Public Forum Report in Siem Reap Province

Phnom Penh, 07 January 2009

Parliamentarians were pushed to arrest those responsible for shooting the people and inflicting grave wounds while the people were collecting rice on March 22, 2009. This case occurred after a land conflict took place between people and a merchant. This concern was raised at a public forum conducted by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) on December 30, 2009 in Sleng pagoda, Pring village, Chi Kreng commune, Chi Kreng district, Siem Reap province. Around 325 people attended and they came from three districts in Siem Reap. There are Banteay Srey district, Angkor Thom district and Chi Kreng district.

In attendance were H.E. Koch Moly (Fun Sin Pech Party parliamentarian), H.E. Sav Rany (Nationalism Party parliamentarian), H.E. Kim Sour Pirith (Som Rang Sy Party parliamentarian), H.E. Ou Chanrith (Human Right Party parliamentarian), Mr. Chong Rathana province governor representative, Chi Kreng governor district, Chi Kreng Commune chief and Mr. Yeng Virak, director of the Cambodian Legal Education Center (CLEC).

The people attending the forum showed their feelings of hopelessness that the authorities and the court could not arrest practice people and their group who shot people because of the unresolved land conflict.

According to what people said, this shooting was led by Mr. Kav Sophon who was formerly of Chi Kreng district. After having a land conflict on Soung dike including 5 lakes in Chi Kreng district in Siem Reap province between people and merchant. People assured that they grew rice on this land from 1982-1983. They stopped growing the rice one year because it had insects but they started again in 2003. Merchant side assured that they are owner of this land too. People filed a complaint to local authorities and national authorities but did not have a resolution. On March 22, 2009 Mr. Kav Sophon, former District Governor, led about 100 soldiers and police and commanded them to shoot the people growing rice. Four people received grave wounds and 11 people were taken into custody - until now they don’t have freedom. Mr. Ponleb lives in Chi Kreng district. When the issue of the 11 people in custody was raised he stated that one of them is his father that they arrested in connection with the land conflict case.

About this case people asked the following questions: why did the authorities shoot the people? And was this shooting right or wrong?’

In regards to this shooting H.E. Kim Sour Pirith stated that some staff in the court and authorities made mistakes because they did not complete their duty carefully so people feel hopeless about them. He added that the former district governor had led polices to solve people’s problem but he didn’t solve problems and shot people. Now
authorities are not arresting practice people yet. One more point related to the court system: because a small group of staff in the court is corrupt, people feel hopeless about the court and he said, “now the court is the place for buy freedom”. H.E. Ou Chanrith said: authorities are people’s helper but they shoot people, this action he can not accept. He will send intervention letter to Ministry of Justice to arrest and punish them by Cambodia law.

On this shooting, H.E Ang Vongvatana is State Minister of Ministry of Justice had sent three letter first on 18 August 2009, second on 29 September 2009 and 05 November 2009 to Siem Reap court to arrest practice people but now we see they have freedom.

The representatives of the Governor of the province said: the people’s letter that was sent to the Ministry of Agriculture was signed by the village chief, commune chief, and District Governor but it did not arrive at the Ministry of Agriculture. About the letter that National Assembly to send to governor province is intervention letter. It is not the letter give land to people.

H.E. Koch Moly said: parliamentarians are not deciders but parliamentarians are people’s messengers to the National Assembly. Authorities and the court are solving this problem. The main points in this forum are land conflict and shooting. He promised people he will research this problem.

About this land conflict H.E. Kim Sour Pirith said: province governor write a letter to suspend work on land conflict 475 hectares. It means suspend both side but authorities delay time in solving and have someone can do and have someone can’t do so authorities must solve the problem by suspend work both side.

In the end, all parliamentarians promised the people they will intervene in this case by sending a letter to the Ministry of Justice and the Prime Minister, especially in the case where the authorities shot people. Mr. Yeng Virak said: he wants to have a solution quickly that both sides can accept. He said: the law is justice but we should not solve all problems by court, some problems we should solve out of court. We hope we have a chance to discuss peacefully.