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LICADHO

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Media Statement

VILLAGERS FLOCK TO PHNOM PENH AS LAND CRISIS CONTINUES

The number of villagers coming to Phnom Penh to highlight land grievances – with people from five provinces arriving in the capital within the past 48 hours – shows the continuing dire situation of land-grabbing in Cambodia.

“People are still coming to Phnom Penh from all over the country, desperate for government officials to listen to their land problems and resolve them,” said Kek Galabru, LICADHO’s president. “This shows that land-grabbing is still rampant and that villagers are unable to get their grievances heard anywhere else.”

In the past 48 hours, five groups of villagers from five provinces have come to Phnom Penh because of unresolved land problems:

- More than 100 villagers from Ta Kaen commune, Chhuk district of Kampot, where 152 families are in danger of losing farmland to military soldiers who have been granted a social land concession in the area.
- About 20 villagers formerly living in Preah Vihear province and now in Kampong Cham. They were among 317 families violently evicted by police, soldiers and other authorities from land in Choam Ksan district, Preah Vihear, last November. Two unarmed villagers were shot dead during the eviction; no-one has been brought to justice for their killings. Six villagers arrested during the eviction remain detained, and another one imprisoned died last month.
- More than 70 villagers from several communities in Bavel and Koas Krolar districts of Battambang province. The villagers walked all the way to Phnom Penh from Battambang. They are from communities affected by two land disputes which district and provincial authorities have failed to resolve.
- About 25 people from Preah Netr Preah district, Banteay Meanchey province, representing 220 families whose farmland was sold by military officials to businesspeople.
- Three individuals representing 300 families in Stung Trang commune, Sala Krau district, Pailin, whose farmland is being taken by military soldiers. Attempts to resolve the dispute by Pailin municipal authorities have so far failed.

In Phnom Penh, the groups have been trying to meet or write appeals to senior government officials, in particular Prime Minister Hun Sen. The Kampot group gathered in front of the Prime Minister’s house yesterday, and several of the other groups wish to do the same.

“These people should not have to come to Phnom Penh to beg for justice and a fair resolution of their cases, but they feel they have no other choice because local officials in their provinces have ignored their grievances,” said Kek Galabru.

“These are just a few of the thousands of Cambodians villagers who have come to Phnom Penh because of land problems in recent years. The government needs to wake up and listen to its citizens – they’re crying out for real action to protect their land rights.

“People have a right to live in dignity, without fearing that their land may be stolen from them, and they need a system which quickly and fairly resolves any disputes which do occur,” added Kek Galabru.

LICADHO once more urges the government to declare a moratorium on evictions and to take firm action to discipline and prosecute State officials and other powerful individuals involved in land grabbing. In particular, we urge long-overdue measures to prevent and punish the widespread involvement of Royal Cambodian Armed Forces personnel in land grabbing and evictions of civilians.

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