Rights Advocates Decry Lenient Punishment for Ousted Police Chief

10 September 2020
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VOA Khmer

Rights advocates have called for criminal proceedings to be initiated against ousted Kampong Thom police chief Ouk Kosal, who was fired by the Ministry of Interior on Monday after being accused in July of physical harassment by four of his officers.

The Ministry of Interior released a document on Monday removing Ouk Kosal from his position as Kampong Thom police chief and also made a request to demote him from the rank of lieutenant general to colonel.

Four police officers, who worked with Ouk Kosal, wrote a letter to Interior Minister Sar Kheng on July 30 accusing the police chief of physically assaulting them while on the job, including accusations of inappropriate touching and non-penetrative sex acts.

Chak Sopheap, who heads the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, said
the use of “partial” administrative measures were insufficient punishment and that the former police chief should face criminal charges.

“We must follow legal procedures to ensure that all abuses draw attention from the government,” she said. “We must follow the legal procedures by not creating an atmosphere where we see the continuation of the culture of impunity.”

A 2015 report from rights groups Licadho showed that victims of rape and indecent assault were often pushed to “settle” their cases for monetary compensation and also pointed to the prevalence of impunity experienced by offenders in these cases.

Bunn Rachana, the director women’s rights group Klaahan, said that it was clear Ouk Kosal had committed a criminal offense and that he should be charged and made to stand trial.

She said senior officials will feel a greater sense of impunity if they know these crimes would result in only an administrative punishment.

“Bringing this case to be tried [by the court] is the right move according to the law. This is a criminal offence, which should not be solved through a comprise outside court,” she said.

Ouk Kosal and the four female officers could not be reached for comment on Wednesday.

Following the release of the letter accusing him of indecent assault, Ouk Kosal released a video on social media claiming the charges were untrue and that he was being framed.

Reacting to rights advocates, Interior Ministry spokesperson Khieu Sopheak said removing Ouk Kosal from his position was sufficient and severe action against the errant police official.

“But I just would like to clarify that submitting a complaint to the court is OK but I think that this resolution is proper and severe for the police officers,” he said.

National Police chief Neth Savoeun told Voice of Democracy on Tuesday that Ouk Kosal’s case could not be sent to the court because “it was difficult for the authorities to compile the documents and elements of the case and that it authorities wanted “to protect the dignity of the female police victims.”
Details:  https://www.voacambodia.com/a/rights-advocates-decry-lenient-punishment-for-ousted-police-chief-/5577974.html