

Stop Harassment of Community Representatives over COVID-19 Petition

May 04, 2020 – We the undersigned groups decry the harassment of community representatives from across Cambodia on Tuesday, April 28. These community representatives were arbitrarily detained for seven hours and interrogated while trying to submit a petition asking for additional government assistance to vulnerable communities during the Covid-19 crisis.

More than 30 community representatives from across Cambodia gathered in Phnom Penh to submit the petition, which has life-saving requests such as asking the government to distribute medical supplies to vulnerable communities; suspend debts from microfinance institutions (MFIs) and private money lenders; and provide direct economic assistance, including suspending rental fees for poor and informal workers and providing stay-at-home payments.

During this process, community representatives were repeatedly asked by authorities, including police officers, what organisations were “behind” this petition, who authored the petition, and were questioned about whether they really faced the problems listed. Many questions focused on the community members’ microfinance debt, and some representatives were asked about their personal financial situation and were required to provide proof of debts to MFIs to district authorities. At least two community representatives were additionally summonsed and harassed after they returned home to their communities by local authorities.

These interrogations are insulting and appear predicated on the mistrust of vocal communities who actively exercise their right to freely express themselves. They ignore the reality that independent communities across Cambodia have advocated for their rights for decades, in particular around crucial issues such as land rights. This harassment is unjustified and should never have taken place, particularly when the Interior Ministry has repeatedly claimed that grassroots communities have the right to conduct activities free from disturbance and in accordance with the law.

On the morning of April 28, community representatives gathered in Phnom Penh but were denied permission to submit the petition to the Council of Ministers. They were instead directed by authorities to Prime Minister Hun Sen’s Cabinet, but officials there declined to accept the petition because it was addressed to the Council of Ministers. Copies were successfully delivered to the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Economy and Finance.

The petition was signed by 141 communities across the country and seeks to address the health and economic impacts of the Covid-19 virus, which disproportionately affect vulnerable communities in rural areas as well as Phnom Penh. It notes that government schemes such as ID Poor are not yet comprehensive or fully effective, and encourages the government to take a more holistic approach to fighting the economic impact of the virus. It also includes a call for an immediate halt on all evictions during the Covid-19 crisis in order to protect community members and authorities from the virus.

After meeting with authorities and police officers at Hun Sen’s Cabinet, nine community members were asked by officials to discuss the petition further at the Daun Penh district office at around 3:00 p.m. They were detained in the district office for more than 7 hours, denied permission to leave and were never provided legal justification for their detention. During their detention, they faced interrogation from authorities until after 10:00 p.m. Some representatives were deliberately singled out and questioned individually, and then had answers compared to other representatives – interrogation techniques more commonly used on criminals, not peaceful petitioners. Some

representatives were also ordered to unlock and hand over their smartphones, and were questioned repeatedly about who authored the petition, as well as their personal financial relationships with MFIs.

At the end of the interrogation, community representatives were coerced into thumbprinting documents that seek to restrict their right to continue advocating on behalf of their communities prior to being allowed to leave the district office.

These community representatives should have been welcomed by their government and treated with dignity while they shared the legitimate concerns of tens of thousands of community members across Cambodia. The community representatives set out with the intention to inform their government about the problems in their communities and never demanded anything other than that their requests be considered in the government's response to Covid-19. We strongly decry their treatment at the hands of authorities.

Signed,

1. 92 Community (Phnom Penh)
2. 104 Community (Phnom Penh)
3. 105 Community (Phnom Penh)
4. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
5. 297 Land Community (Koh Kong)
6. 185K Tita Chambak Thom Community (Kampong Chnang)
7. Activities for Environment Community (AEC)
8. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
9. Anlong Run Community (Battambang)
10. Angdoug Thmor Community (Preah Sihanouk)
11. Ang Svay Community (Kampot)
12. Aphivoth Thmei Community (Phnom Penh)
13. Areng Indigenous Community (Koh Kong)
14. Association of Domestic Workers (ADW)
15. Association to Support Vulnerable Women (ASVW)
16. Bat Khteah Community (Preah Sihanouk)
17. Banteay Srey Community (Phnom Penh)
18. Banteay Srei (Phnom Penh)
19. Blog Kanva Thmei Community (Phnom Penh)
20. Boeung Chuk Community (Phnom Penh)
21. Boeung Chuk A Community (Phnom Penh)
22. Boeung Chuk Meanchey Thmei 1 (Phnom Penh)
23. Boeung Chuk Niroth (Phnom Penh)
24. Boeung Kak Community (Kampong Chnang)
25. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
26. Bos Sa Am Community (Battambang)
27. Bos Snao Community (Kampong Cham)
28. Borei Keila Community (Phnom Penh)
29. Borei Sontepheap Community (Phnom Penh)

30. Brosre Community (Prey Veng)
31. Buddhism for Peace Organization (BPO)
32. Building Community Voice (BCV)
33. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)
34. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
35. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
36. CamASEAN Youth's Future (CamASEAN)
37. Cambodian Domestic Workers Network (CDWN)
38. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
39. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
40. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
41. Cambodian Informal Economy Workers Association (CIWA)
42. Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA)
43. Cambodian Labor Confederation (CLC)
44. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
45. Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers Federation (CTSWF)
46. Cambodia Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
47. Cambodia Youth and Monk Network (CYMN)
48. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
49. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
50. Chak Krey land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
51. Chamroeun Community (Phnom Penh)
52. Chang Kum 1 Community (Tbong Khmum)
53. Chang Kum Kandal Community (Tbong Khmum)
54. Chek Meas Land Community (Svay Rieng)
55. Cheko Community (Phnom Penh)
56. Cheung Ek Group 3 Community (Phnom Penh)
57. Cheung Ek Group 4 Community (Phnom Penh)
58. Cheung Prey Community (Kampong Cham)
59. Chikor Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
60. Chikor Leu Land Community (Koh Kong)
61. Chhuk Sor Community (Siem Reap)
62. Chorm Kravean Community (Kampong Cham)
63. Chray Indigenous Community (Ratanakiri)
64. Chung Ampol Community (Prey Veng)
65. Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C. CAWDU)
66. C I 5 Community (Preah Sihanouk)
67. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC)
68. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
69. Community for Nature Protection (Pursat)
70. Democratic Union of Worker of Angkor Beer Company
71. Deum Moklue Community (Phnom Penh)
72. Dok Por Community (Kampong Speu)
73. Dombe Community (Tbong Khmum)

74. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
75. Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
76. Fishery Resource Development Community (Kampong Chhnang)
77. Forest and Biodiversity Preservation Community (Svay Rieng)
78. Forestry and Natural Resource Community (Pursat)
79. Forestry Resource Conservation and Development Community (Kampong Chhnang)
80. Horng Samnom Community (Kampong Speu)
81. Indigenous Youth Group (IYG)
82. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
83. Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ)
84. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
85. Indradevi Association (IDA)
86. Kam Braes Community (Tbong Khmum)
87. Kbal Hongteuk Community (Preah Sihanouk)
88. Kbal Tahean Forestry Community (Pursat)
89. Khmum Srakar Thlok Risey Community (Kampong Thom)
90. Khmer Thavrak
91. Khum Da Community (Kampong Cham)
92. Khva Community (Phnom Penh)
93. Klaing Teuk 78 Community (Siem Reap)
94. Kok Tarea Community (Takev)
95. Koh Sdech Land Community (Koh Kong)
96. Koh Sralao Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
97. Krei Kra Community (Phnom Penh)
98. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
99. Land Community (Pailin)
100. Lom Touk Community (Siem Reap)
101. Lor Peang Land Community (Kampong Chhnang)
102. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
103. Minority Rights Organization (MIRO)
104. Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC)
105. Network for Prey Long Protection in Mean Rith Commune (Kampong Thom)
106. Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC)
107. Not 1 More (N1M)
108. Orm Laing Community (Kampong Speu)
109. Ou Ampil Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
110. Ou Chheu Teal Community (Preah Sihanouk)
111. Ou Damrei Community (Preah Sihanouk)
112. Ou Kampuchea Community (Preah Sihanouk)
113. Ou Khsach Community (Preah Sihanouk)
114. Ou Tracheak Chet Community (Preah Sihanouk)
115. Ou Vor Preng Community (Battambang)
116. Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)
117. Peam Rus Community (Kampong Speu)

118. People Center for Development and Peace (PCDP)
119. Phnom Bat Community (Phnom Penh)
120. Phnom Kram Community (Siem Reap)
121. Phnom Torteong Community (Kampot)
122. Phnom Thnort Community (Kampot)
123. Phnom Sleuk Community (Battambang)
124. Phsar Kandal Village Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
125. Phum 3 Community (Phnom Penh)
126. Phum 17 Community (Phnom Penh)
127. Phum 21 Community (Phnom Penh)
128. Phum Andong Community (Phnom Penh)
129. Phum Baku Community (Phnom Penh)
130. Phum Bo Loy Community (Ratanakiri)
131. Phum Dei Chhnang Community (Kampong Speu)
132. Phum Koh Norea Community (Phnom Penh)
133. Phum Prek Punlea Community (Phnom Penh)
134. Phum Samut Kram Community (Phnom Penh)
135. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
136. Phum Ou Svay Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
137. Phum Teuk Thla Community (Phnom Penh)
138. Ponlok Khmer (PKH)
139. Prek Ksach Land Community (Koh Kong)
140. Prek Takung 3 Community (Phnom Penh)
141. Prek Takung 60 meters Community (Phnom Penh)
142. Prek Tangov Community (Phnom Penh)
143. Prek Tanou Community (Phnom Penh)
144. Prek Trae Community (Preah Sihanouk)
145. Prey Cheou Ou Domdek Community (Kampong Thom)
146. Prey Lang Community (Kampong Thom)
147. Prey Peay Fishery Community (Kampot)
148. Prey Chher Pich Sangva Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
149. Pun Leu Khemara Community (Phnom Penh)
150. Tunlong Community (Kampong Cham)
151. Railway Community (Phnom Penh)
152. Raksmeay Samaki Community (Kampong Speu)
153. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Udar Meanchey)
154. Reak Chmamroeun Community (Phnom Penh)
155. Rolous Cherng Ek Community (Phnom Penh)
156. Romdoul Svay Rieng (Svay Rieng)
157. Roum Met Community (Phnom Penh)
158. Rum Cheik Land Community (Siem Reap)
159. Rural Cambodia Technological Support Organisation (RCTSO)
160. Russey Sras Community (Phnom Penh)

161. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
162. Samaki 4 Community (Phnom Penh)
163. Samaki Romeas Haek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
164. Samaki Rong Roeung community (Phnom Penh)
165. SAMKY Organization
166. Samrong Meachey Community (Phnom Penh)
167. Samrong Tbong Community (Phnom Penh)
168. Sdey Krom Fishery Community (Battambang)
169. Seang Kveang Community (Prey Veng)
170. Setrey Klaing Sang Community (Phnom Penh)
171. Sen Reakrey Community (Phnom Penh)
172. Smar Sman Community (Phnom Penh)
173. Somros Koh Sdech Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
174. SOS International Airport Community (Phnom Penh)
175. Spean Chhes Community (Preah Sihanouk)
176. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chnang)
177. Sre Prang Community (Tbong Khmum)
178. Steung Bort village Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
179. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource Community (Kampong Chnang)
180. Steung Meanchey Community (Phnom Penh)
181. Tani Land Community (Siem Reap)
182. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
183. Ta Pen Community (Siem Reap)
184. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
185. Thmor Da Community (Pursat)
186. Thmor Thom Community (Preah Sihanouk)
187. Thmor Koal Community (Phnom Penh)
188. Thnong Land Community (Koh Kong)
189. Toul Rada Community (Phnom Penh)
190. Toul Sambo Aphivoth Community (Phnom Penh)
191. Toul Sangke A Community (Phnom Penh)
192. Toul Sangke B Community (Phnom Penh)
193. Trapaing Anchanh Community (Phnom Penh)
194. Trapaing Chor Community (Phnom Penh)
195. Trapaing Krasaing Land Community (Siem Reap)
196. Trapaing Sangke Community (Kampot)
197. Trapaing Raing Community (Phnom Penh)
198. Trapaing Ropov Community (Kampot)
199. Union Service Workers of ALASKA Massage Center (USWAMC)
200. Union Service Workers of CHEVRON COMPANY (CAMBODIA) LIMITED SIEMREAP
(USWCSR)
201. Union of Food and Service of Cambodia Beverage Company LTD