



SPECIAL EDITION NEWSLETTER – March 19, 2010
This newsletter is dedicated to and in solidarity with Chi Kreng.

Chi Kreng community has joined LC for the ‘Dey Krahom Challenge’ project! One of the main purposes of the DKC project is to prove that Dey Krahom was not the only Cambodian community with the courage and capacity to take non-violent resistance efforts to new, creative levels if given access to adequate support.

LC team has met with Chi Kreng villagers on a few occasions and for a few reasons, including as monitors. Most recently, we joined together with friends from Dey Krahom to meet in Siem Reap city with a very special agenda.

CHI KRENG BACKGROUND

Located in Siem Reap province, Chi Kreng came on our radar in March 22, 2009 when a land dispute between villagers and influential businessmen over 475 hectares of rice field turned ugly. Police and military police opened fire with AK47s on approximately 80 villagers. Four villagers were shot and seriously injured.

The villagers have a valid claim to the land. They are among a total of 175 families who have been using the farmland since 1986 as a source of food and livelihood. Their efforts to obtain legal ownership documents for the land in 2004 (under the 2001 Land Law) were twice rebuffed by local authorities without reason. These same authorities later supported several businessmen to lay claim to the land.

Video: (<http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/video.php?perm=3>)

VILLAGERS ARRESTED ON BOGUS CHARGES

After the shooting, 11 villagers were arrested, detained and charged with assault and robbery for trying to harvest the rice they planted. Two were convicted on the charges, the others were acquitted. The prosecutor appealed the acquittal and has since placed new charges on nine men for premeditated attempted murder. All 11 men remain in prison to this day and are now also part of the DKC project. LC has been able to visit the men four times and will continue to try to gain access to them through LICADHO Cambodia’s prison project.

VENERABLE LOUN SOVATH from Chi Kreng

Venerable Sovath is a very unique monk because he is an artist, a writer and a brilliant human rights defender. He also produces his own advocacy videos.

Despite threats of defrocking and imprisonment, Venerable Sovath has been endlessly advocating for his community. He is what we would call ‘a monk on a mission’. Venerable Sovath additionally supports many communities and their imprisoned leaders across the country. And now LC proudly supports the Venerable.

Our journey together began when the Venerable asked LC to help him and the Chi Kreng villagers produce a music CD about their community as an advocacy tool. Of course we said YES to the request, and called on a few of our friends from former Dey Krahom community to help us.



No police have been charged for shooting Chi Kreng villagers.

Recently, Transparency Int’l issued its [2009 Corruption Perception Index](#). Cambodia ranked 158 out of 180 countries. Corrupt courts are one reason for Cambodia’s low ranking.



LC visit Venerable Sovath’s family in Chi Kreng. Venerable’s father is on the far left and his sisters are in the background.

CHI KRENG CD WORKSHOP in Siem Reap

The first 24 hours together was about sharing stories and songs to get to know each other. This heart-felt sharing really connected everyone in their suffering from forced eviction/land disputes. And within the embrace of the Vipassana (meditation) Centre we all found a place to heal and renew ourselves.

Dey Krahom leaders helped to build trust with the villagers and build esteem with community leaders. DK representatives really shone in their role as mentors and advocates, highlighting the importance of solidarity, non-violence and creativity in resistance. DK spokesperson Chan Vichet now works with Bridges Across Borders and has recently received more formal trainer training on community security and protection. Vichet (BAB) joined Borey (LC) and Venerable Sovath (CK) as facilitators of the workshop and was able to share both his experience from Dey Krahom and his new knowledge from BAB.

Over the following two days there was much song writing, singing, dancing, laughing until we cried, sharing, supporting one another, learning how to assess and express our needs. This is how the workshop ended up producing 20 songs (9 from detainees), 20 hours of video footage, and how this project grew into a double-CD and solidarity concert inclusive of many community leaders and groups!

FUTURE PLANS WITH CHI KRENG

LC and the Venerable are currently preparing for another workshop with villagers at the beginning of April 2010. This workshop has a few objectives including preparing to record the first of the songs, planning advocacy strategies for the songs, learning singing skills from professional singer, and practicing meditation as a way to deal with fear. (Meditation will be led by Venerable Sovath and David Ketchum/Peace Bridges.) It goes without saying that our time together will also be filled with laughing, dancing and friendship.

We plan to have the first song produced by early May. The song calls back and forth between the men detained in prison and their wives. The words express how they feel about the tearing apart of families and the song will be used to lobby for justice.

SUPPORT CHI KRENG COMMUNITY ADVOCATE, EDUCATE, DONATE

Inform yourself about the Cambodian eviction crisis

www.licadho-cambodia.org

Donate online

www.licadhocanada.com

Contact our Support Manager Ruth for other avenues to donate and/or to get more information about LICADHO Canada activities ruthgleeson@yahoo.com



Vichet (centre) plays a stress-releasing game with villagers.



Villagers practice one of their new songs.

***We commit honestly to protect
the rice fields, forest
water, fish and animals.
We join together to preserve
these things.***

***-Lyrics from 'Solidarity is the
Power', Chi Kreng song***



***"..our life is meaningful to live on
the earth to help each other. The
first 4 me that I'm happy since CK
trouble happened." Text to LC
from Venerable Sovath.***