

Civil Society Condemns Escalating Intimidation of Human Rights Defenders

10 May 2016

Yesterday's detention of eight human rights workers and activists was an egregious violation of the right to freedom of expression in Cambodia, civil society groups said today. The detentions, which followed the pre-trial detention of four other rights workers and an election official last week, highlight an alarming surge in the Cambodian government's latest campaign of intimidation against civil society.

Six of the eight detained yesterday were arrested as they attempted to make their way to a planned gathering outside Prey Sar's CC1 and CC2 prisons. The demonstration was the first event of the "Black Monday" campaign, in which participants dressed in black to call for the release of the five human rights defenders.

At about 8.15am, Ee Sarom, the executive director of STT and Thav Kimsan, a LICADHO deputy director, were arrested as they attempted join the gathering. After being stopped at a roadblock, the two men were negotiating for access before they were arrested by municipal police in the presence of the deputy governor of Dangkao district. They were held for questioning at Dangkao district police station until about 6pm that evening, along with Sor Sorn, a land activist from Borei Keila community, who was arrested shortly after them.

"The arrests are yet another blatant misuse of the criminal justice system to intimidate civil society members," said Naly Pilorge, Director of LICADHO. "The detention of land activists and human rights workers was an outrageous scare tactic to prevent civil society from mobilizing in support of jailed fellow human rights defenders."

In a coordinated move, three members of Boeung Kak community – Song Sreyleap, Kong Chantha and Bov Sophea – were also intercepted and arrested yesterday morning as they attempted to leave their homes to join the gathering outside Prey Sar. They were detained at Daun Penh police station and denied access to lawyers until they, too, were released at about 6pm.

As about 100 people gathered outside Dangkao district police station to call for the release of the rights workers and community members detained within, police took two international staff from LICADHO into custody and transported them to the immigration police office where they were held until about 7.30pm. The two were questioned about their work, the demonstration, and why they were wearing black clothes.

Two days ago, a government spokesman referred to the "Black Monday" campaign as a form of "urban rebellion". One the same day, the Ministry of Interior told police and military police to "take action" against those wearing black T-shirts.

"The government is so fearful of democratic expression that it consistently misrepresents it as 'insurrection' – and uses this rhetoric to quash fundamental freedoms and silence critics," said Naly Pilorge.

Civil society has been holding events outside the prison in support of incarcerated human rights defenders since 2006. Yesterday was the first time in a decade that supporters were prevented from doing so through use of roadblocks and heavy deployment of police. Yesterday's arrests followed a violent attack on a small group of protesters who briefly assembled at one of eight police checkpoints close to the prison. Police confiscated banners calling for the release of the five and assaulted monitors who were taking pictures of the prison, forcing them to wipe their cameras. Three tuk tuks carrying monks who intended to join the gathering were among hundreds of supporters turned away at the police checkpoints.

"The government's fear of people wearing colors is ludicrous," said Ee Sarom, STT executive director. "Authorities targeted us just for wearing a black T-shirt, which is a peaceful expression of dissent."

Civil society reaffirms the rights and fundamental freedoms of peaceful human rights defenders to conduct their activities free from threats and punishment, and reiterates its condemnation of the government's escalating campaign of intimidation in an attempt to halt such activities.

1. *92 Community*
2. *Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)*
3. *ALTSEAN Burma*
4. *Areng Valley Community (AC)*
5. *Banteay Srey Community*
6. *Banteay Srey Organization*
7. *Beung Pram Land Community*
8. *Boat People SOS (BPSOS)*
9. *Boeung Chhouk Community*
10. *Boeung Kak Community*
11. *Boeung Trabek Community*
12. *Borei Keila Community*
13. *Buddhism for Peace Organization (BPO)*
14. *Building and Wood Workers Trade Union (BWTUC)*
15. *Building Community Voice (BCV)*
16. *CamASEAN Youth*
17. *Cambodia Development People Life Association*
18. *Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)*
19. *Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)*
20. *Cambodian Domestic Workers Network (CDWN)*
21. *Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)*
22. *Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC)*
23. *Cambodian Independent Civil-Servants Association (CICA)*
24. *Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA)*
25. *Cambodian Informal Economic Workers Association (CIWA)*
26. *Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC)*
27. *Cambodian League for the Promotion & Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)*

28. *Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)*
29. *Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers Federation (CTSWF)*
30. *Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)*
31. *Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)*
32. *Cheko Community*
33. *Chey Chomnas Community*
34. *Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Domestic Unions (C.CAWDU)*
35. *Coalition for Integrity & Social Accountability (CISA)*
36. *Coalition of Cambodian farmer Community (CCFC)*
37. *Collective Union of Movement of Workers (CUMW)*
38. *Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (COMFREL)*
39. *Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)*
40. *Community Peace-Building Network (CPN)*
41. *Equitable Cambodia*
42. *Farmer Association for Peace and Development (FAPD)*
43. *Former Boeung Kak Women Network Community*
44. *Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)*
45. *Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF)*
46. *Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)*
47. *Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ)*
48. *Indigenous Youth at Brome Commune, Preah Vihear Province*
49. *Indradevi Association (IDA)*
50. *Khmer Youth Association (KYA)*
51. *Land Community, I Village Preah Sihanouk Province*
52. *Land Community, Prek Chik Village, Koh Kong Province*
53. *LICADHO Canada*
54. *Lor Peang community, Kampong Chhnang Province*
55. *Mother Nature*
56. *Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)*
57. *People Center for Development and Peace (PDP-Center)*
58. *Phnom Bat Community*
59. *Phum 23 Community*
60. *Prek Takung Community*
61. *Prek Tanou Community*
62. *Railway Community*
63. *Samaki 4 Community*
64. *Samakum Teang Tnaut (STT)*
65. *Sarawak Dayak Iban Association (SADIA)*
66. *Social Dhamma Danna Organization (SDDO)*
67. *SOS International Airport Community*
68. *The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)*
69. *Thmor Kol Community (TK)*

70. *Toul Rokakuos Community*
71. *Toul Sangke A Community*
72. *Toul Sangke B Community*
73. *Trapaing Anhchanh Thmey Community*
74. *Urban Poor Women Development (UPWD)*
75. *Vietnam Independent Civil Society Organization Network (VICSON)*
76. *Vietnamese Women for Human Rights (VNWHR)*
77. *Wat Than Monk Network*