International Human Rights Day 2016

A snapshot of restrictions by the authorities on International Human Rights Day activities

On 10 December 2016 LICADHO conducted an International Human Rights Day event in Banteay Meanchey province with a number of communities, despite the deputy governor of Banteay Meanchey province having called on 9 December to warn the Ou Bey Chon community in Ou Chro district not to join the event. Authorities warned the community not to join the event because they alleged it was organized by the opposition CNRP. The deputy governor also asked why the event was being conducted and why the provincial governor had not been informed in advance.

The Boeung Bram community from Battambang’s Bovil district submitted a letter to the provincial administration office requesting permission to march from Derm Dong Ti Dob to Nak Ta Dombang Kranhong roundabout. They were denied permission to march in a letter from the provincial administration office on 5 December 2016. As a result, the event was celebrated without marching. Over 500 people from different community groups and NGOs gathered to celebrate International Human Rights Day on 8 December 2016 at Derm Dong Ti Dob near Samdach Sar Kheng park.

About 300 people from two communities involved in land disputes in Koh Kong commemorated Human Rights Day on 10 December, using it as an opportunity to demand that the government seek justice for them. However, in Donglompeng commune, the commune chief refused to give the people permission to hold their planned event.

In Kampot, three requests for celebrations were denied by the authorities. On December 9, about 80 community members attempted to gather to discuss human rights in a public forum in Savy Ang. The local authorities ordered the villagers to end the meeting after Kampot’s governor claimed that permission was required. The two events planned for December 10 were not permitted to go ahead.

In Takeo, the Khmer Krom Federation was forbidden from holding an event at their headquarters, leading them to express disappointment with the authorities’ decision to not allow them to celebrate International Human Rights Day in Songkam Meanchey village, Kampong Krasang commune, Borey Chulsa district on 10 December. They submitted the request letter to Takeo Authority on 1 November, but the commune chief rejected their proposal. This was the third consecutive year that they have been denied permission to celebrate.

On 7 December 2016 the Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC), led by Mr. Theng Savoeun, celebrated with the Andoung land rights community in Romas Heak district, 10 commune and district police officers arrived at the event and demanded to see CCFC’s permission letter for the event, their registration document, the attendance list and a mission letter. The NGO produced its registration document, and told the police officer that it had already informed local authorities of the event and invited the Commune Chief to join the event. The organizer was repeatedly asked by the police to obtain a second permission letter. He then assigned staff to negotiate with the Commune Chief, which enabled them to continue the event under the surveillance of police.

On 4 December, SOS community, Thmor Kol Community and other land rights community groups conducted an event in celebration of International Human Rights Day at Borey Santepheap II in Snagkat Cham Chao Khmer Porsen Chey, a prominent relocation site. The community didn’t ask permission from authorities, but did inform them of the event. Around 100 people attended the event, with 6 police officers monitoring the activities from 8:00am to 1:00pm. Chhay Nim, SOS community leader, said that the authorities remained at the event until it was finished.

Various NGOs made repeated requests to hold a march to commemorate International Human Rights Day, but all were rejected by the Phnom Penh City Hall. City Hall officials vowed to take “measures” if protesters disobeyed this decision and added the march was “not necessary”. The Deputy Governor stated that the authorities “did not want something that would damage security and public order...What rights have we suppressed?”

On 10 December, labor group Central, among other groups, attempted to hold a separate event in front of the Cambodia Development Council. Police reportedly “ordered” them to go to Freedom Park.