Authority's Campaign of Intimidation to Prevent Peaceful Forum

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) expresses its disappointment at the decision of the authority to forbid the CCHR from conducting a Public Forum in the area of Boeng Kak Lake.

The purpose of these public forums is to give citizens a chance to meet government officials and elected representatives in order to discuss issues of public interest and, particularly, the problems they are faced with. Dialogue between officials and their constituents is a necessary and essential process in any democratic society and an obligation that responsible public servants and parliamentarians cannot avoid.

The authority has consistently and repeatedly sought to prevent the CCHR from organizing the public forum at Boeng Kak Lake. The CCHR originally planned to conduct the forum in the Mosque on May 20, 2009. Although the municipal authority cannot prevent a gathering in a private place, such as the Mosque, the Mosque authorities retracted their permission in the absence of approval from the municipal authorities. On May 25, 2009, the CCHR agreed to rent the Lazy Fish Guesthouse as an alternative venue for the public forum. The Village Chief and deputy Village Chief threatened to close the guesthouse saying “if you rent your Guesthouse to CCHR to conduct the forum, your guesthouse will be closed”. The Village Chief has also intimidated residents at Boeng Kak Lake, one resident named Kolap states that the Village Chief threatened to send her to prison for contacting the CCHR saying “why did you call them back to conduct the forum? You should contact the company secretly. You should be sent to prison.” Similarly Boeng Kak resident Ros Vannak, who volunteered to distribute letters inviting residents to the forum to express their opinions freely, peacefully and in accordance with the law, was approached by the Village Chief and told “don’t incite people or you will be sent to prison.”

The CCHR has written to the municipality of Phnom Penh, Daun Penh District and Srahchak Commune informing them of our intention to hold the public forum. The Village Chief and the Deputy Village Chief have conducted a campaign of intimidation against the residents at Boeng Kak Lake to prevent a peaceful gathering which is legally protected under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which ensures that people can express their opinion freely without abuse from others.

The CCHR urges the ministries involved to act immediately and fire the Village chief and the Deputy Village Chief.

The CCHR urges all parties, political parties and stakeholders alike, to work with civil society and to engage in dialogue towards a peaceful and fair resolution to the problems facing the people at Boeng Kak Lake.

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