



PRESS RELEASE

CAMBODIA: Bail denied to 21 protesters

Geneva, February 11th, 2014. The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), the principal global civil society coalition against torture, expresses concern about the ongoing detention of 21 of a group of 23 protesters, including 3 human rights defenders, who were arrested during protests over garment factory wages and the political situation in the country throughout Phnom Penh early January 2014.

On February 11th, 2014, the Phnom Penh Court of Appeal denied bail to 21 protesters¹, including three human rights defenders, namely **Vorn Pao**, President of the Independent Democratic of Informal Economic Association (IDEA), which works for the promotion of worker's rights, land and housing rights, **Then Saveurn**, Coordinator of the Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC), and **Chan Putisak**, a famous Boeng Kak Lake activist. The 21 individuals, who remain detained at the Correctional Center 3 ("CC3") in Kampong Cham province, were not present for the closed hearing. OMCT has been informed that two other men, **Bou Sarith** and **Yon Sok Chea**, who were among the 23 protesters arrested early January, were granted bail during a hearing on February 7th, 2014 and released under judicial supervision the next day.

Vorn Pao, Then Soveon and Chan Putisak were arrested along with seven other individuals on January 2nd, 2014 during a protest on National Road 4, in front of Yak Jin factory, in Phnom Penh demanding for a greater increase of the minimum wage. 13 others individuals were arrested on January 3rd, 2014 near Canadia Industrial Park. They were all charged under Article 411 "Intentionally causing damage with aggravating circumstances" and Article 218 "Acts of violence with aggravating circumstances" of the Penal Code 2009 and face up to five year's imprisonment and fines from \$1'000 - \$ 2'500.

Today's ruling upheld the decision of the Phnom Penh Municipal Court, which had denied bail to all 23 individuals on the basis of ending crime, preventing new crime and ensuring detainees are available for trial.

OMCT had earlier condemned the violent crackdown and excessive use of force by security forces on various protests throughout Phnom Penh early January 2014 by garments workers, monks, victims of forced evictions and supporters of the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), which led to the death of at least four persons and the arrest of the aforementioned 23 protesters.

OMCT had also been informed that the 23 protesters were held incommunicado by the authorities for five days, without access to lawyers, medical care or their families, after their arrest. The authorities eventually revealed on January 7th, 2014 that they were being held at CC3. According to latest information, civil society groups have still not been allowed to visit them.

OMCT urges the competent authorities to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all aforementioned individuals at all times and to ensure that they have access to their families, lawyers, medical professionals and civil society groups.

¹ Sokun Sombathpiseth, Chhim Theurn, Yong Som An, Reth Roatha, Nakry Vanda, Lun San, Teng Chany, Chea Sarath, Mam Piseth, Neup Sokhourn, Phang Tren, Ry Sinoun, Heng Ratha, Pang Vanny, Pheurn Da, Cheurn Yong, Ros Sophoan and Prong Sarath.

OMCT further recalls the UN Human Rights Council resolutions 19/35 (preambular para. 11) and 22/10 (preambular para. 16), stressing that “peaceful protests should not be viewed as a threat, and therefore [...] all States [should] engage in an open, inclusive and meaningful dialogue when dealing with peaceful protests and their causes”.

Accordingly, OMCT calls on the Cambodian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all the persons currently detained and drop the charges against the above-mentioned activists, as they seem to be aimed at merely sanctioning their peaceful exercise of their freedom of association, assembly and expression.

Furthermore, OMCT urges the Government of Cambodia to immediately lift the ban on all demonstrations and marches.

Finally, OMCT urges the competent authorities to publish the findings of the investigation into the excessive use of force during the protests early January 2014, and to bring those responsible for causing death or injury through such use of force, before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal.

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