INTRODUCTION
This edition of the Sithi Project semi-annual newsletter highlights the CCHR Human Rights Hotline statistics for 2012 and some of the key human rights issues that are reported through the Hotline. This issue also provides an overview of the events that took place in Cambodia in celebration of International Human Rights Day in the Kingdom of Cambodia (“Cambodia”), as well as the Sithi Project’s newest endeavor, a human rights chronology.

CCHR’S HUMAN RIGHTS HOTLINE
The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) Human Rights Hotline was launched in December 2007 to provide the Cambodian community with a channel through which they can report human rights violations. The Hotline provides an information service and follow-up system to the public that promotes human rights protection and community empowerment. Cases reported through the Hotline are then referred to the most relevant civil society organization for appropriate resolution.

In 2012, 1312 calls were made to the CCHR Hotline. The calls ranged from seeking legal assistance and advice, to requesting information on human rights to looking for contact details for NGOs that could provide assistance in cases of physical or sexual abuse, migrant and domestic labor, arbitrary detention and land issues. Of those 1312 calls, a considerable number were referred to partner agencies across Cambodia for resolution or intervention. 26% of the total calls referred were related to land ownership and/or conflicts, 20% were related to physical and/or sexual assault and 10% concerned migrant workers.

Land Rights in Cambodia
Violations of land rights are perhaps the most widespread and prevalent form of human rights abuse in Cambodia today. In recent years, the global increase in land prices and the financially lucrative nature of economic land concessions has led to a rapid increase in the number of forced evictions.

In 2011, CCHR launched the findings of a study into land conflicts in Cambodia on Sithi.org. The finding led to the birth of the Cambodian Land Reform Project (“CLRP”) in early 2012 to mobilize and engage all relevant stakeholders to debate and demonstrate the root of land conflicts in Cambodia. This includes poor land management systems, the legal, institutional and policy framework and other issues that affect some 250,000 Cambodians’ living at risk of forced eviction. The map highlights individual cases of land disputes by province from 2007 to 2011 and will be progressively updated by CLRP in 2013:

HUMAN RIGHTS CHRONOLOGY
In celebration of the 64th International Human Rights Day (“IHRD”), CCHR released a chronology of key events related to human rights violations in Cambodia. The chronology, which also highlights key developments related to the improvement of human rights, covers the period from 1993 – the year of adoption of the Constitution of Cambodia – to 10 December 2012. Proper documentation of human rights violations is critical in conducting effective evidence-based advocacy and campaigning on human
The Cambodian Center for Human Rights

The data on the chronology is presented by year and displayed according to different categories of human rights. The research indicates that assassinations and extra-judicial executions of political figures, journalists and dissident unionists were rife during the first decade while the second decade illustrates a considerable increase in disputes over land ownership and prevalent restrictions on freedom of expression.

IHRD CELEBRATIONS IN CAMBODIA

A number of IHRD celebrations took place in Cambodia, with the theme for 2012 being “Business and Human Rights”. The purpose of the celebrations was to disseminate and share ideas relating to human rights, build solidarity and empower communities.

Many people in Cambodia celebrated IHRD by speaking out publically about their human rights concerns: land evictions, freedom of expression and assembly, lack of judicial independence, corruption, impunity for serious crimes and the illegal use of armed forces were the motivators for action.

Some of the events organized in Phnom Penh included a commemoration organized by the Pur Senchey land community and attended by 150 community members; a demonstration attended by roughly 100 protesters, including tuk tuk drivers and domestic factory workers, where concerns regarding wages and working conditions were voiced; and a celebration by the Boeung Kak Lake community in Phnom Penh, calling for a halt to the use of violence against civilians and human rights defenders and demanding that the government and local authorities respect human rights. The Boeung Kak Lake celebration was attended by more than 250 people including local, international, non-government organizations and the media. Finally, three main local NGOs working on human rights issues in Cambodia jointly organized a peaceful demonstration, attended by roughly 4000 participants.

Despite the peaceful intent of all of the above-named demonstrations, the authorities responded forcefully to many of these situations. In the case of the Boeung Kak Lake event, around 300 forces, including anti-riot police, were deployed and barricades were erected around the Boeung Kak area to prevent the demonstrators from delivering petitions to government institutions. Confrontations between the protestors and the authorities resulted in several injuries and arrests.

Nevertheless, in spite of the repressions, IHRD drew domestic and international attention to human rights issues in Cambodia and provided an opportunity for the community to speak out about their concerns and promote their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Read CCHR’s report for more information.

Editor’s Note: The publication of this newsletter was delayed due to the change from a bi-monthly to a semi-annual newsletter. Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience caused. The 7th edition of the newsletter will be released on 31 July 2013.

ABOUT THE SITHI PROJECT

Sithi means ‘rights’ in Khmer. The Sithi Project aims at increasing awareness and understanding of human rights – especially civil and political rights – and their status in Cambodia.

CONTACT

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