NGO staff and activists arrested on their way to ‘Black Monday Campaign’ demonstrations in support of imprisoned human rights workers

**Date:** 10 May 2016

**Name:** Ee Sarom, Thav Kimsan, Sar Sorn, Song Sreyleap, Bov Sophea, Kong Chantha, Mathias Pfeifer and Anna Pettersson

**Category of activist:** NGO worker and community

**Location:** Phnom Penh

**Rights Involved:** Freedom of Expression; Freedom of Assembly

**Brief Description:**

Four non-governmental organization (“NGO”) staff, including two foreign consultants, in addition to four land activists were arrested yesterday morning – 09 May 2016 - while on their way to take part in what has been dubbed the ‘Black Monday Campaign’ in support of imprisoned human rights workers. All were detained and questioned for several hours, before being released at approximately 7pm.

Ee Sarom, executive director of housing rights group Sahmakum Teang Tnaut; Thav Kimsan, deputy director of advocacy for rights group Licadho, and Sar Sorn, a Borei Keila land activist, were arrested in Dangkor district, near Prey Sar prison, where four senior staff members from the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (“ADHOC”) are currently being detained on charges of bribing opposition leader1 Kem Sokha’s alleged mistress to deny that they had an affair. Meanwhile, three Boeung Kak lake activists were also arrested as they tried to the leave the Boeung Kak area, and were detained in Daunh Penh district. Two foreign consultants also working for Licadho, Mathias Pfeifer and Anna Pettersson, were taken into custody outside Dangkor police station after a stand-off with police and sent to the immigration police office near Phnom Penh International Airport.

These arrests were pre-emptive moves by the security forces taking place at road blocks where the authorities intercepted the NGO staff and activists. They followed a statement from the Ministry of Interior on Sunday accusing the protestors of incitement and warning that authorities at all levels would act to maintain “peace, political stability and social order”. The Royal Government of Cambodia (the “RGC”) had likened the planned protest to an act of incitement and rebellion, and accused the campaign’s organizers of trying to incite a color revolution,2 indicating its attitude towards its critics in the run up to the commune and national elections in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

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1 CCHR, ‘Conditional Release of Human Rights Defenders Violates Fundamental Rights to Freedom of Expression and Assembly’ (Briefing Note) (05 February 2014) [http://bit.ly/1QRhpHx](http://bit.ly/1QRhpHx)

All of those detained, except for the two foreigners, were released only after signing an agreement to not participate in any future illegal activities, a practice that the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) has noted has long been used as a tactic of the RGC to unlawfully restrict human rights defenders’ rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

The arrests are yet another example of the increasing crackdown by the RGC on peaceful protestors and civil society members in the past year, sending a direct warning to those that may wish to participate in future protests as part of the campaign. At present, 18 members of the opposition are imprisoned or detained, while opposition leader Mr. Sam Rainsy remains in self-imposed exile due to an arrest warrant issued against him in November 2015. In addition, three Mother Nature activists have been held in pre-trial detention since August 2015 in relation to their involvement in protests against sand dredging in Koh Kong province.

For more information please contact CCHR’s Protecting Fundamental Freedoms Project Coordinator Ms. Chhunly Chhay, via telephone at +855 (0) 17 528 021 or email at chhunly.chhay@cchrcambodia.org; or Pat de Brún, Legal Consultant, via telephone at +855 (0) 89 536 215 or email at pat.debrun@cchrcambodia.org.

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