



If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.

~Bishop Desmond Tutu



Detaining or arresting leaders is a great way for police to stop a demonstration



Communities are using a growing number of resistance strategies



The nine recently released men tour Phnom Penh with their LC tour guides.

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*.

People Power

May 2011

Cambodia – Kingdom of Wonder

Since LC's last newsletter in January, LC team was repeatedly swept away by crisis and emergencies. So much so that we just did not have time to write a newsletter before now.

The Cambodian government has been keeping busy shoving the new oppressive draft NGO & Association Law down everyone's throats. The police have been busy cracking down on communities, and threats against individual human rights defenders are coming closer and closer to home. Cambodia is a Kingdom of Wonder all right!

But in the midst of all this darkness, we are finally seeing rays of light shine through. We've even witnessed a few 'wins' for the Cambodians on their path to rights and freedoms.

Senegal Learns from Cambodian Communities

LICADHO was invited to share resistance strategies of Cambodian communities at a landgrabbing workshop leading up to the World Social Forum in Dakar, Senegal in February 2011.

LICADHO and LC compiled a video for LICADHO to share at the workshop called '[Community Resistance to Forced Evictions](#)'. This LICADHO production offers a glimpse into community activism to resist land evictions throughout Cambodia. It is currently being reproduced for a Khmer audience.

Nine of the 12 Chi Kreng Detainees Released

On March 22nd, the court finally allowed the release of nine of the 12 men detained in the Siem Reap prison. The [nine had been detained](#) for exactly two years on numerous trumped up charges. ([attack link](#))

After celebrating Khmer New Year and blessing ceremonies in their village, the nine men were invited to Phnom Penh to meet the vast group of partners that lobbied for their release. LC took the men out to celebrate their freedom, and to tour the city that many of them had never visited before.

The mental and physical health of the nine men are slowly returning.

The remaining three detainees are awaiting an appeal trial. Two of these men are seriously ill. LICADHO and LC continue to push for their release.

Delay on Progress of NGO & Association Law

On March 24, the government released its second draft on the [Association & NGO Law](#). It was with little surprise that the implications of this law on civil society were worse than the original draft. The government publicly announced it would send the law to National Assembly before the start of Khmer New Year in mid April.

With only a small window of opportunity to rally support, Cambodian civil society called on National and International Human Rights organisation, development partners, international governments and media to apply pressure to stop the law from moving forward.

“..it's a transparent attempt by the government to control civil society and stifle dissent. It's also a blatant violation of domestic and international protections on association, assembly and speech.” [Naly Pilorge, LICADHO](#)

Remarkably, as of mid May, the draft still has not been forwarded to the National Assembly, and the government has become quiet on the topic. This doesn't mean that civil society has 'won', but it does mean the pressure is working to delay, giving civil society time to drum up even more support and mechanisms of pressure.

Threats against Venerable Sovath

On March 25th, religious authorities attempted to arrest and defrock Venerable Sovath for standing with villagers at a Boeung Kak demonstration. The UN intervened by putting him in their car and driving away.

This is not the first time [Venerable Sovath](#) has faced these threats for his active role as a monk, nor is it the first time he has responded to villagers' pleas for support. In fact, many threatened communities and imprisoned human rights defenders know him personally and tenderly because they know he cares deeply about their suffering.

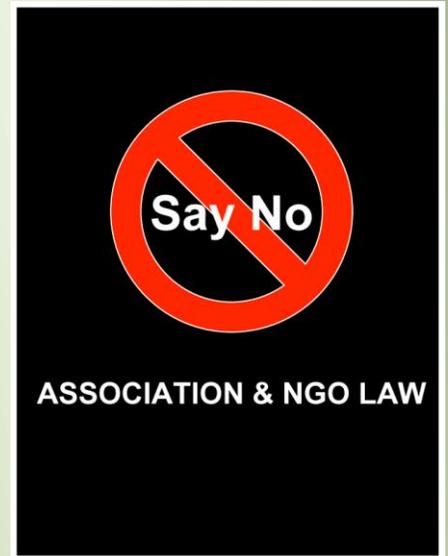
However, the government-appointed Patriarch Monk Tep Vong does not share these sentiments, nor does the Phnom Penh police authorities. Venerable Sovath has been banished from his Phnom Penh pagoda. Currently he is spending time with the nine Chi Kreng men recently released from prison. Venerable Sovath will return to Phnom Penh despite the ongoing threat to arrest and defrock him.

A new video will be released about this story soon. Stay tuned!

Attacks and Arrests of Boeung Kak Community

In March, the attacks and unlawful detention of Boeung Kak demonstrators began to increase. The brutal land conflict has made international news, and the stakes are high. For villagers, their land is their life. For the developers, the land is estimated to be valued close to \$2 billion.

On April 21, more than 100 Boeung Kak villagers gathered at Phnom Penh Municipal Office, demanding a resolution to their land dispute. A group of armed anti-riot police forces used [violence against villagers](#), arresting 11 people including women and two children. After UN and LICADHO intervention, the 11 were released the next day.



Logo used in English and Khmer on banners and t-shirts



Venerable Sovath with Boeung Kak villagers

“They accuse me of doing all things wrong. So then, whose role is it to help when the people are miserable?” ~Venerable Sovath

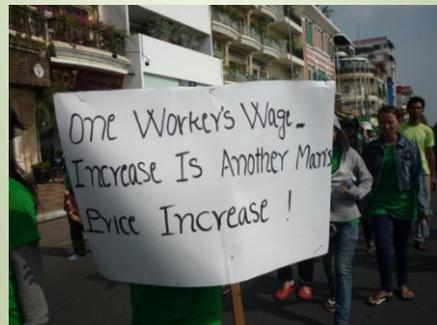


Women of Boeung Kak often face police violence and arrest



Boeung Kak continue protests

LABOUR DAY:



Despite violent crackdowns and arrest, the remaining 1,500 Boeung Kak families continue to struggle for their rights. Together, united, they cannot be divided!

Please join Amnesty's 40,000 members on the [Urgent Campaign](#) to support [Boeung Kak](#).

Labour Day

On May 1, 2011, some 3,000 Cambodians gathered in Phnom Penh to celebrate [International Labour Day](#). It was a rare moment for such large numbers to gather without a crackdown from authorities. As always, the organising, solidarity and spirit of the unions inspired us all.

The workers movement still struggles to obtain fair living wages and working conditions. And as the NGOs and associations are threatened with the government's Draft Association & NGO Law, the unions are threatened by the current drafting of a Trades Union Law. These ongoing threats to fundamental freedoms are uniting groups more strongly than ever before.

"...oppression [i]s counter-productive because it's like the third Newton Law of action and reaction. When you raise the level of oppression, the resistance goes up as well."

~Ivan Marovic, Serbian resistance leader

LC's recommended viewing:

- [The Cause of Progress](#)
- [Since Labour Day....](#)

Support Cambodian People Power!

- ✚ **Educate** yourself and others about Cambodia's resistance to its current freefall from democracy
- ✚ **Advocate** on behalf of Cambodians, including signing petitions and joint letters.
- ✚ **Donate** to groups that work directly with this people power to provide legal, medical, advocacy, protection, humanitarian and monitoring support, including:

[LICADHO](#)
[LICADHO Canada](#)
[Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Confederation](#)

