The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) conducted a Public Forum on “Human Rights and Development” on July 29, 2009 from 8:00 AM to 11:30 AM at Ka Ter Village, Lum Choar Commune, Ou Ya Dav District, Rattanakkirri Province, where ethnic minority residents have a deep concern about losing their land.

305 residents participated in the forum and 92 of whom were women. Five guest speakers were present for the forum, 1. Mr. Kimsour Pirith, Som Rang Sy Party parliamentarian, 2. Mr. Dork Sor Ou Ya Dav Governor District, 3. Mr. Sev Tvan, Lum Chor commune chief, 4. Mr. Pen Bunna, ADHOC Monirator in Rattanakkirri Province, 5. Mr. Ou Virak, President of Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR). Eight people raised their concerns at the forum.

Residents raised two important concerns in the forum: 1. a land conflict over 450 hectares between 180 families with H.E Keo Trei in Lum Choar commune and Pat Te commune and 2. a land conflict over 450 hectares between 60 families with Mrs. Sisovath Neary Phal in Lum Choar commune.

The first land conflict is in Ka Ter, Lum Choar Commune, Ou Ya Dav District, Rattanakkirri Province, between minority villagers and H.E Keo Trei. The villagers had filed a complaint to the Provincial Office, Ministries and Stockholders, but there have been no results. Mr. Romom Ten, the village chief said: “We had filed a complaint to provincial office, but they provided a poor solution.”

The second land conflict involves Mrs. Sisovath Neary Phal. She has lived in Lum Choar commune since 1994, without having purchased this land from the minority villagers. Now, she plans to give her relatives three plots of this land for
Mr. Romom Ten, the Village Chief, Ka Ter Community said: “why do they not buy our land? Why do we give them our land without receiving money?”

Mr. Dork Sor, Ou Ya Dav District Governor, said this land conflict between H.E. Keo Trei and the minority villagers was caused by a failure of the minority villagers to clearly mark their land. Mr Romum vart, Kong Yuk village, said: “I asked him (Mr. Dork Sor) to clearly mark the land, but he said it was not necessary”.

In 1994, the last District Governor lent land to Mr. Keo Trei to grow potato, with the understanding that, if he failed to grow potato on this land within three years, he must return back the land. In 2006, Mr. Keo Trei gave himself title to the land without informing the authorities. Mr. Sev Tvan, Commune Chief in Ou Ya Dav District, Rattanakkirri Province said: “The Last District Governor lent this land to Mr. Keo Trei to grow potato.” Now the villagers worry that, in the future, he will use his title to claim the land from the villagers.

H.E. Kimsour Pirith, Som Rang Sy Party parliamentarian, Mr.Dork Sor, Ou Ya Dav District Governor, Mr. Ou Virak, President of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), Mr.Pen Bunna, ADHOC facilitator in Rattanakkirri Province, all said that good solution must be found that is within the Cambodian law, avoids violence and that we should investigate the judge and the legal methods he used.