



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*.

Cambodia Continues its Freefall from Democracy

January 2011

“Democracy, by definition, requires citizen participation,” said Dr. Pung Chhiv Kek, President of LICADHO. *“When people are no longer able to freely speak, criticize and demonstrate their concerns, they are no longer participating. At that point, democracy becomes an illusion.”* LICADHO [press release](#) December 20, 2010

Penal Code Comes into Effect

Ironically on December 10th – International Human Rights Day – Cambodia’s new Penal Code came into effect complete with questionable articles that restrict fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression.

“In summer 2010, UN High Commissioner for Human Right Navi Pillay provoked strong condemnation from the Cambodian government when she criticized the judiciary’s handling of cases involving opposition politicians Mu Sochua and Sam Rainsy.

As of Dec 10, 2010, the same criticism could make her a criminal in Cambodia.

Under Article 523 of the Penal Code [...] any person who criticizes a “judicial act or decision” aiming to “endanger Cambodian institutions” can be sentenced up to six months imprisonment and 1 million riel fine.” LICADHO [Press Release](#) December 9, 2010

Penal Code Used Attack Human Rights Defenders

“The new code also contains a restrictive and broadly worded ‘incitement’ provisions (Article 495) [...] That provision was used for the first time on Dec 19 when it convicted World Food Program employee Seng Kunnaka of incitement for allegedly printing out and distributing material from KI-Media, a Cambodian news blog that is known to take a strong stance against the government.” LICADHO [Press Release](#) December 20, 2010

Most recently, one villager from disputed land of Lor Peang village and one employee of a human rights organisation named ADHOC were convicted by the courts for “disinformation” under Penal Code (Article 305). Their crime? They publicly stated that the KDC International development company had illegally cleared 140 hectares of Lor Peang land.

“KDC is run by Chea Kheng, the wife of the Minister for Industry, Mines and Energy Sny Sem.” [Phnom Penh Post](#), January 18, 2011

Draft Association & NGO Law

Five days after the Penal Code came into effect, the government released the draft Association & NGO Law. What does this mean for civil society and NGO groups working in Cambodia? It’s too soon to tell but in its Draft form, the law has the potential to eliminate any voices crucial of the government.



Authorities told Banteay Srey communities they could not advocate for human rights on International Human Rights Day Dec 10 2010. Villagers ignored the order, loaded into carts, and drove from house to house to celebrate human rights.

Article 502 New Penal Code: Contempt – criminalizes any act, gesture, writing, etc., directed at a public official that affects the “dignity of a person.” The elements are vague and highly subjective; taken to the extreme the article could criminalize all acts which hurt the feelings of public officials.



Despite increased restrictions on Cambodia’s freedom of assemble and express, more and more Cambodian’s are claiming their voice.

“Today, so many NGOs are speaking too freely and do things without a framework. When we have a law, we will direct them.” National Assembly President Heng Samrin

In its current draft form, LC would not be able to register in Cambodia and thus would be deemed an illegal entity; our activities deemed illegal. Furthermore, any community or other informal groups who do not register and meet registration requirements will also be deemed illegal entity.

“The draft [NGO] law – which fall far from short of meeting international standards for laws on the non-profit sector – constitutes the most serious threat to civil society in Cambodia in years.” LICADHO [Briefing Paper](#) January 4, 2011

Two-year Memorial of Dey Krahorm Eviction

On January 24 2011, more than 200 former [Dey Krahorm](#) residents and 60 supporters gathered at the fence surrounding their previously owned land to remember the violence and unlawful attack two years prior.

The community erected banners depicting their former spirit house and the eviction violence, and monks came to bless the families. Villagers lit incense and candles and spoke to the media of the suffering and poverty they experienced since displacement.

It was an emotional ceremony. In a sobbing plea, one villager leader begged the UN to arrest their Prime Minister for allowing these atrocities. The community called on all threatened and evicted communities to work together to end forced evictions.

UPDATES

Dey Krahorm families in Udong relocation site are stilling living in squalor without access to adequate resources, including health care and employment. Many are still haunted from the violence inflicted upon their community from eviction and displacement.

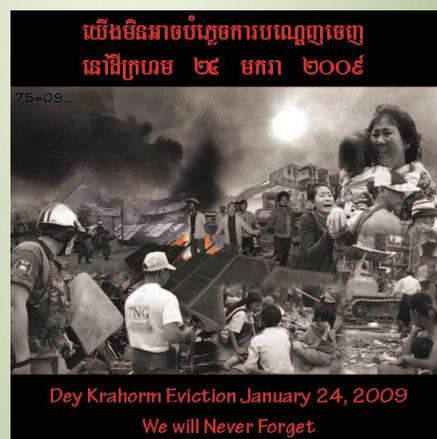
Seven former leaders and six youths are in group arts therapy for trauma under Ragamuffin and LC partnership. The leaders are showing much improvement in their ability to express their needs and to rebuild their lives. Four of these representatives work with LC as Community Consultants.

Venerable Sovath has remained in the US since the WITNESS Gala in December where LICADHO was nominated as Partner of the Year. LICADHO President Pung Chhiv Kek and Venerable Sovath received standing ovations for their work to stop forced evictions in Cambodia.

Since the Gala, Venerable Sovath has remained in America, meeting with Khmer communities in three states. He has been advocating for his community and has distributed more than 2000 copies of his video advocacy tools. Venerable Sovath returns to Cambodia in the middle of February.



Dey Krahorm families pray for justice and retribution.



Dey Krahorm community designed banners and stickers to reflect the violence of eviction day.



Venerable Sovath received standing ovation at WITNESS gala in New York in December.

Send Chi Kreng and Venerable Sovath a message on facebook:
[Sovath Loun](#)



Chi Kreng detainees being loaded into prison truck



Solidarity action outside CC1prison to call for the release of union leader Sous Chantha. His older sister and daughter in photo



Twelve Chi Kreng detainees still in Siem Reap prison. LC will visit them again early next month and will campaign for their release throughout 2011. Many of the men have been in prison since March 2009 with a total of nince criminal charges against them. There are two more trials and one appeal pending.

LICADHO staff member Mr. Leang Sokchouen is still in prison for his bogus ‘disinformation’ conviction, despite condemnation from the International community. His lawyers have appealed his verdict and now await an appeal trial. LICADHO staff and other friends and family regularly visit Chouen in prison. Chouen is staying positive and hoping for an early appeal date. He teaches English to other prisoners to make good use of his time.

Alternative unions and the workers movement still have their fair share of obstacles. More than 300 workers were fired for role in the national strikes and still have not been reinstated. [Clean Clothes Campaign](#) has started an [urgent action](#) in solidarity with these 300 workers. Please take two minutes and sign the petition to have the workers reinstated and compensated.

LC in 2011

We renew our commitment to monitor, support and protect threatened communities, working in solidarity to stop forced evictions and other human rights violations in Cambodia.

We vow, and strive to find creative strategies to collect, preserve, and project the voices of Cambodians into the global arena.

LC's recommended viewing:

- [WITNESS video](#)
- [Dateline video](#)

How Can You Help?

- ✚ **Educate** yourself and others about Cambodia’s current freefall from democracy
- ✚ **Advocate** on behalf of Cambodians, including signing petitions and joint letters.
- ✚ **Donate** to [LICADHO](#) or [LICADHO Canada](#). Abuses against communities and other human rights defenders continue to be on the rise. Therefore we need support from people like you to continue to provide emergency funding and other support to victims and their families in a timely manner.



The blue karma (traditional scarf) has become a national symbol of human rights defenders.