



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*

Cambodia’s Judiciary – The Weapon of Choice to Silence Dissent July- September 2010



Land activist prays for justice outside the court. He has six bogus criminal charges against him.

“I remember observing my first Cambodian trial. I was shocked to watch the trial unfolding without ANY semblance of law or due legal process for the defendants. It was so ridiculous it could have been labelled humorous if it hadn’t destroyed the lives and livelihood of the defendants and their larger community. Every trial I’ve monitored since has sadly been the same.”

Lee Robinson, Director of LC



Chi Kreng villagers wait outside the Siem Reap court. The balloons carry signs calling for justice.

“We as witnesses from Cambodia are here today because we see that democracy in Cambodia is experiencing an alarming freefall, and because we can no longer tolerate a life threatened by fear of being arrested because of our views and opinions. We bring you the high hope of our people who wish to be ruled by law and not by the power of corrupt officials.” - Parliamentarian Mu Sochua, “Cambodian Democracy in Free Fall” testimony (2009). In 2010 she was convicted on ‘defamation’ charges.

As the monsoon rains pounded down these past three months, many of LC clients and friends have been simultaneously pounded by the courts. Cambodian courts – well known for high levels of corruption – are more and more often being used as a weapon against anyone who dares to speak out against the Cambodian elite. The past two years has seen a spike in criminal and civil suits being filed against media, community leaders, NGOs, and even opposition party leaders.

As debilitating as a bullet, attacks via the courts are becoming closer and closer to home.

Chi Kreng Pummelled by the Siem Reap Courts

From July until end of September, Chi Kreng detainees have had four (4) trials over a total of six (6) court dates, as well as two (2) verdict dates, and one (1) appeal court date. The trials seem deliberately spaced to force Chi Kreng villagers to travel many times to the court, an attempt to break their spirit and financial ability to attend. But the villagers have stayed strong, raised money through organisations, and continued to show up in hundreds outside the court in Solidarity with their detainees.

Charges range from misdemeanours (some charges duplicated) to felony charges. The inconsistencies and examples of lack of due process are numerous, both within the judicial system and civil society. Inside the court, Judges were witnessed answering private phone calls and aggressively demanding that the defendants admit their guilt. While outside the courts, well meaning NGO’s who gave up on the courts altogether, were making shady deals with provincial authorities without adequate consultation with the communities they claim to represent.

Over the past two months all verdicts for Chi Kreng have been “guilty”, with some charges carrying ‘suspended sentencing’ on part or all of the charges. It’s been heart breaking for detainees and their families. To this day, all 12 detainees remain in prison without justice, while they continue to await two additional trials and two appeal dates.

LC and LICADHO continue to provide critical support to the detainees and their families.

As of 15 July 2010 [...] LICADHO monitors were tracking 60 human rights defenders imprisoned throughout Cambodia on a variety of spurious charges.

www.licadho-cambodia.org

LICADHO Staff Member Wrongly Convicted of Disinformation

The LICADHO family is still reeling from the recent conviction of one of our own.

“This conviction once again highlights the lack of independence and impartiality of the courts, which are all too often used as a tool against the less powerful, rather than to uphold their rights,” said Donna Guesst, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific deputy director.

Cambodian police arrested Sokchouen on May 29, 2010 on charges of involvement in the production and distribution of anti-government leaflets in Takeo province in January. He was held incommunicado for over 33 hours, despite numerous requests by his family and lawyer to visit him. At his August 30 trial, Sokchouen was sentenced to two years’ in prison and a 2 million riel fine (US\$500) on charges of disinformation.

“[...] Leang Sokchouen should be immediately and unconditionally released as his detention is arbitrary and due process was blatantly violated throughout investigation and trial,” added Eric Sottas, Secretary General of OMCT.

-Excerpt from September 2010 [joint media statement](#) by four international human rights organisations.

Union Friends Punished by Court for Legal National Strike

From September 13 to September 16, 200,000 union workers went on strike demanding a living wage of US\$ 93/months to ensure basic provisions of life such as sufficient nutrition and shelter. The national strike was in response to a July 2010 announcement by the government that the minimum wage for factory workers would be set at \$61USD/month.

It was the largest union action since the 2005 assassination of union leader Chea Vichea, which subsequently paralyzed the growing union movement at the time. It was amazing to see the workers spring back to action.

On September 16, the Ministry of Social Affairs agreed to a meeting with union leaders on September 27, and thus the unions agreed to temporarily halt the strikes. However when workers returned to factories on Friday September 18th, 261 trade union representatives at 20 factories were illegally dismissed or suspended from their jobs. And not surprisingly, the September 27th meeting proved to be fruitless.

Meanwhile, a number of key union leaders and labour rights activists remain at risk of judicial harassment and under the threat of arrest warrants for organising the strike. These charges are without a legal ground as the unions observed all legal obligations, such as a giving prior notice and collecting 60.000 signatures of workers confirming their support to strike action. - [Clean Clothes Campaign, Website](#)

The key union leaders and labour rights activists mentioned above are also partners and friends of LICADHO/LICADHO Canada. Since 2009 LC began partnering with leaders from various unions. Experts at dealing with police violence, our union friends join us to monitor community actions and demonstrations. Likewise, LC monitors and supports union actions and strikes. So it just seemed right that LC and our Canadian union partners UFCW Local 401 show our support.

On behalf of our union friends, LC extends deep gratitude to UFCW Local 401 for providing monetary support and solidarity to workers through the strikes.



Sokchouen faints upon hearing the ‘guilty’ verdict at his trial. His lawyers have since filed an appeal on the verdict.



200,000 workers strike to increase minimum wage.



Please join in solidarity with Cambodian workers non-violent struggle for a living wage.

[ACT NOW](#)

