Cambodian military forces complicit in the dispossession of indigenous farmland in Pir Thnu and Srae Cha communes in Kratie Province

The indigenous Stieng community in Thma Hal Dei Kraham village, Pir Thnu commune, Snuol district, Kratie province has occupied the land, upon which their livelihoods depend, for several decades. Since 2006, approximately 75 hectares of land, relied on by 150 families, have been under threat from corporate interests. Some families have official letters from the local authorities, recognizing their possession of the seized farmland, however when the villagers have shown them to the companies involved in the dispute, they have refused to acknowledge their validity.

In 2006, CIV Development Agro Industry (“CIV”) was granted an Economic Land Concession ("ELC") covering 1,000 hectares of farmland across both Pir Thnu and Srae Cha communes, although in 2012, 914 hectares were excised from CIV’s ELC as per Sub-Decree No.148. In 2007, CIV sent bulldozers to the area to commence building a road to the disputed land. The construction of this road infringed upon 100 hectares of farmland possessed by villagers from both Pir Thnu and Srae Cha communes. In response, approximately 500 people from five different villages from both communes travelled to the site to stop the bulldozers from flattening the land. As a result of their action, the company stopped bulldozing for one week, before carrying on as planned.

In 2008, a Vietnamese company, Hai Yong Investment Agro Industry Company (“Hai Yong”), arrived and began to clear the villagers’ farmland, in order to establish a rubber plantation. In response to villagers’ protests against the bulldozing, soldiers from regiment 204, equipped with AK47s, have been deployed to patrol the disputed land’s perimeter. When the villagers have attempted to access the land, the soldiers have fired their AK47s into the air and at the ground whenever the villagers attempted to access the land.

Hai Yong was originally granted a 701-hectare ELC in the area to grow rubber and cassava in 2007, although 43 hectares were excised from Hai Yong’s ELC in 2012, according to Sub-Decree No. 148. The community has never seen the ELC license, nor were they consulted about the project before it went ahead. Moreover, the site has not been well looked after; many of the rubber trees have died and much of the land has been neglected. Thus, the company’s operation appears to be at odds with the fundamental rationale for awarding ELCs to private companies: to encourage agricultural development and increase efficiency.

The community has filed a number of complaints with various institutions, including the commune, district and provincial authorities, the Council of Ministers, the Prime Minister’s Cabinet, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction. However, no resolution has been forthcoming and the villagers are still fighting for the return of their land.

1 The five villages were: Srae Char, Meam Chey, Kbal Trach, Krabie Chol Roung, Dei Kraham, and Chba Ampao