

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*.

August 2, 2011

Unexpected Appeal Court Verdict Releases 3 Chi Kreng Men!

On July 22, the Phnom Penh Appeal Court announced that it would uphold the verdict of the Siem Reap court and drop the charges of illegal confinement against 5 Chi Kreng villagers, including 3 men who were still imprisoned in Siem Reap prison.

The final of many cases filed against Chi Kreng representatives, the Appeal Court verdict even included a release order for the 3 detained men!

Released on July 26

At 11:30am July 26 Klin Ieng, Chan Leap, and Sin Leap walked out of Siem Reap prison into the waiting arms of family and friends.

After a lunch and celebrations in Siem Reap city, the group returned to Chi Kreng where many of their fellow villagers were waiting to receive them, bless them, and encourage them to restart their lives.

Freedom without Justice is Only a Partial Win

While LC is indeed celebrating the release order of the 3 innocent men who were imprisoned, there is also a deep sense of sadness at the injustice unnecessarily suffered by the Chi Kreng community. All 12 men who were imprisoned during the land dispute should not have spent even one day in prison.

“It’s not even freedom. These 12 men will be haunted by trauma and health problems for years. It is only release from prison; it is neither freedom nor justice.”
Naly Pilorge, Director of LICADHO.

LC would like to take a moment and remember some of the injustice this community has been forced to deal with:

Police Shoot Villagers, Never Charged

[Chi Kreng](#) came on our radar on March 22, 2009 when a land dispute between villagers and influential businessmen over 475 hectares of rice field turned violent. Police and military police opened fire with AK47s on approximately 80 villagers. Four villagers were shot and seriously injured.

One villager bravely recorded [video of the shooting](#) on his phone camera; evidence that shows police were unprovoked when they started shooting.

Until now, no charges have been laid against police for shooting at unarmed civilians. Instead, 11 men from the community were immediately arrested on trumped up charges starting a more than 2-year nightmare for the community.



Family and friends after July 22, 2011 Appeal Court verdict in Phnom Penh



The three men walk out of prison with Venerable Loun Sovath



Villagers shot and beaten by police

Massacred by the Judicial System

Since March 2009, **8 criminal cases** that involve **13 charges** were filed against a total of **15 men** involved in Chi Kreng's land dispute. Twelve (**12 men were imprisoned**); 11 men for 2 years and 1 man for 15 months. The latter, Mr Klim Ieng has spent 15 months in prison **despite a lack of detention warrant**.

Charges against these men included attempted murder of police officers, incitement, damage to property, and two (yes two) charges of rice robbery, filed against Chi Kreng men for robbing rice from their own rice fields!

Violating Freedoms of Expression and Movement

We could write a small book detailing all the times police/authorities attempted to restrict the villagers' activities and movements.

Violations included road blocks to prevent villagers from attending the trials, warning rental vehicles in the districts not to transport Chi Kreng villagers, direct bullying of villagers, planting police in the village the night before trials, and when villagers still managed to rise up, religious authorities entered the scene to try and silence Chi Kreng's biggest advocate - Buddhist monk [Venerable Sovath](#).

Chi Kreng Lose their Rice Fields in an Attempt to Free Their Men

Over time, one NGO began to lose hope in justice, and focused solely on getting freedom for the 12 men. In September 2010, Chi Kreng community leaders and the detainees signed an NGO-designed contract that ultimately removed the community's right to their own rice fields, as well as the right to file counter-suits against the other stakeholders in the land dispute.

In exchange, the other stakeholders involved would influence the court to release the men and put pressure on the municipal government to grant a 'social concession' of new rice fields.

It took almost a year for all men to be released and there has yet to be any word on new rice fields for Chi Kreng villagers. LC does not support communities trading land for freedom.

Future for Chi Kreng

Right now the men are adjusting back to their lives. In a few weeks time they will plan a 2-day ceremony, inviting many communities from two provinces to join. The ceremony will include traditional Buddhist blessings, singing, dancing and eating together, and will end with a public forum allowing all community leaders to speak.

LC and LICADHO plans to meet with the community leaders of Chi Kreng during their ceremony to see how the released men are adjusting and enquire about their next move.



Loading onto a truck to attend one of many trials in Siem Reap, 60kms away



Villagers walked when trucks were too afraid to pick them up



Nine of the 12 men who were in prison receive special blessing from monks