

URGENT ACTION

TWO HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON TRIAL

Two Cambodian housing rights defenders have been arrested and charged with “incitement” for taking part in a peaceful protest calling for the release of five imprisoned human rights defenders. Their trial has been postponed to 22 August. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience.

Tep Vanny and **Bov Sophea**, housing rights defenders from the Boeung Kak community in Phnom Penh, Cambodia’s capital, were arrested in the evening of 15 August while conducting a peaceful vigil against corrupt officials with a small group of people from their community. The peaceful gathering was part of the “Black Monday” advocacy campaign by human rights defenders protesting the detention of four staff from local human rights organization, ADHOC (Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association), and one former ADHOC staff member who is now the deputy secretary-general of the National Election Committee.

After being arrested, Tep Vanny and Bov Sophea were held at Daun Penh police station for two nights before being brought to Phnom Penh Municipal Court for questioning on 17 August. Later that day they were charged under Article 495 of the Criminal Code for “incitement to commit a felony” and trial proceedings were initiated immediately under Article 47 of the Criminal Procedure Code which allows for expedited prosecutions of accused where certain conditions are met. If convicted they face up to two years’ imprisonment and a fine of up to USD\$1,000. Their trial began but has been postponed to 22 August. They are currently held in Prey Sar CC2 Prison on the outskirts of Phnom Penh.

The arrests of Tep Vanny and Bov Sophea come in the context of a wider attempt by the authorities to discourage and stifle the “Black Monday” campaign. The two women have taken part in peaceful activities defending housing rights in their community and elsewhere since 2007. Both have been arrested numerous times and have been previously detained as prisoners of conscience.

Please write immediately in English, Khmer or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Tep Vanny and Bov Sophea;
- Urging the authorities to end the use of criminal charges to intimidate and punish peaceful protestors;
- Calling on them to publicly acknowledge the legitimate work of human rights defenders and ensure a safe and enabling environment for them to carry out their work.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 SEPTEMBER 2016 TO:

Minister of Public Security and Deputy

Prime Minister

Sar Kheng

75 Norodom Blvd

Khan Chamkarmon

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Fax: +855 23 426 585

Salutation: Your Excellency

Prime Minister

Samdech Hun Sen

Office of the Prime Minister

Jok Dimitrov Boulevard Phnom Penh,

Cambodia

Fax: +855 23 360 666 / +855 23 880

624(c/o Council of Ministers)

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs and

International Cooperation

Prak Sokhonn

No. 3 Samdech Hun Sen Street

Khan Chamcar Mon

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Fax: + 855 23 216 141

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

HIS EXCELLENCY MR MEAS KIM HENG,

Royal Embassy of Cambodia, 64 Brondesbury Park, Willesden Green, NW6 7AT

020 8451 7997, Fax 020 8451 7594, cambodianembassy@btconnect.com, www.cambodianembassy.org.uk

Salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tep Vanny and Bov Sophea are currently held in Prey Sar CC2 Prison on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. Prior to their arrests on 15 August, four other land rights activists - Sar Sorn, Phork Sophin, Nat Sreynak and Nou Sat from the Phnom Penh's Borei Keila area – were arrested at another peaceful gathering earlier in the day. They were released later the same day after thumb-printing documents pledging not to take part in future gatherings. A Spanish national, Marga Bujosa Segado, was arrested on 16 August for taking part in the Boeung Kak community gathering and questioned by the Ministry of Interior Immigration Department before being released later that evening. She was re-arrested on 17 August and deported.

The “Black Monday” advocacy campaign has been ongoing since early May 2016. The campaign aims to support five detained human rights defenders who were arrested on 28 April and have been charged with bribery in connection with legitimate assistance provided in the course of their human rights work. These are four staff from ADHOC (Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association) and one former ADHOC staff and now member of the National Election Committee. The “Black Monday” advocacy campaign has involved small gatherings with people wearing black in solidarity, or individuals posting photos of themselves wearing black on social media. At least 36 people – excluding Tep Vanny, Bov Sophea and Marga Bujosa Segado - have so far been arrested in connection with these peaceful protests. Until 15 August those arrested were released without charge after questioning and undertaking not to carry out further protests. Government officials have said that they regard the “Black Monday” protests as part of an effort to bring about a “Colour Revolution” in Cambodia, similar to the popular movements that toppled autocratic regimes in post-Soviet countries and the Balkans in the early 2000s, and have justified arrests on this basis. The Boeung Kak Lake gathering on 15 August has been described by the government as an illegal “urban rebellion”.

This is not the first time that Tep Vanny and Bov Sophea have been targeted for their human rights activities. Tep Vanny was among a group of seven women housing rights defenders arrested on 10 November 2014 after a peaceful street protest over flooding in their neighbourhood. The next day, the seven were brought to the Phnom Penh Municipal Court where they were charged with obstructing traffic under Article 78 of the Traffic Law. They were tried, convicted, and each sentenced to one year's imprisonment and fined an equivalent of USD\$500. The trial lasted less than three hours. They were released in April 2015 after receiving a Royal Pardon.

In May 2012 Tep Vanny and Bov Sophea were among 13 women arrested during a peaceful protest to support 18 families whose homes had been destroyed in forced evictions. They were sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison after a summary trial. In June 2012, their convictions were upheld on appeal but the remainder of the sentences were suspended.

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