



ក្រុមការងារពិសេសសិទ្ធិលំនៅឋាន HOUSING RIGHTS TASK FORCE(HRTF)

52, Street 306, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Tel: (855) 23 996 531, Tel/Fax: (855) 23 996 531, P.O Box: 1247
e-mail: cam.hrtf@gmail.com, www.hrtfcambodia.org

News Release

23 August 2010

For immediate release

Boeung Kok Residents Denied Freedom of Assembly

Housing Rights Task Force strongly condemns the disruption of a peaceful meeting by some 500 residents from Boeung Kok Lake in Phnom Penh, which led to a public demonstration at Independence Monument and the closure of Sihanouk Boulevard as efforts to find an alternative meeting venue were thwarted by authorities.

As the threat of eviction increases, community members from all villages surrounding Boeung Kok lake met at the National Institute for Education on Monday Aug. 23.

Their aim was to discuss their demand not to be forcibly evicted, as well as demands for adequate housing according to internationally accepted standards and onsite development. In addition, community members hoped to discuss the ongoing flooding in their area, as well as future plans.

The peaceful meeting, the first of its kind in terms of size in several months, however never took place.

At 8.45am it was disrupted, as police arrived at the venue, pressuring the proprietor of the institute to ask everybody to leave the meeting hall.

As relayed by Chamkarmon hospital officials, consequent arrangements to move the meeting to the Red Cross premises at the hospital were thwarted by a phone call from Phnom Penh Governor Kep Chuktema, ordering the closure of the grounds to the residents.

This led community members, including children and the elderly, to protest outside the hospital, heavily guarded by police, both in uniform and without, as well as military police.

Initially planning to walk all the way back to Boeung Kok, the residents were forcibly stopped by the authorities at the Independence Monument.

The stand-off there lasted for some hours, with numbers of police, military police, military, and security guards swelling.

In a violent incident, a car nearly drove into the residents, and police pushed some of the people. Many of the elderly residents also felt faint, with one older woman fainting.

“We are here at Independence Monument because we wanted to have a quiet meeting at the National Institute for Education, but were not allowed to do so,” said Ly Mom, 45, village leader in Village 24.

“We had saved money for and organised the meeting to discuss our demand for onsite development, as well as about the current flooding in our communities, and our plans for the future. Our purpose was not to come here, but the authorities gave us no choice.”

At around 11.10am, the military, armed with shields, batons, and automatic guns, began surrounding the community members, eventually herding the residents along the closed-off Sihanouk Boulevard to Wat Botum Park.

The peaceful demonstration, prompted solely by the denial of meeting space for the residents, came to an end around midday.

“Disrupting the meeting this morning was entirely unjustified,” said Sia Phearum, Secretary General of the Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF). “The authorities need to respect human rights including the freedom to assembly which is enshrined in the Cambodian constitution and international human rights standards. The people have the right to organise a meeting.”

HRTF calls for the authorities to investigate the incident as a violation of people’s right to assembly, as well to respect people’s rights as enshrined in the Cambodian constitution.

For further information, contact:

Sia Phearum, Secretary General, Housing Rights Task Force, Tel: 012 852 325