Private Company Receives Nearly 13 Hectares of Riverside Property, More than 300 Families Face Eviction.

More than 300 poor families face eviction to allow a private company to develop land in the Russei Keo district to the north of the Chroy Changvar bridge in Phnom Penh.

Prime Minister Hun Sen signed a September 2022 sub-decree awarding 12.98 hectares of riverside property to Advanced Trust (Cambodia) Co., Ltd., owned by a woman named Lun Nary. The land is located in Phsar Touch village within the Tuol Sangke I and Russei Keo communes and likely worth tens of millions of dollars.

Advanced Trust was registered with the Ministry of Commerce in 2019 and lists Lun Nary as its sole director and chairperson.

Reached by phone, Nary denied she was the real owner of the company.

“The [director], he went abroad and he kept his phone with me,” Nary said. “[I am not clearly informed. I am his relative.”
She did not reveal the identity of the person she claimed was the real owner.

To make way for Advanced Trust, approximately 80% of the 300 families living in the area have reluctantly agreed to relocate to Prek Pnov district’s Samraong commune 10 kilometers away, CamboJA reported in October last year.

“I do not want to [leave] but I have no choice,” one resident told CamboJA in October. Authorities had spent months pressuring residents to leave after serving eviction notices in July, including threatening them with arrest and beginning to demolish their houses without consent.

Men work at a construction site along the Tonle Sap riverbank near the Chroy Changvar bridge, where the government granted 12 hectares of land to a private company for
Retired police officer Khoeun Savuth, 67, has lived along the riverside in Phsar Touch for 20 years and said he felt residents were not receiving proper compensation after being served with an eviction notice two months ago.

“Usually, we can’t oppose the development of the nation, but they should have a suitable solution [for us],” he said. “I won’t move it if there is no suitable compensation, because we have to negotiate for compensation.”

He said authorities have promised to give him a plot of land in Prek Pnov.
“They have not yet set a deadline to move but they have just said they are already prepared land,” he said. “We have not seen that land, they [authorities] just showed that land on their phone’s screen.”

Khoeun Savuth, living under threat of eviction at Phsar Touch village in Phnom Penh on March 15, 2023. (CamboJA/ Pring Samrang)

Vann Sophat, Cambodian Center for Human Rights coordinator, called for relevant authorities to thoroughly study the environment and social impacts before privatizing land and urged for proper compensation for evicted families. He said families appeared to be getting forcibly evicted.

The development will have impacted 332 families in Toul Sangke I commune and 102 families had already moved, said Van Savoeurn, Phsar Touch village chief in the Toul Sangke I. He said he was unaware of the company's plans.

“I do not know, maybe they will develop condos,” Savoeun said.

Phnom Penh deputy governor Keut Chhe claimed not to know about the development or the land giveaway.

“I do not know that document [the sub-decree], how can I answer your question?” he told CamboJA when reached by phone.
“You are a journalist, when I said that I don’t know, why don’t you try to find the information,” he added. “Honestly, I am not your hostage, and I don’t have an obligation to answer you.”

He directed reporters to district authorities regarding the impact on local families.

But Russei Keo District Governor Ek Khun Doeun referred questions back to Phnom Penh municipal authorities.

“We have resolved people’s issues [there],” he said, then hung up the phone.

Residents of Phsar Toch village face eviction after the government granted the land alongside the Tonle Sap river to a private company for development, seen here on March 15, 2023. (CamboJA/Pring Samrang)