Public Forum Report in Kampong Cham Province

On June 24, 2009 the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) conducted a Public Forum on Human Rights and Development between 8.00 a.m. and 11.30 a.m. in Meak Village, Prek Kak Commune, Stueg Trang District, Kampong Cham Province. The forum provided local residents with the opportunity to voice their concerns arising from the grant by government of a land concession over the land on which they live.

Presentations were delivered by three guest speakers: H.E Ou Chanrith, Human Rights Party parliamentarian, Mr. Neang Sovat, Adhoc representative, Ms. Yon Sokhum Prek Kak Commune Representative and Elizabeth Evans, Deputy Head of Mission from the British Embassy who attended the Forum as an observer. Additionally, around 500 citizens participated in the forum, 145 of whom were women. 15 of the citizens raised concerns and expressed opinions relating to the loss of their land after the Government granted an economic land concession of over 7000 hectares to a private company. This concession to the Long Sreng Company- owned by Okhna Heng Long, affects hundreds of families in the area.

The main issue that people raised in the public forum vis-à-vis the economic land concession granted by the Government to the Long Sreng Company, was the adverse effect it will have on the community’s livelihood. Moreover, no final resolution was presented to the community. Despite no resolution, the company has commenced clearing the land; they have confiscated farm materials, and have threatened and prevented people from entering their land and tending to their crops.

First, the people asked to find the appropriate resolutions. Secondly, they asked to limit the size of the land concession. And thirdly, they also asked if the authority have plans to grant land concessions to the poor people who will be displaced by the original concession to the company.

The people claim to have the legal documentation entitling them to the land, which was recognized by the village chiefs and the commune chief. Further, they have never had land conflicts until Long Sreng Company.
Citizens raised their concerns in the Public Forum at Kampong Cham Province.

H.E. Ou Chanrith informed the forum that they can file a request to the Government and local authority to find solutions for the affected land, and reminded the community to request a time limit to solve the issues. He also advised the people to not use violence to resolve these issues. The commune representative informed the community that they know about the company’s land grab, but it is beyond the level and ability to help find resolutions for the people. Mr. Neang Sovat, the Adhoc representative, stated that “the concession must be researched clearly and take into consideration the impact on the people before any plan for development—development for public benefit must be conducted, but it also requires proper compensation.”

Elizabeth Evans, Deputy Head of Mission from the British Embassy, attending the Public Forum in the capacity of an observer, was asked by the participants to address the forum. Ms. Evans addressed the participants stating that she was pleased to be attending the public forum and that the British Embassy supports the CCHR’s Community Empowerment Program. Ms. Evans fielded a number of questions by participants in the forum and was asked to bring their concerns before the government of the Kingdom of Cambodia. Ms. Evans stated that she will raise these concerns with the British Ambassador and will communicate the issues to other embassies. She stated that although the embassy cannot promise to address these concerns directly with Prime Minister Hun Sen they will ensure that the concerns of the participants will be part of the British embassy’s ongoing dialogue with various government ministries.
Additionally, the HRP parliamentarian, H.E. Ou Chanrith, promised to help intervene on this issue, he says he will not support the company when the people are right.

The community was encouraged to see the HRP parliamentarian, a representative from the British Embassy and NGOs present, but they were disappointed not having their elected party officials, namely the CPP, NRP and SRP represented at the forum.