

## **Joint Statement**

**On**

### **Call for a Transparent Investigation and a Stop to Grassroots Activism Interference following Hong Kong's Seizure of More Than 211 Tons of Rare Timber Exported from Cambodia**

Phnom Penh, May 27, 2021

We, the undersigned associations, unions, civil society organizations, environmental activists, acitizens, and international scientists are very concerned after seeing the press release issued by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Customs and Excise Department on the confiscation of 211 tons of rare and endangered timber, valued at HK\$ 1.1 million or USD 140,000. The confiscated logs were found by Hong Kong customs officials in seven containers after being dropped off at the Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi customs offices between April 29 and May 5, 2021. The seizure is considered to be the largest confiscation of rare and valuable timber by Hong Kong in the last five years.

The discovery of this valuable piece of timber exported from Cambodia should come as no surprise. Earlier this year, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime stated that between 2001-2018, Cambodia lost about 557,000 hectares of forest cover within protected areas. This is equivalent to about 11,7% of all protected areas, which environmental activists and civil society organizations have increasingly been restricted from patrolling and protecting by authorities.

Following the seizure in Hong Kong, the Cambodian government denied facilitating the export of luxury wood and re-stated the ongoing export prohibition of such wood. In a written statement dated May 14, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries denied having prepared any documents to export rare and endangered plants to Hong Kong or anywhere else, labeling this an instance of illegal timber smuggling. The ministry also confirmed that it would investigate the case to determine who is responsible.

We, the undersigned associations, unions, civil society organizations, environmental activists, citizens, and international scientists call for the government-announced investigation to be thorough and transparent, with public disclosure of its findings. Identification and prosecution

of all parties involved in illegal timber exports and deforestation is necessary to put an end to rampant impunity for illegal logging. Such measures are crucial to protect Cambodia's remaining forests, a national treasure at risk of being permanently lost.

Moreover, we take this opportunity to once again call for the government to put an end to their ongoing campaign of harassment and obstruction of grassroots communities, associations and organizations trying to protect natural resources. Local communities' independent patrols and awareness raising activities are some of the few mechanisms proven to be effective at stopping illegal logging and preserving the forests. These activities should be protected, not prohibited.

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This statement is endorsed by:

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2. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
3. Asia Pacific Network Environment Defenders (APNED)
4. The Center for Environmental Concerns - Philippines
5. The Center for Sustainable Community Development (SCODE)
6. People for Development and Peace (PDP-Center)
7. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
8. Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID)
9. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
10. Cambodian League For The Promotion And Defense Of Human Rights (LICADHO)
11. Community Resource Center (Vietnam)
12. Vikas Adhyayan Kendra (India)
13. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association) IDEA)
14. Cambodia's Independent Civil - servants Associations(CICA)
15. Solidarity House(SH)
16. Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation (CFSWF)
17. Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC-Cambodia)
18. The Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)
19. Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC)
20. Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC)
21. Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN)
22. Kouy Indigenous Community: BroMer District, Previhear Province
23. PhnomBak Forest Community: Kratie Province
24. PnomSess Forest Community: Kratie Province
25. Ou Kork Forest Community: Kratie Province
26. Baplel Forest Community: Kratie Province
27. Prey Rolous Community: Kratie Province
28. Reading Friend Club (RFC)
29. Charity Event Cambodia (CEC)
30. Gender Environment Mental (GEM)
31. Walhi Kalimantan Tengah (Indonesia)

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