

(This is a translation of the official letter which was sent to the Ministry of Interior in Khmer)

His Excellency Sar Kheng

Deputy Minister, Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior,
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia

10 January 2013

Open Letter Regarding Comments Made in Relation to the Rape of a Disabled Woman in Kandal Province

Your Excellency Sar Kheng,

I write to you regarding comments made by District police chief Pam Sam Eth regarding the gang rape of a 19-year-old disabled woman in Kien Svay district, Kandal Province. According to a 3 January 2013 article published in The Cambodia Daily ('In Cambodia, a Culture of Silence Surrounds Rape'), Pam Sam Eth stated that "*it was already 9 p.m. when she was raped. She shouldn't have been out so late.*" Although I commend the police for taking action on this case and for beginning an investigation, I am concerned that comments such as these – which imply that the victim is to be blamed for the rape because she was out late at night – will only serve to discourage more women from speaking out about incidences of sexual and gender-based violence and from seeking the help of the police.

Although rape is by no means a problem unique to Cambodia, it is nevertheless a grave and widespread issue that must be taken seriously by all levels of authority in Cambodia. According to the article in The Cambodia Daily, Adhoc recorded approximately 320 cases of rape in 2012.¹ Furthermore, the consensus amongst NGOs is that many cases go unreported because victims are afraid to file complaints with the authorities. If the police are seen to be blaming the victims for incidences of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, it will only exacerbate these trends, as victims will be even more reluctant to go to the police to file complaints and perpetrators will go unpunished.

In order to stem the tide of violence against women, the police must ensure that all such cases are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly, with a focus on respecting and protecting the victims. If it fails to do so, impunity and, inevitably and consequently, the failure to bring the number of incidents down, will result in a serious and systemic human rights violation. This will only further victimize survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, for which the government

¹ Similarly, from May 2010 to May 2011, CCHR documented 250 cases of rape reported in the news media in English and Khmer: http://www.sithi.org/temp.php?url=rape_case.php&.

would be responsible. I hope that you will speak out on this issue and ensure that the authorities do not discriminate against victims of sexual violence.

Yours Sincerely,

Ou Virak
President

CC:

- Samdech Techo Hun Sen (Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia)
- Lokchumteav Ing Kuntha Phavy (President of Cambodian National Council for Women (CNCW), Minister of Women Affairs)
- Ang Vong Vathana (Minister of Justice)