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**Cambodian Center for Human Rights**

**Press Release – Phnom Penh, 6 September 2011**

**Incitement allegation and suspension threat against CCHR and NRPG are without any basis in law and are further proof of crackdown on civil society**

Today, 6 September 2011, it was reported in *The Cambodia Daily*, that provincial authorities in Kampong Thom would seek the suspension of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) and the Natural Resource Protection Group (NRPG) as a result of perceived incitement on the part of the two groups through the provision of human rights training to communities affected by the ongoing destruction of Prey Lang forest. The article states that provincial police authorities would seek the suspension of the two groups by the Ministry of Interior should further training events proceed.

Two additional human rights training events have been scheduled by CCHR and NRPG to be held in Mean Rith and Dang Kambith communes, Sandan district, Kampong Thom province on 7 and 8 September respectively. On the morning of 6 September, CCHR was informed that monks in the Dang Kambith pagoda where the training event on 8 September was to be held were summonsed by Sandan district governor Sim Vanna and told not to provide access to CCHR and NRPG to conduct the training event. CCHR is trying to establish contact with district officials to ensure that this event can go ahead.

The allegations made against CCHR and NRPG relate to a human rights training event held in Dang Kambith on 9-10 August. The event, which was attended by individuals from communities in three provinces affected by the destruction of Prey Lang forest, was disrupted on 10 August by armed police but was eventually allowed to proceed. In today's *Cambodia Daily*, Kampong Thom provincial police chief Phan Sopheng is quoted as saying these activities "included acts to incite citizens to oppose government [approved] land concessions". The training events of 9-10 August, which were conducted at the invitation of individuals whose land and/or rights is being or may be affected by the ongoing destruction of Prey Lang forest, focused on informing those participants of the human rights legally owed to them according to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia and international legal instruments which Cambodia is subject to and could in no way be defined as to constitute acts of incitement.

In *The Cambodia Daily* article, Phan Sopheng is also quoted stating that CCHR and NRPG did not have official permission to conduct the training events. The article quotes Mr. Phan as saying that provincial police have concluded that this "contradicts" a government requirement that registered NGOs cooperate with local authorities. These comments echo similar sentiments expressed by Sandan district governor Sim Vanna and Dang Kimbith commune chief Chhoy Mab in an article in *The Phnom Penh Post* relating to the disruption of the training event on 10 August.

CCHR is unaware of any specific law which requires cooperation with the authorities in relation to training events, such as the training conducted on 9-10 August. Indeed, the Law on Peaceful Demonstrations exempts organizers of such activities from providing any notification for such events. While the law requires notification be sent to provincial authorities in relation to a peaceful demonstration, Article 3 provides that “education dissemination activities for social interests” are exempted from the law. According to the Implementation Guideline for the Law on Peaceful Demonstrations published by the Ministry of Interior and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Cambodia to “provide guidance to those making use” of the law, “educational dissemination activities” include trainings, workshops, public forums and press conferences “whether on private or public property”.

CCHR and NRGF were therefore under no legal obligation to inform the authorities of our intention to conduct the training on 9 August 2011. It should be noted however, that in the interests of maintaining a constructive relationship with all levels of government, CCHR, as a matter of courtesy, seeks to ensure that authorities are informed of activities – including training activities – held in their locale. This included informing the commune authorities through oral communication of the training event on 9-10 August as well as informing the provincial authorities in writing of our intention to conduct training in Mean Rith and Dang Kambith communes, Sandan district, Kampong Thom province on 7 and 8 September respectively.

The allegations and threats against CCHR and NRGF are the latest developments in an ongoing crackdown on civil society groups in Cambodia which has already led to the suspension of one land rights group, Sahamakum Teang Tnaut, and threats of similar moves being made against other groups. The Royal Government of Cambodia is continuing in its efforts to finalize a Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (RGC) which many observers, including CCHR, have criticized as the latest in a series of legislative attempts by the RGC to curb dissent and silence criticism.

**In response to the threats and allegations, CCHR President Ou Virak commented:**

*“These allegations and threats against CCHR and NRGF are without any basis and are the latest evidence of a deeply disturbing trend in Cambodia whereby the government is clearly seeking to silence the voices of civil society and the general public. In this instance, we see provincial officials wrongly citing the law as a means to prevent the legitimate efforts of ordinary people to inform themselves of their rights in Cambodian and international law. This is a daunting precedent and, with the NGO law on the horizon, the ominous spectre looms whereby officials are given free rein, and an appearance of legitimacy, to make such arbitrary moves in an effort to silence those who they purport to represent and whose interests in which they ought to be operating”.*

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