



FACT SHEET: FORCED EVICTIONS IN CAMBODIA DURING COVID-19

Snapshot: Despite the deterioration of the COVID-19 situation in Cambodia in early 2021, forced evictions continue to be carried out in blatant disregard for the human rights of evicted citizens, especially their right to adequate housing which United Nations (“UN”) experts have recognized as key to responding to the pandemic.¹ This fact sheet builds upon a previous fact sheet released by CCHR in 2020² and focuses on forced evictions in Cambodia amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It recalls the human rights obligations requiring both States and businesses to protect citizens against this gross human rights violation. It also provides tangible recommendations to the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) to cease forced evictions and preserve its citizens’ housing in light of the ongoing global health crisis as well as improve respect for land rights and fundamental freedoms in the Kingdom.

1. Introduction

Forced evictions are amongst the most pervasive land rights violations as they often force individuals into homelessness or impede the victims from earning a livelihood. Forcible evictions intensify inequality, and invariably affects poor and marginalized communities, pushing the poorest and most vulnerable further into poverty.

What is a forced eviction?

Forced eviction is the “*permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection*”.

*Committee on Social and Cultural Rights,
(General comment No 7, E/1998/22, 1997)*

Forced eviction constitutes a gross violation of human rights law that particularly violates the right to adequate housing as well as broad range of other internationally recognized rights including the right to security of person, and the rights of indigenous peoples to their traditional lands and territories.³ Under international law, forced evictions are only permissible in very limited and narrow circumstances, and **must be fully justifiable, authorized by law, in full compliance with international human rights law, and full legal recourse and remedies must be available to those affected.**⁴

It is the **responsibility of the State to protect against forced evictions**, ensure evictions are permissible under human rights law and are carried out in the appropriate manner. This includes considering alternatives, following due process, and respecting the rights to information, meaningful consultation and free and prior informed consent of affected citizens. The State must also take all necessary steps to minimize the impact of evictions to ensure that they do not result in homelessness⁵ and to ensure that evicted citizens are provided with adequate compensation in advance and appropriate remedies.⁶

States are also required to protect against forced evictions carried out by third parties, including businesses.

¹ Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Summary Report to 75th UN General Assembly ([A/75/148](#), July 2020).

² CCHR, “Fact Sheet on forced evictions”, ([CCHR](#), October 2020).

³ OHCHR, ‘Forced Evictions Factsheet No. 25/Rev 1’, ([OHCHR](#), 2015), p 5.

⁴ ICESCR, ‘General comment No.7 on the right to adequate housing:forced evictions’, ([ICESCR](#), 1997), UN Doc E/1998/22, para. 11.

⁵ Ibid, para. 16.

⁶ For examples of appropriate remedies, see OHCHR, Land and Human Rights Standards and Applications, ([OHCHR](#), 2015), p. 29.

Businesses are under an obligation to respect human rights, including to not forcibly evict individuals.⁷

It is important to recall that protection against forced evictions is not dependent on a person's land tenure status, and extends to *all* individuals, including those living in informal settlements, in rural areas, and renters.⁸

International Guidance: Prohibition of evictions during COVID -19



Forced evictions are increasingly problematic in the context of the unprecedented global pandemic during which individuals need housing and security the most to protect themselves against COVID-19 and comply with governmental protection measures, such as quarantines, lockdowns, or curfews, which require individuals to stay at home.

Regrettably, land rights violations and forced evictions have increased around the world despite the global pandemic. This led the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing ("UNSRRAH") to urge all States to take adequate measures to ensure protection against evictions during COVID-19, highlighting that housing is the frontline defense against COVID-19 and that evictions during the pandemic constitutes a potential death sentence.⁹ In a guidance note on the prohibition of evictions during COVID-19 from April 2020, UNSRRAH made various recommendations to States, including:

- Immediately cease all evictions of anyone, anywhere and for any reason until the end of the pandemic and for a reasonable period of time thereafter, with minimal exceptions;
- End forced eviction or displacement of informal settlements, and follow guidance on protecting residents in informal settlements;¹⁰
- Ensure that any evictions that were approved before the pandemic are suspended;
- Provide sufficient resources to implement the ban of evictions effectively, including resources to monitor and prevent private actors from carrying out extrajudicial evictions;
- Take measures to ensure security of land tenure and that no one is evicted into homelessness for a reasonable time after the end of the pandemic to tackle the economic recession; and
- Ensure access to justice for individuals, families or communities that have experienced an eviction and are seeking access to effective remedies.

2. Forced evictions in Cambodia during COVID-19



Land rights violations are amongst the most widespread human rights issues in Cambodia, and forced evictions are commonplace.¹¹ Worryingly, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has offered no respite as forced evictions have continued to occur at alarming rates in the Kingdom.

Relatively spared at the outset of the pandemic, Cambodia has experienced three waves of COVID-19 community outbreak since November 2020. The latest wave, which started in February 2021, has seen COVID-19 cases skyrocket and the country's first COVID-19 deaths reported. The worsening of the COVID-19 situation in the Kingdom pushed the RGC to impose various restrictive measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic,

⁷ OHCHR, "Land and Human Rights Standards and Applications", (n 6) p. 81.

⁸ OHCHR, "Land and Human Rights Standards and Applications", (n 6), p. 7.

⁹ UNSRRAH, "COVID-19 Guidance Note: Prohibition of Evictions", ([OHCHR](#), 28 April 2020).

¹⁰ UNSRRAH, "COVID-19 Guidance Note: Protecting residents of informal settlements", ([OHCHR](#), 23 April 2020).

¹¹ CCHR Fact Sheet on forced evictions, (n2); See also CCHR, "Briefing note on business and human rights: corporate accountability in land rights violations", ([CCHR](#), December 2020).

including quarantines, lockdowns, and curfews.¹²

While complying with such measures and ensuring the safety of the population requires the authorities to provide proper housing, they have instead continued to regularly carry out forced evictions despite existing international and national protections,¹³ and international guidance recommending a halt to all evictions during the pandemic (see previous section), exposing the most vulnerable to homelessness and increasing the risk of spreading COVID-19 among those vulnerable communities.

In addition, in March 2021, the RGC also adopted a controversial Law on Preventive Measures Against the Spread of COVID-19 and Deadly Infectious Diseases (“COVID-19 Law”), which contains broad and vague provisions and provides for disproportionate punishments. Since its promulgation, the authorities have used the COVID-19 law to stifle citizens’ freedom of expression and assembly by notably charging them with “obstructing the implementation of COVID-19 measures” under its Article 11, when expressing their views on COVID-19-related issues or protesting to demand justice, as outlined in some of the case studies below.

CASE STUDIES: Unabated forced evictions in Cambodia amid worsened COVID-19 situation in 2021

The recent forced evictions recorded by CCHR have been marked by the **use of force, intimidation, and threats by state authorities against evictees**, the **demolitions of houses and farmlands without prior notice** by police or private companies, as well as **judicial harassment of evicted citizens** for protesting against their evictions and demanding adequate compensation. The main victims are **farmers** and **minority groups**, including indigenous, ethnic Vietnamese, and Muslim Cham communities.

The most egregious examples recorded by CCHR in the past few months include:¹⁴

- **23 January 2021 – Phnom Penh** – The Chbar Ampov district authorities set up a border demarcation post to erect a fence around 30 hectares of land, restricting 158 families from using and cultivating the land which they have occupied and enjoyed since 2008. The residents were told they were not allowed to cultivate the land any longer and security forces were deployed. Authorities claim the land is being illegally occupied and have so far denied compensation for the newly evicted families.¹⁵
- **25 March 2021 – Monduliri** – Pu Nong indigenous community members intercepted an excavator of wealthy and powerful man clearing their community forest land in Dak Dam commune’s Putreng Village, leading 200 Pu Nong families to seek the assistance of local authorities to prevent and protect their community land. The land cleared part of the Treng village community forest, a registered wildlife sanctuary which spans 2,000 hectare and is home to Pu Nong indigenous communities. The excavation of these lands impacts their identity and cultural traditions.¹⁶
- **14 May 2021 – Kandal** – Around 200 farmers affected by the new Phnom Penh International Airport development project in Kandal province blocked the road to the project’s site after the project developer, Overseas Cambodia Investment Corp (“OCIC”), sent tractors and started destroying their rice crops.¹⁷ This protest stems from a long-standing land dispute, which remains unresolved because the farmers have only

¹² Khmer Times, “Cambodia’s chronology of COVID-19 and the February 20 community event”, ([Khmer Times](#), 18 June 2021); For more details on the COVID-19 situation in Cambodia, see the World Health Organization and Cambodian Ministry of Health [joint situation reports](#).

¹³ See CCHR Fact Sheet on forced evictions, (n2) for more details on the international and national legal framework applicable to Cambodia.

¹⁴ The list of cases provided in this fact sheet is not an exhaustive list of the cases recorded by CCHR in 2021.

¹⁵ Nath Sopheap, “Chbar Ampov Residents Protest against authorities’ post”, ([VOD Khmer](#), 24 January 2021).

¹⁶ Cheat Chamnan, “Indigenous peoples in Monduliri province accuse a powerful man of encroaching on 53 hectares of community land”, ([RFA](#), 27 March 2021).

¹⁷ See e.g., Sorn Sarath, “Mega airport project leaves hundreds of affected families struggling livelihood”, ([CambojaNews](#), 5 March 2021).

Khout; Sophak Chakrya, “Villagers protest farmland clearing for Phnom Penh airport project”, ([The Phnom Penh Post](#), 19 May 2021).

been offered a meager compensation price for the loss of their lands which would force them into homelessness, and poverty. Protests continued in the following months to demand a more equitable compensation price. In response, the authorities destroyed a road leading to the villagers' farmlands and houses.¹⁸ On **7 September 2021**, hundreds of police and military personnel were deployed to the land dispute site to begin clearing land.¹⁹ On **12 September 2021**, around 30 villagers were arrested during another protest attended by 100 affected villagers. The police alleged that protesters used violence against them, injuring 13 police officers, while protesters and relatives reported police violence and pressure from the authorities to accept the company's inadequate compensation offer. The authorities began to dismantle homes in the area, cut off electricity, and started taking tractors and motorbikes away from the residents. On **14 September 2021**, 9 of the 30 arrested protesters, of which 4 are women, were charged with intentional violence and obstruction to public officials with aggravating circumstances as well as incitement to commit a felony and sent to pre-trial detention.²⁰ They were released on bail on **21 September 2021** and placed under court supervision, after being made to apologize to the authorities and sign a contract in which they promised not to protest again and being pressured into accepting the company's unfair compensation offer.²¹

- **2 June 2021 – Phnom Penh** – The Phnom Penh Municipal Administration ordered residents of floating houses on the Tonle Sap river, most of whom belong to ethnic Vietnamese or Muslim Cham communities, to dismantle or relocate their homes in a week or otherwise face legal action, over stated city beautification plans and environmental concerns.²² On **12 June 2021**, Phnom Penh authorities began demolishing the floating houses without offering any relocation or compensation solution to their residents. By **14 June 2021**, the authorities had proceeded to the **mass eviction of over 1,000 families** from the Tonle Sap river. Despite rising COVID-19 cases, the Phnom Penh City Hall announced that more evictions would come.²³ Uprooted and left on their own, some have temporarily rented rooms while others have temporarily settled on other riverbanks or at the Cambodia-Vietnam border after having been barred entry by Vietnam.²⁴ To date, none of the evicted families have been offered any adequate resettlement solutions.
- **3 June 2021 – Kandal** – Military forces opened fire on a protest over a land dispute in Tuol commune, Ang Snoul district, Kandal province, organized by about 300 villagers, which hit and severely injured a 56-year-old farmer. The protesters were trying to stop bulldozers from clearing their rice fields with barricades, which the RGC has planned to use for military purposes and garbage disposal without paying any compensation to the affected villagers.²⁵ The military forces stated that the soldiers shot the protesters in self-defense and that the disputed land belonged to the State.²⁶ The villagers claimed that they had called on the national authorities to seek a fair solution to the land dispute without success. In **September 2021**,

¹⁸ Khut Sokun, "Residents affected by airport development project protest again", ([VOD](#), 31 May 2021); Khut Sokun, "Airport Protesters vow to block road next week as governor refuses to budge", ([VOD](#), 11 June 2021); Sorn Sarath, "Land dispute at mega-airport project leads to protest, scuffle at access road", ([CambodiaNews](#), 10 August 2021); Mech Dara & Ananth Baliga, "Villagers protest armed destruction of road at new airport development", ([VOD](#), 1 Sept. 2021).

¹⁹ Sorn Sarath, "Despite lack of resolution in dispute, authorities block roads, let OCIC begin clearing residents' farmland for mega airport project", ([CambodiaNews](#), 7 September 2021); RFA, "Cambodian police bar villagers from land seized for new airport", ([RFA](#), 7 Sept. 2021).

²⁰ Mech Dara, "21 Airport protesters released, nine charged with violence", ([VOD](#), 15 Sept. 2021) and "Airport protesters charged with violence, obstruction, incitement", ([VOD](#), 15 Sept. 2021).

²¹ Khut Sokun, "Nine airport protesters released amid pressure to end protests", ([VOD](#), 21 September 2021).

²² Sorn Sarath, "Floating home residents get one-week notice to leave river dwellings in Phnom Penh", ([CambodiaNews](#), 2 June 2021); Vicheika Kann and Malis Tum, "Phnom Penh's Floating Fishing Community faces Eviction", ([VOA](#), 12 June 2021).

²³ Phoung Vantha, "Phnom Penh City Hall suggest more forced evictions of Cham communities", ([Cambodianess](#), 14 June 2021).

²⁴ Khy Sovuthy, "Vietnamese authorities block the Mekong to bar entry for hundreds of ethnic Vietnamese evicted from Phnom Penh floating homes", ([CambodiaNews](#), 30 June 2021); Danielle Keeton Olsen and Samoeun Nicseybon, "Floating communities, many Vietnamese, uprooted by Phnom Penh's evictions", ([VOD](#), 11 June 2021) and "Stateless fishers cast out by Cambodia, shut out by Vietnam", ([VOD](#), 6 August 2021).

²⁵ RFA, "Cambodian villager shot by security forces in plantation land dispute", ([RFA](#), 6 June 2021); Sorn Sarath, "Soldiers shoot one man in land dispute in Kandal province", ([CambodiaNews](#), 3 June 2021).

²⁶ Sun Narin, "Kandal governor defends firing at protestors, says injuring farmer was unintentional", ([VOA](#), 4 June 2021).

the injured farmer, still in recovery, reiterated his call to the relevant institutions to expedite the investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice.²⁷ The authorities also threatened the affected families that they would not be compensated if they kept refusing their offer, forcing them to accept inadequate compensation.²⁸

- **10 June 2021 – Phnom Penh** – Around 50 to 60 police officers and private security forces from the OCIC cleared two hectares of land with two excavators near a satellite city they are building in Chroy Changva district's Prek Leap commune without prior notice to the residents living on the land.²⁹ The land dispute with OCIC and residents of the Chroy Changva district has been ongoing for at least nine years with approximately 26 families impacted by OCIC's development projects. The residents have attempted to rent or build new houses on parts of the demolished lands but authorities have prevented them from doing so. Instead, the authorities are attempting to force the villagers to accept compensation of 10% of their total land area before they are permitted to build houses. However, the residents have continued to refuse this offer, considering it insufficient. In **August 2021**, the affected families asked the Phnom Penh City Hall to find a solution to the land dispute and provide them with land titles.³⁰
- **12 June 2021 – Monduliri** – The shelters of about 1,000 Pu Nong ethnic minority families in Monduliri province were demolished by environmental officials, alleging they were living on State land, even though the families say they have been living there for generations. The Pu Nong indigenous group in Pech Chreada district's Bousra commune stated that authorities started a "Crackdown on Forest Crime" campaign, leading to the eviction of many indigenous people living in the province.³¹
- **2 July 2021 – Kandal** – Three representatives of an ongoing land dispute between 150 families and a private landowner in Sa'ang district's Prasat commune were arrested after a complaint against them was filed by a landowner who accused them of occupying private land. The villagers have been living on and cultivating the land since 1980 until 2019 when the land became disputed and villagers were told to stop cultivating the land. The conflict reignited when the villagers returned to their farmlands after the factories they worked at closed due to COVID-19 in 2020. On **4 July 2021**, the Kandal Provincial Court charged them with incitement to commit a felony, leading around 50 villagers to gather at the Ministry of Justice on the next day to demand their release.³² On **4 September 2021**, one of the three detained representatives died due to health issues from a lack of medical treatment in prison.³³
- **6 July 2021 – Kratie** – Villagers in Kratie province's Chit Borei district have accused a private company of encroaching on their land and have taken them to court after protesting. On **6 July 2021**, hundreds of villagers in Sang village, Changkrang commune, Chit Borei district, protested and prevented a private company from clearing their land. Community members stated that the land dispute with the company called "Mikastat" began in 2020 and involves 8,000 hectares of land belonging to more than 600 Cambodian families, with around 60% of those affected belonging to Pu Nong indigenous communities. A villager also reported that the company used security to open fire, threatening residents not to protest and threatening to sue them in court.³⁴
- **22 July 2021 – Phnom Penh** – Local authorities dismantled 44 houses on the banks of the Tonle Sap river in Tuol Sangke I commune, Russey Keo District, Phnom Penh without prior notice and without compensation.

²⁷ RFA, "Victim of military shootings in land dispute continue to ask relevant institutions to expedite justice" ([RFA](#), 13 September 2021).

²⁸ Sorn Sarath, "Ang Snuol families forced to accept compensation in Defense Ministry land dispute", ([CambodiaNews](#), 29 Sept. 2021).

²⁹ Keat Soriththeavy, "Chroy Changva authorities clear resident's land near OCIC satellite city", ([VOD](#), 11 June 2021).

³⁰ Cheat Chamnan, "Residents affected by development in Chroy Changva continue to demand land solutions", ([RFA](#), 12 August 2021).

³¹ Son Minea, "Indigenous communities in Monduliri forced off land", ([Khmer Times](#), 14 July 2021).

³² Sam Sopich, "Protests after three villagers charged over occupying private property", ([CambodiaNews](#), 5 July 2021).

³³ RFA, "Land detainee dies in Kandal provincial prison", ([RFA](#), 5 Sept. 2021).

³⁴ Kuth Sokun, "Villagers in Kratie province accuse a private company of clearing and encroaching on their land and suing them", ([VOD Khmer](#), 6 July 2021).

Approximately 50 families were affected by this demolition and most of the families were traders who collected construction materials in the area to earn a living.³⁵

- **4 August 2021 – Phnom Penh** – Local Authorities dismantled the houses of the remaining 20 families living in Russey Keo District’s Boeung Chhouk A community to make way for the construction of a road after giving a mere week notice and offering no compensation to the evictees. Residents reported that the police came to demolish their homes with hammers, axes, saws and a drill motor, with one family physically removed from their home by the police before it was torn down in front of them.³⁶

“Animals can live without houses, but human can’t. The COVID-19 virus is hitting us hard right now, people have less income, making us short of food while now we also don’t have houses, it’s so difficult.”
Sam On, Boeung Chhouk A village evictee (*Cambodianess*)

- **6 August 2021 – Phnom Penh** – The Phnom Penh’s Meanchey District Authority sent letters on **6 August 2021** to multiple families living near the Boeng Tompun lake development, ordering them to dismantle their houses within a week to make way for the construction of a new reservoir or otherwise face legal and administrative action. On **13 August 2021**, over 100 district authorities came to the site and attempted to demolish the homes of 10 families, claiming the residents were living illegally on State land and that there would be no compensation.³⁷ Following the villagers’ protest, authorities ended up demolishing only two houses. In **September 2021**, the affected residents rebuilt their demolished homes, stating that they have been living there for over 20 years and had nowhere else to go.³⁸
- **27 August 2021 – Svay Rieng** – Two community representatives from Svay Chrum district’s Chheu Teal commune, were arrested and detained at the Svay Rieng provincial prison for holding protests refusing to accept the low compensation price for the loss of their disputed land. The representatives were charged under the new COVID-19 law for obstructing the enforcement of health measures and face up to three years in jail if convicted. Both had previously been fined two million riels after uploading a video of themselves on disputed land without masks. This conflict stems from the villagers pending forced eviction to pave way for a canal restoration project called the Vaiko Tonle II, under the management of the Ministry of Water Resources. This development project has been ongoing since 2009 and has affected 120 families and over 99 hectares of their land. The residents have since been pressured by authorities to thumbprint a contract accepting the low compensation offer.³⁹

Overall, between January and June 2021, four assemblies during which villagers sought to stop private companies from encroaching on or bulldozing their homes or land were interfered with and subjected to unjustifiable state use of force and one assembly was subjected to third-party violence.⁴⁰

3. Conclusion & Recommendations



Forced evictions constitute a gross deprivation of human rights and are continuing at alarming rates in Cambodia despite the challenging COVID-19 situation. It is crucial that the RGC addresses the issues outlined above to protect its citizens’ right to adequate housing, which must be central to governmental protection efforts against the pandemic. CCHR makes the following **recommendations to the RGC**:

³⁵ RFA, “Nearly 50 families ask for a solution after the authorities demolished their houses without compensation”, (*RFA*, 28 August 2021).

³⁶ Gerald Flynn, “Evicted Residents Label Government ‘Dictatorship’ after Homes Destroyed”, (*Cambodianess*, 12 August 2021).

³⁷ Pork Kheuy and Ouch Sony, “Boeng Tompun houses demolished, reporters obstructed”, (*VOD*, 16 August 2021).

³⁸ Pork Kheuy and Ouch Sony, “Boeng Tompun residents rebuild demolished homes”, (*VOD*, 2 September 2021).

³⁹ See, Chea Sokny, “Svay Rieng farmers pressured to accept land deal after arrest of community representatives”, (*CambodiaNews*, 31 August 2021); Mech Dara, Seng Thai, and Khut Sokun, “Svay Rieng Land Disputants Arrested Under Covid-19 Law”, (*VOD*, 30 August 2021).

⁴⁰ CCHR’s Fundamental Freedoms Monitoring Project (“FFMP”) Monitoring Database.

1. **Immediately cease all forced evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic**, and for a reasonable time afterwards, in line with UN recommendations, and protect its citizens against forced evictions and use of force by businesses and third parties;
2. **Implement the UN recommendations** in the COVID-19 Guidance Note on the Prohibition of Evictions and COVID-19 Guidance Note Protecting Residents of Informal Settlements;
3. **Take urgent measures** to ensure that the citizens who have been forcibly evicted during the pandemic are **adequately compensated** for the loss of their land and assisted in finding **appropriate housing** to protect them against COVID-19;
4. **Stop the use of force, threats, intimidation and judicial harassment of evicted citizens** who peacefully protest or seek to protest against forced evictions and for adequate compensation; and
5. Effectively **remedy all human rights violations** due to forced evictions, and ensure that any remedy respects international standards.

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