Report Links Businesses With Rights Abuses

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Children sit on top their inundated homes, where Shukaku, Inc., has been pumping fill into Boeung Kak lake, in early November 2010.

Government officials and businesses, backed by a biased court system, are behind many of the most egregious rights violations in the country, a new report has found.

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights found what it called a governance gap, where the authorities are unable to protect citizens from
rights violations brought about by powerful business interests.

The group also found financial ties between individuals in government and businesses responsible for rights violations, exacerbating the problem. In some situations, it was hard to tell the difference between the government and business, the center said in its report, “Business and Human Rights in Cambodia.”

Land rights violations brought on by economic motives have become endemic, the report said. And land cases and their respective crackdowns have meant curbs on land and labor rights and the freedom of expression and assembly, the report said.

“Victims of evictions are rarely given an opportunity for participation or consultation beforehand and any information which is provided to residents is often incomplete and inaccurate,” it said. “When consultations with communities facing the threat of eviction do occur, they are often manipulative or coercive. Evictions are regularly conducted by armed Cambodian troops and police, while the political and economic elite benefit from forced evictions.”

Rights activists, meanwhile, face regular threats
of physical violence or criminal charges when they voice their opposition to harmful developments, it said.

Victims of land or labor violations who seek to demonstrate or protest meet “public and private forces [that] collude to deny them these rights,” it said, adding that the courts were also not free of political or financial influence.

“The judicial mechanisms in Cambodia are in practice utilized by the political, economic and social elite to ensure impunity,” the report said.

Government spokesman Phay Siphan called the report an “attack from a non-governmental organization.”

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