the petitions were on behalf of 649 families in her district, Memot and Stung Trang districts. Villagers feared being "relocated to make way for rubber trees" and were asking for Hun Neng's assistance, she said. Hun Neng is Prime Minister Hun Sen's older brother.

Three companies were trying to force families to vacate the area but were offering them land elsewhere half the size of their current plots and only US$600 per family, Long Sokhum said. Oun Sou Cheng, of Memot district, said villagers were delivering their petition to Hun Neng because their previous petitions to the official in charge of economic land concessions had gone unanswered. She said they had delivered petitions to Chan Tong Iv, secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, many times.

"The provincial cabinet told us that we did not send our petitions to H. E. Chan Tong Iv because Hun Neng did not get a reply from the secretary," Oun Sou Cheng said. Kun Navuth, director of the provincial cabinet, said he had not received any petitions. "I didn't see anybody in the provincial hall," he added, declining to comment further.

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16 NOV

Prey Lang protest puts foursome in firing line

May Titthara, Phnom Penh Post, Nov. 16 2011

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Villagers walk on recently cut timber last week in Prey Lang forest in Kampong Thom province. **Photo Supplied**

A pair of Sandan district villagers who participated in last week's Prey Lang forest protest against illegal logging, and two of the NGO workers who monitored them, were facing accusations of incitement and destruction of property in complaints filed against them in the provincial court, villagers told the Post yesterday. Chut Wutty, director of NGO the Natural Resource Protection Group, said he had not yet received a summons, but a village chief had informed him of the complaints filed against him and three others by local authorities. "I am just trying to educate villagers to understand about the forest law . . . and the protection of natural resources, but the district authority has filed a complaint against me on [the charge of] incitement." Roeun Sopheap, a villager in Sandan district, said he had also had a complaint filed against him and confirmed the three others targeted as Sim Sean, a representative of Sandan district; Chhim Savuth, a project co-ordinator for the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights; and Chut Wutty.

"I am worried about my safety, because in Cambodia, the powerful people do not respect the law but are corrupt," he said. "We are protecting the natural resources, but [the authorities] . . . support people who destroy the natural resources." On Sunday, villagers who had taken part in the week-long protest in Prey Lang said they had returned home to be confronted by police seeking thumbprints, background information and the names of the "ringleaders" of the protest. "It is a great injustice for us," Roeun Sopheap said. "Which article in the law says that it's wrong for villagers to protect our natural resources?" About 300 villagers from three of the four provinces overlapped by Prey Lang spent more than a week walking through the endangered forest looking for illegal loggers. The march ended with a confrontation at rubber firm CRCK, which has a concession of more than 6,000 hectares in the forest.

Sandan district police chief Oung Moly said he had filed the complaints against the two villagers and NGO workers with the provincial court because they had burned timber. "We filed a complaint against two villager representatives for burning timber and two NGO workers who urged them to burn the timber. What they did is illegal," he said. Villager representative Sim Sean told the Post on November 9 that villagers had, in fact, burned 20 cubic metres of timber, but that it had been confiscated because it had been illegally logged from the forest. NGOs have insisted throughout the protest that they were simply acting as observers. Chheng Sophors, a senior investigator for rights group Licadho, said the two NGO workers had accompanied villagers only because they were afraid the authorities would resort to violence.

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