

Registered in British Columbia, LICADHO Canada provides critical services to communities on the front lines of the Cambodian land-grabbing crisis in meaningful collaboration with LICADHO - *Cambodian League for the Promotion & Defense of Human Rights*.

VITAL VOICES

March - June 2013

The last few months have seen joint campaigns and rising voices of dissent against injustice from garment factory workers, land activists, and farmers, whose vital voices have increasingly been coming together in solidarity. This unity was instrumental in securing the release of [Mam Sonando](#) on March 14 and continues in calls for both the release of Prisoner of Conscience [Yorm Bopha](#) and for the imprisonment of Chhouk Bandith, former provincial governor who [shot three](#) peacefully striking garment factory workers.

Since the beginning of the year, pressure has been mounting from all sectors knowing that national elections are just around the corner. Cambodian unions, farmers and land activists fear that any remaining space for dissent will rapidly close after national elections end of July 2013. And Cambodian [elections](#) are anything but fair and free.

Unions Holding Foreign Suppliers Accountable

Throughout February and March, workers from Kingsland held vigil outside the factory after the owner absconded, leaving them with no job, no final month's salary and no severance pay. Kingsland had been making garments for H&M and Walmart brands. After continued pressure from workers and partner organisations; raising awareness through [video](#) testimonies and online advocacy; meetings with the shareholders and tireless arbitration, eventually shareholders relented and paid the workers fairly.

March also saw a tragic factory collapse in Cambodia which reached [international media](#) and continued to highlight the working conditions of garment factory workers in Cambodia and how rampant abuses are.

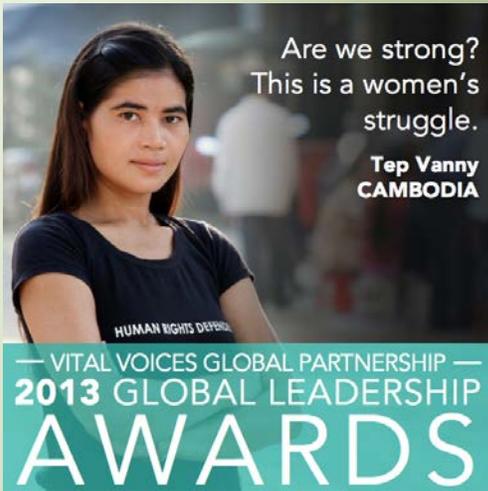
LC partners and garment factory workers rallied in Chhouk Bandith's case. According to witnesses, then-governor Bandith fired his gun into a group of thousands of workers striking at a [Puma supplier factory](#) in February 2012. [Three women](#) were seriously injured. Bandith has yet to spend a day in prison, and at one point, charges were actually dropped. On June 25 he was finally [convicted](#) but only under the charge of causing "unintentional violence". He was sentenced to 1.5 years for actions that in reality was an attempted triple homicide.

International Labour Day – March for Justice

On May 1 around 7,000 garment workers, union leaders, local communities, motodops, students, NGOs and others gathered to mark Labour Day. The group [marched](#) to the National Assembly, calling for living wages, improved working conditions and for justice in the Born Samnang/Sok Sam Oeun and Chhouk Bandith cases. Forty three NGOs signed an [open letter](#) to CEOs of Puma and the heads of corporate social responsibility to put pressure on factory owners to respect workers' rights.

Justice Repeatedly Denied but Water Cannons Pour

Despite police violence and political interference, Boeung Kak Lake community, in solidarity with other threatened and evicted communities continue to advocate for a solution to their land dispute and to call for the release of Yorm Bopha.



Community leader Tep Vanny receives 2013 Global Leadership Award from [Vital Voices](#) in Washington



After major pressure from Kingsland workers, H&M and GAP finally pay workers for work done and severance pay in March. Photo by Tat Oudom



Garment factory worker holds banner during Labour Day march in Phnom Penh

On March 13 police [cracked down](#) on a peaceful protest near Prime Minister Hun Sen's house causing injury to five protestors including broken teeth and bones. In a [statement](#) STT's Ee Sarom said 'beating and arresting people will not make the problem go away. If anything, these techniques have only increased the community's solidarity'.

In another blow to peaceful activism, a demonstration with BKL and two other threatened communities who had gathered at City Hall on May 30 was violently stopped when the Phnom Penh police chief authorised the deployment of [water cannons](#) on demonstrators. This violence against the community does not deter them; it merely makes them more determined.

In May an Amnesty International [solidarity action](#) between Seoul and Phnom Penh called for Bopha's release and on Mother's Day a touching [video](#) was produced by LICADHO/LICADHO Canada highlight Bopha's activism.

Bopha Continues to Lose in the Clown Courts

On March 27 Bopha was again denied bail at the Supreme Court. A week prior to the hearing Hun Sen publicly stated that her case had nothing to do with land issues and that she had acted 'violently and unjustly in the eyes of the government'. Organisations released a joint [statement](#) afterwards citing political interference and hundreds of demonstrators outside the court burned a scale of justice replica in frustration after the verdict and marched to the Royal Palace in protest.

Bopha's Appeal Court dates on June 5 and June 14 attracted large crowds calling for a release. Political interference and the use of a pro-government motodop union to intimidate BKL were used as weapons by authorities. Despite a complete lack of evidence, Bopha's bogus charges were upheld and her original 3-year sentence was suspended by one year. As it stands, she will not be released until September 2014. She has since filed an appeal to the Supreme Court and the community vow to continue struggling for her release and for a [solution](#) to their land dispute.

Witness Video Advocacy Training!

In partnership with WITNESS, LICADHO/LC facilitated a Video Advocacy Workshop process with eight partner organisations including unions and informal groups. Each group learned filming, security, and editing skills and began their own video advocacy projects. So expect a lot more short advocacy videos to come from these grassroots groups! In the words of WITNESS, we all will be 'Exposing the truth; one video at a time'.

You Can Help Too!

Educate, advocate and/or donate. Those are the best ways to support Cambodians struggling for rights and justice at this time.

LC has super cool partners; donate to your area of interest (unions, students groups, communities, HR groups/LICADHO), sign up for their/our newsletters, participate in petitions, 'like' LICADHO's [Facebook](#) page, follow us on [Twitter](#), spread the word back at your office, write me a letter, visit LC's website, watch our [videos](#).

**There is so much YOU can do to show
Cambodia that you are paying attention.**

www.licadho-cambodia.org www.licadhocanada.com



BKL villagers try to rescue a female representative who was rendered unconscious by authorities' use of water cannons on a peaceful protest



Bopha with her 10 year old son waiting for her Supreme Court bail verdict



Participants work on their video projects during Witness video advocacy training.

