No Closure Yet for Slain Anti-Logging Fighter Chut Wutty After 12 Years, Activists Call For Reinvestigation

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- Khuon Narim

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activists called on the government to reinvestigate the case of anti-logging activist Chut Wutty who was shot dead on April 26, 2012.

Some 20 activists marched from the night market near Wat Phnom to the Ministry of Justice to hand over a petition to call for an independent investigation into Wutty’s murder in conjunction with his 12th death anniversary. A Buddhist ceremony was also organized by NGO CCHR which released an open letter for reinvestigation. They urged the government to identify the “instigators” and others who were involved.

According to reports, Wutty was traveling with two reporters from Cambodia Daily newspaper in the Cardamom Mountains in Koh Kong province to investigate illegal logging in the area at the time of his death in 2012 by a military police.

The shooting happened after a security guard with Timber Green logging company, who was accompanied by military police and soldiers, confiscated both Wutty and the reporters’ cameras.
An official investigation into his death was closed in less than two weeks but six months after that, Rann Boroth, a private security guard for a logging company was convicted for his role in Wutty’s death. However, his two-year prison sentence was suspended.

The government claimed that Wutty was accidentally shot by military police officer In Rattana, who was himself shot during a tussle over the murder weapon with Boroth.

Environmental activist Mean Lisa said more than a decade has passed but no justice has been rendered yet by the ministry to Wutty, who was murdered in the forest.

She said the purpose of their petition was for justice to be done to Wutty whom they regarded as a hero.

“We want to know why they killed him. Who was behind the shooting,” Lisa said.

She said environmental youths will celebrate Wutty’s death anniversary every year as a reminder to Khmer people and others that Cambodia “has no real peace”.

Environment activists submit a petition to the Ministry of Justice on Chut Wutty’s case in Phnom Penh on April 26, 2024. (CamboJA/Pring Samrang)

Another activist, Nuth Thi, said the next generation of young environmental activists will continue the journey of Chut Wutty to defend national resources and the forests.

“Yes, everyone is scared but if we do not carry this forward, what will happen to our forest?” she said.
“Our freedom is now limited. We are now shouting for justice but there is no result. If we stop expressing our opinion, where is our right to freedom [of expression],” Thi said.

In a reply to CamboJA News via social media, Wutty’s son, Cheuy Odom Reaksmy, said 12 years on, justice has not been rendered to his family, noting that Cambodians have always respected Wutty as a defender of the forest.

“I think the person who ordered the killing of my father is a high ranking [officer] in the government. I don’t hold any hope that the Cambodian courts will bring him justice,” Odom Reaksmy said from the US, alleging that the “court is under the influence of the government”.

“[Ratana] was just a military police officer. He has no right to make a decision to kill my father. I believe that there was a plot to kill him [Wutty],” he added.

Justice Ministry spokesperson Chin Malin said in principal, the case was closed as the perpetrators have been convicted.

“For those parties who say there is still no justice or the perpetrator has not been convicted yet, please cooperate [with the ministry] to provide strong evidence or new testimony in order [to reopen] investigations,” he said.

“But a petition, criticism and baseless opinion can’t prompt a police investigation […] the case is already closed,” Malin said.

Ny Sokha, president of NGO rights group Adhoc, said the public has doubts over the investigation into the death of Chut Wutty.

“If there is no clear investigation and transparency, and [the government] avoids criticism, [it shows that] our judiciary system is not independent,” he said.

“The public has [long] doubted that there were not only two people [military officer and security guard] involved. There might be other people behind this case, which is why we have asked for a reinvestigation,” Sokha said.