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**CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Relocation of Sambok Chab villagers threatens a humanitarian crisis – Phnom Penh City Hall must now guarantee the basic human rights**

*Phnom Penh, June 22<sup>th</sup>, 2006*

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) reiterates its call on the Phnom Penh Governor and superior Cambodian authorities to acknowledge that the eviction of villagers of Sambok Chab, Sangkat Tonle Bassac, on Tuesday, June 6, 2006, is threatening a serious humanitarian crisis. Timely action is needed to save lives and to guarantee the basic human rights to food, housing, clean water, public health services and schooling for the estimated 6,000 people at the relocation site close to Trapeang Andong village in Kork Roka Commune, Dangkao District.

Under the supervision of hundreds of armed police and military, more than 1,200 families from Sambok Chab were forcibly relocated on idle rice fields more than two weeks ago. Hundreds of other desperate and destitute families have moved or were driven to the same area of about three hectares. One household occupies less than five by five meters. Most families take shelter under plastic sheets or other makeshift materials, not sufficient to provide privacy and dignity. Only a few families have received tarpaulins. Muddy water standing in pools created by heavy rainfalls is used for washing and cleaning. The municipality provides only two or three trucks of drinkable water a day. There are not enough provisional toilets. Public health service is not available on a regular basis. Medicine is distributed by some NGOs only. Located more than 20 kilometers from their former homes, most people have lost their meager income making opportunities and many are already starving. There is no administration of this site and security is not guaranteed: People do not leave their small huts for fear that others will take their few belongings. The most vulnerable groups, including women, infants and children, older people, disabled people and people living with HIV/AIDS are already affected by this precarious situation and their condition is at high risk of worsening.

The developing humanitarian crisis is aggravated by the fact that it is not yet recognized as such, even though the conditions at the relocation site do not meet internationally recognized minimum standards for human settlements in post-disaster situations.

CCHR calls on the Phnom Penh Governor and superior Cambodian authorities to:

- acknowledge that the forced relocation of Sambok Chab villagers and other poor residents of the capital has been a colossal failure of planning and now threatens a humanitarian crisis according to the international understanding of this term.
- guarantee the basic human rights to food, housing, clean water, health services and schooling by organizing immediate relief with the assistance of qualified international organizations.
- immediately halt any further not agreed and unprepared relocations of poor people in Phnom Penh and throughout the country.
- develop a consistent and transparent multi-stakeholder process for resolving land disputes that may involve relocations; such a process should be consistent with the U.N.'s resettlement guidelines, the Declaration of Principles for Best Practices in Housing and Pro-Poor Development in Phnom Penh, and the government's own promises made during the 2003 Secure Tenure Campaign to upgrade 100 urban poor communities per year with government support through 2008.

*For questions and interviews please call Pa Nguon Teang, phone no. 012 598066*