

Immediately Release and Drop Charges Against CCFC staffers

Phnom Penh, 24 May 2023

The arrest of three staffers from the Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC) and the unfounded charges of incitement and plotting against the nation marks yet another case of Cambodian authorities imprisoning human rights defenders for their peaceful activism.

We, the undersigned groups, demand an end to the persecution of human rights defenders, and call for the three CCFC staffers to be immediately and unconditionally released, so they can continue their work.

On the morning of 18 May, police formally arrested Theng Savoeun, CCFC president; Nhel Pheap, a senior organizing officer; and Thann Hach, who works as a community facilitator. They were first detained in Kratie province on the way to Phnom Penh on 17 May while they were travelling with dozens of people following an event in Ratanakiri province, and later transferred to Ratanakiri Police Commissariat.

Their lawyer was only able to speak with Savoeun in Ratanakiri Police Commissariat after his arrest in Kratie on 19 May and before his transfer to Ratanakiri provincial court. On 22 May, their lawyer was again permitted to meet with Savoeun during his questioning at the Ratanakiri Provincial Court, and to briefly speak with Hach.

During the afternoon of 22 May, Investigating Judge Say Kouhav charged Savoeun, Pheap, and Hach with plotting under Article 453 and incitement under Articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code. The three men face up to 10 years in prison and fines of up to 4 million Riel (around US\$1,000) if convicted. Based on a statement from the Ratanakiri court, Chan Vibol, an academic, has also been charged with the same offences.

These charges are baseless. CCFC is a farmer's association founded in 2011 that works with more than 70 communities across 10 provinces, assisting farmers facing forced evictions and helping to promote land rights where it is needed most. The association supports local communities to stand up for their rights, and advocates for better livelihoods and land rights for rural farmers across Cambodia.

The work of human rights activists must not be equated to criminal incitement or plotting against the nation. Arresting CCFC staffers will not resolve the long-running land conflicts faced by its members. It will not silence the voices of the community leaders and representatives who demand justice for their neighbours, friends and families.

The arrests have sparked days of protests by land communities across the country, who know that these charges are an attempt to suppress their activism, and will ultimately hinder a resolution to their land conflicts.

Savoeun, Pheap and Hach need to be immediately freed, and the charges against them must be dropped. Community organising is not a crime. Releasing these activists is a crucial step towards achieving true peace and justice in Cambodia.

1. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
2. 243 Families of Pro Lean Village Land Community (Koh Kong)

3. 955 land community (Koh Kong)
4. Am Leang Community (Kampong Speu)
5. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
6. Bos Snor Community (Tbong Khmum)
7. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
8. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
9. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
10. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
11. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
12. Cambodian Labor Confederation (CLC)
13. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
14. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
15. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
16. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
17. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
18. Charay Indigenous Community (Ratanak Kiri)
19. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
20. Chi Kha Leu Land Community (Koh Kong)
21. Choam Kravien Community (Tboung Khmum)
22. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC)
23. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
24. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
25. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
26. Free Trade Union of Workers of Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
27. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
28. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
29. Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear)
30. Khmum Srakarhlork Community (Kampong Thom)
31. Klaing Toek 78 Community (Siemreap)
32. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
33. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
34. Land Community (Pailin)

35. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
36. Peam Ros Community (Kampong Speu)
37. People Center for Development and Peace (PDP-Center)
38. Phnom Krom Community (Siemreap)
39. Phnom Tor Toeung Community (Kampot)
40. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
41. Prek Ksach Land Community (Koh Kong)
42. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
43. Prey Lang Community (Preah Vihear)
44. Prey Peay Land Community (Kampot)
45. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
46. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
47. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
48. Samaki Chek Meas Community (Svay Rieng)
49. Samaki Romeas Haek Community (Svay Rieng)
50. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
51. Sre Prang Community (Tboung Khmum)
52. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
53. Ta Ni Land Community (Siemreap)
54. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
55. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
56. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
57. Thmar Da Community (Pursat)
58. Tonlung Community (Tboung Khmum)
59. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)
60. Trapeang Pring Community (Tboung Khmum)
61. Youth Resources Development Program (YRDP)