

Case Brief: Chut Wutty

Chut Wutty was one of Cambodia's most effective and vocal critics of the illegal trade in luxury timber, harvested under the cover of economic land concessions. Before becoming an environmental activist, Wutty was a military trainer in Cambodia's Ministry of Defense. In the early 2000s, he quit his military job to serve as Deputy Director of Global Witness in Cambodia. In 2004, he found the Natural Resource Protection Group (NRPG), an organization that worked to protect environmental rights and monitored illegal logging and natural resource destruction in Cambodia.

Case chronology

26 April 2012

Chut Wutty was shot dead while he was escorting two journalists to investigate an alleged land grab and illegal logging in Koh Kong Province's Veal Bei commune, Mondul Seima district. It was reported that just prior to his killing, Wutty had been taking photos of suspected illicit activities in the forest, when he and the two journalists were detained by military police officers. Their cameras were confiscated by one of the military police officers and a guard for the Timber Green Company. It was then that Chut Wutty was fatally shot. A military police officer, In Rattana, was also killed at the scene.

October 2012

The trial for Chut Wutty's killing took place before the Koh Kong Provincial Court of First Instance, which concluded the case in October 2012. The court stated that Chut Wutty was killed following a disagreement with a military police officer and a guard of a timber company, who ordered Chut Wutty to surrender his camera containing pictures from the company's site. A military police officer, In Ratana, then fired a round from his AK-47 killing Chut Wutty. Ratana died by the same weapon as another company's guard, Rann Borath, was trying to grab the gun in an attempt to stop him from shooting any further. Borath was sentenced to two years in prison for "manslaughter" (article 207 of Criminal Code), but 18 months of the sentence were suspended. There was no appeal.

Impact:

In the years since the killing of Chut Wutty, there have been repeated calls from the local and international community for an impartial, independent, transparent investigation to the case to bring justice for the victims and hold all those responsible to account. However, a credible investigation into the case has yet to be launched. Justice for Chut Wutty and his family therefore remains to be served.

In the words of Chhoeuy Odom Reaksmey, Chut Wutty's son:

"It has been 14 years since I lost my dear father, the one gave me warmth, and upheld our family and livelihood. After his death, I have to force myself to live and work abroad to support my family and support my younger siblings to continue their studies. For 14 years that justice has not been provided to me and my family and the entire community that wish to see justice for Mr. Chut Wutty. This is because of the person behind my father's killer has not been brought to justice. I continue to call for an independent and impartial investigation into the case to provide real justice for my family."

*“CCHR strongly urges the Cambodian authorities to tackle and end the culture of impunity by enabling an impartial and independent body and bringing all those responsible to justice for all cases of extrajudicial killings, including cases of human rights defenders like Chut Wutty. The Cambodian authorities must take every effort to stop extrajudicial killings, and protect human rights defenders from harm.” – **Seng Sovathana, CCHR Executive Director.***



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