

URGENT ACTION

CONVICTED ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS RELEASED

Two environmental activists and prisoners of conscience, convicted of and sentenced on trumped-up charges based on their peaceful activism, were released after serving five months out of their 1-year prison sentences, as seven months of their sentences had been suspended.

Hun Vannak and **Doem Kundy**, activists affiliated with the environmental NGO ‘Mother Nature Cambodia’ (MNC), were released from Koh Kong Provincial Prison in the morning of 13 February 2018. On 26 January 2018, Koh Kong’s Provincial Court convicted both men of “incitement to commit a felony” and “violation of privacy” and sentenced them to one year in prison with seven months of that prison sentence suspended.

At the day of the trial, both activists had already spent five months in pre-trial detention due to their arbitrary arrest on 12 September 2017. The trumped-up charges were based on their peaceful environmental activism. They had filmed two large vessels in open waters, which were anchored off the coast of Prek Khsach in Koh Kong province, southwestern Cambodia, as they suspected them to be illegally carrying sand for export. The complaint had been filed by ruling party Senator Ly Yong Phat’s company, Ly Yong Phat Group Ltd., alleging the two had filmed on the company’s “private property”, such as the Special Economic Zone in Kiri Sakor district.

Both were arrested two days after MNC had published a video exposing illegal exports of Cambodia’s valuable silica sand by companies linked to the Cambodian authorities. MNC has accused Cambodian authorities of complicity in this illegal trade of Cambodia’s natural resource by turning a blind eye to fraud and tax evasion allegedly committed by sand-dredging companies.

Upon arrest, the pair had been questioned and charged without their lawyer present. In October 2017, they had been denied bail. They were held in small and overcrowded prison cells at Kog Kong Provincial Prison. Amnesty International considered both men to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for their peaceful activism.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the first update of UA 279/17. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa23/7635/2017/en

Further information on UA: 279/17 Index: ASA 23/7913/2018 Issue Date: 19 February 2018

