

Good evening council members.

My name is Socheata Has and I'm a current resident of the 6th district. I'm here today to bring up a matter of great concern within our community at large.

As you may know, the 4th annual Cambodian New Year Parade is coming up on April 6. That same day, we also have the historical inauguration of Cambodia Town. However, anticipation for these events has been greatly marred by distressing news that broke out 2 months ago.

On December 12, 2007, the Royal Government of Cambodia issued a press release detailing Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sok An's acceptance of the invitation to appear in this year's parade and his participation in the ribbon cutting ceremony in the inauguration of Cambodia Town. The invite was issued by a self-appointed delegation comprising of representatives from 4 different organizations. Two weeks later, the Press Telegram confirmed the story.

Ladies and gentlemen of the city council: leaving the past aside, the latest reports on Cambodia are nothing short of cataclysmic. Last year, Global Witness reports the exploitation of natural resources by senior officials in the sum of over \$100 million. Even more alarming are the government-sanctioned land grabs and forced evictions escalating as we speak. An Amnesty International report this February put the number at 150,000 villagers at risk of having no home and water because the government has seized and sold their lands to developers without their consent. Meanwhile, the Cambodian government is quoting double digit economic growth. Growth is meaningless when the majority of state assets are in the hands of an unaccountable political elite and 35% percent of the population remains in poverty. These are not numbers in the news for a Cambodian-American community: these are our families. While the world is seeking to put pressure on the Cambodian government to change its practices, it is heartbreaking and incomprehensible that a key figure from that government has now been invited to parade and inaugurate the first ever Cambodia Town in the United States.

These coming celebrations are to be a time of joy. It is to be where we unite the young and old and promote the best we have to offer. The Cambodian government is NOT the best we have to offer. In fact, it is a highly detrimental message to be sending our impressionable young. To be frank, it is an embarrassment for all of Long Beach, that a city sponsored event would promote and honor a representative of a government that has been termed a "kleptocracy" by internationally respected civil societies.

We don't need to look 8000 miles away for someone to honor in a Cambodian-American event. In fact, we humbly ask that the ribbon cutting of Cambodia Town be done by Mayor Bob Foster of Long Beach, NOT a Cambodian government official. Mayor Foster is OUR elected official, he has been here through our struggles and he helped us obtain the Cambodia Town designation. We ask this so that for posterity, when our children's children learn of the history we are making that day, they won't have to wonder why.

In closing, I would like to present copies of over 1000 petition signatures from residents of Long Beach and surrounding areas who respectfully beg your help in the withdrawal of this invitation. Thank you so much for your time.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



> [Home](#) > [For Media](#) > [Press releases](#) > [Forced evictions in Cambodia: homes razed, lives in ruins](#)

FORCED EVICTIONS IN CAMBODIA: HOMES RAZED, LIVES IN RUINS

11 February 2008

"I lost my house, rice and belongings like clothes and utensils. All houses were burned down and destroyed by the excavator and the bulldozer. They kept good-condition corrugated steel and planks of wood for themselves. They even took water jars and looted our chickens and ducks. They never came to evict us like this before."

A villager in Sihanoukville, who lost her home on 20 April 2007.

Amnesty International today said that forced evictions are one of the most widespread human rights violations affecting Cambodians in both rural and urban areas. At least 150,000 Cambodians across the country are known to live at risk of being forcibly evicted in the wake of land disputes, land grabbing and development projects.

In sharp contrast to the rhetoric of the government's pro-poor policies and in breach of international human rights laws and standards, thousands of people, particularly those living in poverty, have been forcibly evicted from their homes and lands, reveals a new Amnesty International report, *Rights Razed – Forced evictions in Cambodia*, launched today.

The Cambodian authorities are not only failing to protect – in law and practice – the population against forced evictions, but are actively involved in these unlawful practices.

"The authorities have been instrumental in demolishing villages, setting homes ablaze and making poor people homeless without due process and at the behest of those who wield economic and political power," said Catherine Baber, Director of Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Programme. "It is clear that relevant laws are seldom and arbitrarily applied, and the authorities have not protected the human rights of people affected by forced evictions."

Rights Razed shows how affected groups have had no opportunity for genuine consultation before eviction, received little or no information on planned evictions, and had no access to adequate alternative housing. In addition, they have been left with no recourse to justice. The cases presented in the report also show how, contrary to international human rights law, the authorities have opted for eviction long before all other alternatives have been explored.

"Unless the Cambodian government takes immediate and effective steps to ensure that its population, particularly those living in poverty, is protected against forced evictions, its poverty reduction agenda rings hollow. Cambodia urgently needs to end all forced evictions," said Catherine Baber.

Amnesty International calls on the Cambodian government to:

- End all forced evictions and introduce a moratorium for all mass evictions until legislation and policy is put into place that requires any further evictions to be conducted in full compliance with international human rights laws and standards.
- Ensure that those victimised by forced evictions have access to, at the very least, minimum essential levels of shelter, clean water, sanitation, health services and education, including through the provision of humanitarian assistance where necessary.
- Abide by its obligations under international human right law to give those affected by eviction an opportunity for genuine participation and consultation.

Notes to editors:

Background:

A forced eviction is 'the permanent or temporary removal against the will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection,' according to the Committee

on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Forced evictions have been recognized by the UN Commission on Human Rights as a gross violation of human rights, and are also – as in the cases presented here – associated with other human rights violations.

As a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and other international human rights treaties which prohibit forced eviction and related human rights violations, Cambodia has an obligation to stop forced evictions and to protect the population from forced evictions.



global witness

10/08/07

For Immediate Release:

Cambodian Hammer fails to crack nut - Cambodian Embassy in London calls for regime change at Global Witness

Following Global Witness' recommendation that new World Bank President Robert Zoellick take advantage of his recent trip to Cambodia by calling for a credible investigation into evidence of an illegal logging network surrounding the Cambodian Prime Minister and other senior officials (exposed in Global Witness' June 2007 report 'Cambodia's Family Trees'), the Cambodian government, increasingly desperate to defend their already tarnished public image, has issued a press release demanding a change in Global Witness' leadership and a call to the organisation's donors to cut funding.

The August 5 press release describes Global Witness' request to Mr Zoellick as both "amusing and disturbing" and urges funders to "review the credibility and ill-intention of Global Witness Director," adding "his discriminatory nature may be ill suited to lead Global Witness in the current situation and the future."

"Cambodia's Family Trees is based on several years of rigorous investigations into Cambodia's forest sector and offers an in-depth exposé of illegal logging, kidnapping and attempted murder by relatives of the prime minister and other senior officials. I fail to see why calling for a credible investigation into these findings is either amusing or disturbing," said Global Witness Director, Simon Taylor. "This latest announcement from the Cambodian Embassy is symptomatic of the government's reluctance to deal with the facts presented in our report. Attempts to suppress our activities will not make these very real issues of governance and natural resource mismanagement disappear," he said, adding "Either respond to our calls for an investigation to prove impunity in Cambodia does not exist, or stop complaining."

"It's also worth noting that the Cambodian government are happy to benefit from the freedom of the press here in the UK, whilst our report is banned in Cambodia and the prime minister's brother is reported to have threatened Global Witness staff with violence," said Taylor.

The press release highlighted economic growth over the past decade in Cambodia and improvements in the investment climate. Yet last month a World Bank survey of corruption in 207 countries ranked Cambodia in the bottom ten percent, as did the 2006 Transparency International "corruption perceptions index". The Cambodian government is still repaying millions of dollars siphoned off in a graft scandal that forced the Bank to temporarily suspend three key aid projects last year. Meanwhile, an estimated 35% of the Cambodian population continues to live in poverty.

"Quoting economic growth rates is meaningless if the vast proportion of state assets are under the control of an unaccountable elite," said Taylor. "Changing the status quo will necessitate addressing the rampant corruption which allows a small group of individuals to profit from the exploitation of Cambodia's natural resources at the expense of the country's poor. There must be an effective judicial investigation into our report's findings and the international donor community must insist that this happens."

Ends

For further information please contact: +44 7957 142 121 or +44 207 561 6396

Notes to Editors:

- (1) Global Witness exposes the corrupt exploitation of natural resources and international trade systems, to drive campaigns that end impunity, resource-linked conflict, and human rights and environmental abuses. Global Witness was co-nominated for the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for its leading work on 'conflict diamonds' and awarded the Gleitsman Foundation prize for international activism in 2005. For more information see <http://www.globalwitness.org>
- (2) For more information on World Bank governance indicators, see <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi2007/home.htm>
- (3) The report 'Cambodia's Family Trees' can be downloaded from http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/546/en/cambodias_family_trees
- (4) For further information on Transparency International's "corruption perceptions index" visit http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2006
- (5) For more information on poverty in Cambodia visit http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCAMBODIA/Resources/293755-1181597206916/E&D_execsummary.pdf
- (5) References to the threat from the prime minister's brother are drawn from an article by Douglas Gillison and Yun Samean, published in the Cambodia Daily on June 5 2007. In it, the prime minister's brother and Kompong Cham provincial governor Hun Neng is quoted as saying: "If they (Global Witness staff) come to Cambodia, I will hit them until their heads are broken."
- (6) The press release issued by the Cambodian Embassy can be found at http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/566/en/global_witness_must_stop_activities_and_defamation_to_discredit_the_image_of_the_royal_government_of_cambodia_from_now_and_for_good