

**For Immediate Release****Cambodia: Call for the Immediate Release and Acquittal of Seven Imprisoned Land Rights Activists**

(Bangkok, 12 November 2014) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), together with its members the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) and the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), express their grave concern over the arrest, flawed trial and imprisonment of seven women land rights activists on 11 November.

Land rights defenders Tep Vanny, Nget Khun, Song Sreyleap, Kong Chantha, Pan Chunreth, Bop Chorvy and Nong Srengand were sentenced to a year in prison after being charged under Article 78 of the Traffic Law for obstructing traffic during a protest and were each fined 2 million riel (approx. \$500). FORUM-ASIA condemns the actions by the Phnom Penh prosecutor and Phnom Penh Municipal Court to charge and sentence the women in just over 24 hours, in clear violation of Cambodia's Code of Criminal Procedure and international fair trial standards. FORUM-ASIA, ADHOC and LICADHO call on the Cambodian government for the seven women to be immediately acquitted and unconditionally released.

The seven women land rights activists were arrested on 10 November in front of Phnom Penh's City Hall, for obstructing traffic during a protest to draw attention to the repeated flooding of their homes, which results from the filling in of the Boeung Kak lake for a development project backed by the ruling party Senator Lao Meng Khin. The activists planted a bed in front of City Hall to protest that their homes had been inundated with fetid water for days, and were demanding that the city clear the surrounding drains immediately. The day following their arrest they were brought to court and convicted by presiding Judge Mong Mony Saophea. His sentence was the maximum allowed by the law.

"The arrest and sentencing is an emblematic example of judicial harassment against human rights defenders who reveal and promote accountability for human rights abuses. Imprisoning these activists aims to silence the critical voices of human rights defenders and has a chilling effect on their legitimate work," said Naly Pilorge, Director of LICADHO.

"The swiftness of the conviction is a clear due process violation," said Thun Saray, President of ADHOC. "There has been no official reason given for this case being expedited. The imprisonment of these seven land rights activists is a clear example of the culture of repression surrounding land rights in Cambodia".

Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA concluded that "land conflicts are Cambodia's most pressing human rights issue today and land rights defenders continue to face threats, harassment, violence, unwarranted criminal charges and even imprisonment on a regular basis. Despite all the risks, many people are still willing to stand up to defend the land rights of their communities."

FORUM-ASIA, ADHOC and LICADHO assert that the Cambodian authorities should review the case in conformity with relevant international human rights standards including the [United Nations Declaration on human rights defenders](#) which provides for the support and protection of human rights defenders in the context of their work, and press for their immediate release.

**Background**

Of the seven women sentenced on 11 November, five (Tep Vanny, Nget Khun, Kong Chantha, Pan Chhunreth and Song Sreyleap) already had standing convictions from a 2012 case related to their protests against the evictions then taking place in Boeung Kak. In that case, the municipal court charged the "Boeung Kak 13" with

obstructing public officials and illegally occupying land and they were convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms on baseless charges in a three-hour summary trial. The Appeal Court released them a month later after reducing their sentences to time served, but upheld the convictions.

**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a Bangkok-based regional human rights group with 47 member organisations in 16 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta and Geneva. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratisation.*

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