

RFA Reporter, 2 Activists Tried For Disinformation in Takeo

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A Radio Free Asia reporter and two human rights workers stood trial in Takeo province yesterday over charges stemming from a 2008 broadcast in which local Muslim leaders were accused of corruption, according to deputy prosecutor Say Nara.

To Serey, an RFA reporter also known as Sok Serey, is charged with criminal disinformation while volunteer Cambodian Center for Human Rights activists Chiep Cheav and Khim Sarom are both charged with disinformation and destruction of property.

Verdicts are expected on Feb 19, according to Mr Nara.

"I hope that the court will drop the charge against my client and give him justice," said Moung Sokun, lawyer for Mr Serey.

Neither Mr Serey nor Ms Sarom could be reached for comment yesterday, however Mr Cheav said that he had simply given his telephone number to Mr Serey and had done nothing wrong.

The case stems from a 2007 petition, thumbprinted by 206 families from Borei Cholsar district's Kompong Yol village, demanding new elections to choose leaders for the local mosque.

Villagers at the time accused a committee of three people at the mosque, Sok Sen, Man Pov and Riem Math, the imam, of misappropriating \$2,500 in donations.

In April of that year Mr Math launched a lawsuit accusing the broadcaster of disinformation for airing the accusations and the activists of clearing a plot within a graveyard.

Although he could not be reached yesterday, Mr Math had previously denied mishandling donations and told reporters the villagers' attempt to oust him were politically motivated.

"They could not do anything to me in a religious way so they did it in a political way," he said last October.

If found guilty of disinformation, the suspects could face jail sentences of between six months and three years in prison, fines of \$75 to \$750, or both, Mr Nara said.