



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

June 2010

“Land is life for most Cambodians. In a country where much of the population lives primarily hand-to-mouth, surviving on the day’s harvest from fishing, farming and foraging, their preservation of their access to land and natural resources is vital.” (NGO Forum Land is Life report 2009)



Police shoot at Chi Krenge villagers for attempting to harvest their own rice fields

Over the past three years, LC has been focused on urban evictions - the theft of homes and forced displacement of Cambodians in the name of ‘development’. Since expanding to rural areas in 2010, LC has noticed that rural conflicts largely concern farmland rather than houses and villages. Many rural communities, already more vulnerable because of high levels of poverty and illiteracy, are made more vulnerable due to lack of access to media, embassies, and NGOs. Most of the time, their land is already being encroached upon before the people know there is a problem.

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Highlighting the Important Role of Community Leaders

As of June 1, 2010 LC will modify our focus to celebrate, highlight and support active community **leaders** from various communities; connecting them to build capacity and access to resources as well as creative mediums of expression. And of course we will share the journey with you!

Without brave and organized leadership, Cambodian communities don’t have a chance going up against the authorities and big businesses vying for their land. And with the increasing number of community leaders being imprisoned, threatened, and attacked, it is amazing that anyone volunteers to be an active community leader in Cambodian communities. Cambodia leaders using active non-violence to defend their communities are true **heroes**.

Community Leaders in Prison

Companies and authorities commonly silence community leaders by filing bogus legal charges against them. The strength of a community leader’s case in court is irrelevant against the well-known corruption and impunity of Cambodia’s legal system.

In 2008, Cambodia’s two largest human rights watchdogs, ADHOC and LICADHO, reported a total of 199 people arrested from threatened communities. Others leaders were silenced with the mere threat of legal charges, while still others avoided arrest by going into hiding.

The numbers are rising each and every year, with many leaders getting lost in the legal system. Over the next year, LICADHO Canada will increase our focus on advocating and lobbying for Cambodia’s imprisoned community leaders.



Dey Krahorm leaders deal with eviction trauma at Ragamuffin’s healing arts centre.



Dey Krahorm leader Lor Seyha the day of his release from prison. Seyha spent more than six months in prison.

Chi Kreng CD production in PP

Five Chi Kreng singing leaders arrived in Phnom Penh on May 9 to produce their community music CD. After two days at the first studio, the owner decided that he could no longer work with Chi Kreng. His reason was fear; fear for his family and business if he recorded solidarity songs. The government's complete disregard for freedom of expression is well known, as are the repercussions for speaking out.

We quickly found a new studio and quickly found ourselves facing the same problem again. Thankfully Chi Kreng are a persistent bunch. And the group of friends coming to support and assist Chi Kreng singers continued to grow alongside the obstacles. Eventually we found a supportive studio and after ten days, CK left Phnom Penh with 13 recorded songs! Coming to you soon....

Canadians Supporting Cambodian Community Leaders

The Canadian government has not been sending a friendly message to Cambodians over the past several years. The Harper government removed diplomatic presence from the nation in 2008, despite Cambodian civil society petitioning against the Embassy's closure. And let's not forget the Canadian International Development Agency which is still spending tax-payers' dollars to fund the Cambodian government on land related projects. (Shame, shame CIDA)

But regular Canadian people are hearing Cambodian leaders in BIG ways – they're lending support and reminding us that transformative power truly is with the people! Canadians have been creatively raising money (including via Karaoke contests!) and taking other action such as nominating community leaders for human rights awards as a way to protect and fund them. LC is so inspired by the recent support coming from Canadians that we've started a fund and funding campaign to support the needs of community leaders!

Community Leader Defence Fund (CLDF)

Every step of the creation and execution of the CLDF must emulate the solidarity and passion that inspired its formation. We hope that contributors will have fun raising money for the fund, and we will ask them to tell us about how the money was raised so we can share the stories with community leaders.

Contributors to the CLDF will receive newsletters every two to three months detailing how the funds were spent, including personal stories and messages from community leaders accessing the fund.

A special thank you to folks from United Food & Commercial Workers Local 401 who have kicked off the fund with a \$3000CDN contribution!

I WANT TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY LEADERS IN CAMBODIA

You do? That's great! There are 3 steps:

- 1) Find a fun and creative way to raise a contribution
- 2) Donate on-line PayPal www.licadhocanada.com
- 3) Write a quick note to LC to share with us how the contribution was raised and/or what was sacrificed to make the contribution
lee@licadhocanada.com

**All on-line contributions received through LC automatically are deposited into the CLDF from June 1, 2010 until January 1, 2011.*



Chi Kreng singing leaders at the studio in Phnom Penh



It takes courage and strength for leaders to claim a voice for their community

How are contributions spent?

- Community forums & events
- Transport to court or municipal offices
- Paper, pens, banners
- Community training (Land Law, media, peace building strategies, story-telling)
- Medical needs of leaders
- Lawyers for leaders (shortage of legal aid lawyers in Cambodia)
- Community song and video production
- Bail for leaders
- Trauma counselling

