



មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលសិទ្ធិមនុស្សកម្ពុជា
Cambodian Center for Human Rights

CCHR MEDIA COMMENT – Phnom Penh, 13 December 2012

CCHR highlights new legislation in China to prohibit land grabs and calls for Cambodia to do the same

Cambodia’s longstanding ally, China, is to press ahead with legislation aimed at preventing controversial and abusive land seizures in a bid to quell growing social unrest, reported *The Cambodia Daily* (‘China Tackles Land Grabs, a Key Source of Rural Anger’, p.22 *The Cambodia Daily*, 7 December 2012). In the same week that a report was released by three Swedish NGOs that used Cambodia as one of two case studies on the negative impacts of land grabbing, China’s outgoing Premier, Wen Jiabao, is prioritizing amendments to the land management law that will make it more difficult for local officials to requisition land and will also increase the levels of compensation that farmers receive in cases where land is taken in the public interest.¹ The move is widely seen as a response to growing civil unrest regarding land seizures in rural China where 65% of social disturbances are said to be in direct response to disputes over land.²

The social disturbances in China echo the growing civil unrest that has unfolded in Cambodia in response to land grabs and forced evictions. Commenting on the report, *The Race for Land* (“the Report”), published last week by a consortium of Swedish NGOs, Karin Gregow of the NGO Forum Syd, stated that Cambodia “gives one very concrete example of the serious negative impacts of land grabbing” and of the worldwide cases of land grabs monitored by the organization, she described Cambodia as “one of the worst in terms of human rights violations”.³

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) urges the Royal Government of Cambodia (the “RGC”) to take seriously the concerns highlighted in the Report and to adopt similar legislation to the new laws currently being considered by China’s State Council. Without such legislation, the fundamental rights of those affected by land issues remain insufficiently protected and incidents of civil unrest are likely to continue to increase. Despite a purported moratorium on Economic Land Concessions (“ELCs”), the RGC continues to grant them and the authorities have arrested a number of people in connection with protests against ELCs this year. CCHR calls on the RGC for greater transparency regarding the

¹ ‘China Tackles Land Grabs, a Key Source of Rural Anger’, p.22 *The Cambodia Daily*, 7 December 2012.

² Ibid.

³ ‘Report on Worldwide Land Grabbing Zeroes in on Cambodia’, p.18 *The Cambodia Daily*, 7 December 2012

number of ELCs granted before the moratorium was put into effect and to amend and update existing legislation in order to protect the rights and interests of Cambodian citizens.

CCHR's Land Reform Project Coordinator, Vann Sopath, comments:

“The fact that the Chinese government is prioritizing the passing of this new legislation in order to protect the rights of its citizens and to ensure that they are properly compensated if their land is taken demonstrates the seriousness of the issue of land grabbing and the impact that it can have on social cohesion and civil unrest. In the wake of the Report released by the group of Swedish NGOs, CCHR hopes that the RGC will take similar steps to ensure that its citizens who are affected by ELCs are treated fairly.”

For more information, please contact Vann Sopath via telephone at +855 (0) 1294 1206 or e-mail at vann.sopath@cchrcambodia.org or Senior Consultant Robert Finch via telephone at +855 (0) 7880 9960 or e-mail at robert.finch@cchrcambodia.org.

– END –

Notes to Editor:

CCHR, founded in November 2002, is a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights – primarily civil and political rights – throughout Cambodia.

CCHR is a member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression.

The Cambodian Human Rights Portal www.sithi.org is the 2011 winner of the Information Society Innovation Fund Award in the category of Rights and Freedoms.