

**Fact Sheet:** Case Study Series: Andoung Kantout Village

**Timeline:** 2007-present



**Snapshot:** The long-running land conflict between local residents and soldiers in Andoung Kantout village began in 2007, and is still ongoing, with no resolution in sight. It involves a total area of 3,800 hectares of land. Since 2007, a number of villagers have been arrested and charged with various offenses due to their prolonged role as community activists in the land conflict.

### **Introduction**

This fact sheet gives an overview of the long-running land conflict between local residents and the military in Andoung Kantout village, Duanba commune, Kaos Krala district, Battambang province, which began in 2007 and is still ongoing, with no resolution in sight. This fact sheet is written by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”), a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights – primarily civil and political rights – throughout the Kingdom of Cambodia.

### **Background**

During the 1980s civil war Andoung Kantout village was controlled by the Khmer Rouge. The area was hotly disputed, and at times was the scene of fierce combat between Khmer Rouge and government forces. Following the war, many people were mired in extreme poverty and, for the most part, did not possess land titles – a legacy of the Khmer Rouge years. In the 1990s, local residents first cleared the land for farming; then, in 2005, when they had money, they built a pagoda and an informal school, before constructing a road into the village, thereby providing community members with access to further opportunities to earn a living elsewhere beyond the village.

### **Details of the land conflict**

However, in 2007, life in the village took a turn for the worse: a conflict started when the authorities constructed a bridge and another road through the community, making it easier for people to grab land. A total of 3,800 hectares of land in Andoung Kantout village are now the subject of several different long-running land conflicts, involving 1,140 families on one side, and the military and other powerful individuals on the other, with community members alleging that 1,859 hectares have already been lost to land-grabbing by these groups. In September 2008, residents accused Long Sinare, a military police lieutenant captain, and Soam Vanthoeun, a Royal Cambodian Armed Forces captain, of grabbing a further 558 hectares to sell to powerful businessmen to grow rubber trees and cassava. Since 2007, 415 affected families have filed official complaints.

### **The evolution of the community’s struggle**

With so many families affected, the whole community has been engaged in trying to resolve the conflict peacefully and fairly. From 1 July 2007 to 13 August 2007, there were large gatherings of people in Andoung Kantout village, with people from other communities joining in support. Around 300 people from Pursat, Pailin and Banteay Meanchey provinces gathered there for two weeks as well as outside the Battambang provincial headquarters to demand that the authorities find a proper resolution to the conflict and prevent land-grabbing by the military and other powerful people.

On 8 August 2010, 70 representatives protested in front of the Prime Minister’s house in Phnom Penh, demanding compensation for their land for the fourth time. They were forcefully pushed back by about 100 police and military police, and told to return to their homes in Battambang province.

The following day, one of the village representatives, Nha Mak, was arrested and detained by Battambang provincial police in connection with the land conflict. Another resident, Hun Sengly, had been arrested in front of the Ministry of Defense in 2008. On 25 November 2010 King Sihamoni wrote a letter asking the Minister of Justice to reconsider Hun Sengly's detention, but to no avail. In July 2011, a girl was beaten, intimidated, harassed and threatened by soldiers on several occasions.

On 25 October 2011, CCHR [Human Rights Network](#) representative, Im Sam Oeun, and five other community activists in Andoung Kantout village – Men Phorn, Chan Chhiv, Mork Phouk, Lach Toum, and Po Len – were summonsed for questioning at Battambang Provincial Court of First Instance on 27 October 2011, only two days after the summons. The summons alleged that they had damaged the property of Long Sinare in Andoung Kantout village, although it did not specify what property had been damaged. CCHR intervened and assisted the activists in submitting a letter to delay the interrogation. The court officer accepted this request on 26 October 2011, but only delayed the proceedings until 3 November 2011. In the end, the community activists were questioned by the investigating judge for two hours, before being released to go back home.

In only the last few days, another resident, Deang Sarom, who spoke up at a public forum organized by CCHR at Andoung Kantout village on 15 October 2011, was arrested on charges of occupying land belonging to others. He was reportedly beaten on arrest by police who did not show any arrest warrant. He was released after two hours of questioning by the investigating judge but ordered to appear again in court on 26 November 2011. The claimant is a former military officer and his family. Furthermore, two community activists who helped to prepare the CCHR public forum on 15 October 2011 have reportedly been harassed and intimidated by a group of soldiers over the last few days.

## Conclusions

Although the community members have continuously advocated for intervention from the Royal Government of Cambodia and relevant ministries, there has been no resolution to their suffering at the hands of the military and other powerful people. These groups have instead reacted by resorting to force, violence, intimidation and judicial harassment to silence the voices of the people, thereby trampling on their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Since 2008, there have been four community representatives jailed, with a total of 31 involved in lawsuits. The national authorities, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Defense should all be urging the provincial authorities to resolve this conflict; however, if the provincial authorities are unable to resolve the issue themselves, the national authorities should take on the responsibility and help their people.

In the meantime, public and community forums must continue: through a number of public and community forums held in Andoung Kantout village during 2011, community members were able to raise their concerns regarding land-grabbing, the selling of their land, and the court summonses and arrest warrants that some had received. Community representatives have been empowered to ask local authorities to respond to their demands numerous times and, despite limited success so far, these public and community forums have enabled community members' voices to be heard.

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