

LICADHO
Canada

LC works for all people in Cambodia to live in a peaceful society that respects human rights, democracy, and social justice.

December 2015



THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING

REMEMBERING 2015

By 2015, the ruling regime seemed to realize they were losing their grip on power, evident in all of their underhanded tactics to silence any challenge to its authority. With imprisonment of activists, oppressive laws, the legalised control over the court and judges, and a firm grip around a bullied and weakened opposition, Cambodians have increasingly less space to exercise their rights. Thousands of people who continued to struggle for their rights failed to receive justice by the corrupt courts, were abused, threatened, and intimidated for standing up for their rights, and saw their freedoms being taken away through repressive legislation. Despite these losses, thousands of people continued to call for change, stood up for their and other's rights, and refused to be silenced by the authorities.

This last newsletter of 2015 goes out to all brave activists in Cambodia. Below are some, but far from all the people that we, LC, will remember from 2015.

LY SEAV MINH - LAND RIGHTS ACTIVIST

Nineteen activists imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights were freed in April after spending five to seven months in prison. Among the 19 were prominent activists and well-known campaign organizers, monks, opposition party members and supporters. And then there was Seav Minh.

Seav Minh was arrested in November 2014 when seeking information about her father who was arrested earlier the same day. Her family had lived on the same land in Phnom Penh for 35 years and been victims of repeated attacks over the years, including attempted arson, having venomous snakes thrown into the home, poisoning of their animals and threats of physical violence, due to a long-running land dispute with the municipality and Khun Sea Company.

months in pre-trial detention together with the other 18 political prisoners and activists. This was not the first time the government had tried to silence activists and opponents through a corrupt and biased judiciary, but it was a first for Seav Minh. Seav Minh remained vocal and strong throughout the detainment and refused to give in to the authorities. While in prison, she wrote this letter.



Ly Seav Minh

EXCERPT FROM LY SEAV MINH'S LETTER

"...I just need my housing rights but I have been put in jail. It is really painful because of the injustice. Today is the sixth day that I have been on hunger strike. So, if my health status gets worse or if I eventually die in this prison, I would like to appeal to all brothers and sisters, including people around the world, to condemn the government, the court and the Khun Sea Company and keep this information about me in the historical records of human rights defenders.

Please brothers and sisters, demand justice and let the world know that the Cambodian courts are not independent. They are just a tool for the rich and powerful elites. They do not help to seek truth and justice for people. I will keep fighting. I am not afraid of the suffering or of mistreatment in the future. I want to let these people know that they cannot use the court system as a tool to achieve their aims.

Although the case involves only my family, I am not lonely, so please keep fighting and don't lose courage. If my family has any problem that affects our futures or results in us losing our lives, Oknha Khun Sea, Mr. Yim Leang, the court and the Cambodian government shall be responsible."

Seav Minh spent more than five

"This ugly incident is the same kind of crude political violence used against the opposition in the 1990s to fend off challenges to Hun Sen's one-party rule."

Brad Adams, Human Rights Watch, referring to the staged protest outside the National Assembly.



In July, a video was released on social media with pictures of all parliamentarians that voted to adopt the Law on Associations and NGOs. The producer of this video remains anonymous.



Venerable Prim Houn in one of his own videos with over 117,000 views.

THE 'CULTURE OF DIALOGUE'

Since the 7-point code of conduct: Culture of Dialogue, signed in May between Prime Minister Hun Sen and the opposition party leader Sam Rainsy, the political climate has plummeted.

In July, four opposition parliamentarians led more than a thousand members and supporters to the disputed border demarcation between Cambodia and Vietnam, a move hyper sensitive to the ruling regime. Also in July, the opposition parliamentarians boycotted the National Assembly and Senate sessions that passed the highly-contested Law on Associations and NGOs.

These events were followed by the arrest of 14 opposition party

members and supporters, as well as an opposition party senator. In October and November, Khem Sokha, deputy opposition leader, was ousted from the Parliament for being too vocal about the ruling party, and Sam Rainsy, opposition leader, went into self-imposed exile after an arrest warrant was issued for him.

Before this, the ruling party also staged a protest outside the National Assembly which left two opposition parliamentarians injured and evacuated to Bangkok for treatment.

While LC wishes not to remember the weakened opposition and the dirty games by the ruling party, it is unfortunate that this has characterised much of 2015.

VENERABLE PRIM HOUN - MONK ACTIVIST

LC's partner and friend, Venerable Prim Houn is a monk and a video activist. LC first got to know Venerable Houn in 2014 as he was frequently accompanying our close partner Venerable Loun Sovath. In early 2015, LC invited Venerable Houn to participate in a video advocacy training organised by LC and WITNESS.

During 2015, Venerable Houn became a well-known front-line activist and a true leader of Buddhist monks advocating for social justice.

Venerable Houn travels Cambodia to participate in protests and advocate for human rights. He has produced an impressive amount of videos and news clips, one of which has more

than 117,000 views on Facebook. This video shows the opposition party supporters at the disputed border demarcation between Cambodia and Vietnam in July, an incident that escalated tensions between the two main parties in Cambodia under 'Culture of Dialogue'. The incident also seems to have been a motivating factor in the arrest of an opposition party senator.

The senator is currently detained together with 17 additional government opponents and activists in Prey Sar prison.

LAMEY, NARY, SEAKLIN - YOUTH ACTIVISTS

In April 2015, Prime Minister Hun Sen announced that the draft Law on Associations and NGOs, shelved in its fourth draft in 2011, had been finalised secretly in 2012, and would soon become law.

The campaign to halt the Law was spearheaded by several community-based groups and civil society sectors, particularly the youth who took on the responsibility to safeguard the future of youth and student associations. The youth wrote songs, joined flash-mobs and created campaign material and petitions about the threat the law posed for Cambodia's future.

Although the Law was passed and implemented in August, the campaign brought together an extensive network of activists from many sectors of civil society. These people also continued to bravely advocate for justice and human rights, and join other sectors' events in solidarity.

With a cadre of additional draft laws about to become reality, we are proud to be a part of a network that is still growing and with new civil society actors struggling for change.



Seaklin, Lamey, Sopheak (LICADHO), Nary, Narin (LC) and Vann (LC) during Say No! campaign, July 7.

KHEM SREY MOM - GARMENT FACTORY WORKER

For International Human rights Day (IHRD) in December, celebrations took place all over Cambodia to commemorate the 67th Human Rights Day as well as to highlight human rights abuses and call for justice. An estimated 10,000 people took part in the events including around 3,000 people that marched through Phnom Penh before they all assembled outside the Ministry of Justice to submit petitions.

The IHRD celebrations were another example of Cambodians refusing to be silenced by the authorities' bullying tactics.

Earlier in September, LC organised a Basic Filming with Smartphones-workshop. The workshop aimed at front-line grassroots activists using ICT for social change.

Throughout the workshop the participants were trained in video recording with smartphones, editing on smartphones, digital security, and legal rights when filming and documenting demonstrations.

Most of our participants have already become established citizen journalist and frequently share their productions on social media with

"We are students from high schools and universities in Cambodia who have participated in discussions regarding the draft Law on Associations and NGOs (LANGO). In short, we would all like to express our dissatisfaction with the LANGO. We think that the draft law is too strict and restricts the freedom of NGOs, associations and especially youth. In addition, it will have the following negative impacts:

- 1. Youth will have difficulty to form groups or associations.*
- 2. Youth will lose their rights to have full freedom of expression.*
- 3. Youth will lose their right to develop by gaining knowledge and support from associations, networks and NGOs.*
- 4. Youth will lose the right to participate in social activities facilitated by associations, networks and NGOs.*
- 5. Youth will lose the potential to increase their capacity to compete with youth in other ASEAN countries.*

Ultimately, we would like to request the government and the National Assembly to consider our opinions regarding the negative impacts of the LANGO. We hope that the government and the National Assembly stop the process of passing this law immediately.

We believe that everyone has the right to freedom of expression and the right to develop in society."

On July 7, a group of youth activists from the Youth Child Protection Group in Phnom Penh, Cambodian Youth Network, Khmer Youth Association and students from Phnom Penh universities published an open letter on Facebook.

“About 43 per cent of the ELCs are Cambodian-owned, more than a third of which comprise a single concession in Pursat province owned by Pheapimex Group, which is directed by Yeay Phu, the wife of ruling Cambodian People’s Party Senator Lao Meng Khin.”

The more than 333,000-hectare concession is far larger than the Tonle Sap lake and more than 33 times the legally allowed limit.”

The Phnom Penh Post reporting on the released land concession data.



A Danish tv-team interviews Nhean Narin on December 1.

an impressive amount of reach and views.

On IHRD, most of the citizen journalists documented the various events in Phnom Penh and the

provinces. Below is Srey Mom, one of our workshop participants documenting one of the marching groups in Phnom Penh with her smartphone.



Srey Mom on International Human Rights Day.

NHEAN NARIN - LAST RESIDENT ON THE LAKE

In 2015, land continued to be the single most contentious issue in Cambodia.

In several of the above described cases land was the common component. In Koh Kong prison, three activists from the outspoken Mother Nature organisation are also detained.

Besides this, our closest partner LICADHO opened up its land concession data covering almost 2.14 million hectares of land concessions. Large-scale concessions have had a track record of destroying livelihoods and natural resources as well as negatively affecting development projects.

In December, LICADHO and LC were granted to opportunity to highlight some of the struggles on Danish TV. LC’s Technical & Outreach Coordinator accompanied a Danish TV-team to Borei Keila, Boeung Kak and Village 1, Sangkat 3, Sihanoukville to illustrate the effects of forced eviction and the continuous struggle by land rights activists.

In Boeung Kak, LICADHO and LC brought the TV-team to visit the last remaining house on the former lake. The family that occupies the house is now residing inside the roof as the first and second floor are filled with sand. The family has refused to give in to the authorities’ intimidation tactics and remains the last house on the former lake.



Nhean Narin’s house, the last remaining house on the former Boeung Kak Lake.