Rights Workers Faced Increased Duress in 2008, 2009: Report

Heng Reaksmey, VOA Khmer | Phnom Penh
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Licadho President Pung Chhiv Kek told VOA Khmer Wednesday the increase was a result of a judicial system that was biased toward the rich or powerful.

Cambodian human rights workers say they have faced increasing threats and pressure for doing their work over the past two years from police, courts and government officials.
In a report issued Wednesday examining the years 2008 and 2009, the rights group Licadho said it found “the intensified use of the courts as a weapon,... increased use of defamation and disinformation laws to restrict freedom of expression... [and] increased restriction on freedom of association and assembly.”

Licadho President Pung Chhiv Kek told VOA Khmer Wednesday the increase was a result of a judicial system that was biased toward the rich or powerful.

Ministry of Interior spokesman Khieu Sopheak denied the finding of the reports, reporting to the number of Licadho staff in the provinces. Were threats and intimidation as bad as reported, he said, Licadho would not have staff there.

Ou Virak, director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, supported the findings in the report.

“Violence has progressed, not only for the NGOs,” he said. “Most of the violence has happened to community representatives in land grabs and in land violence against the Khmer Kampuchea Krom.”

The group called on the government to combat the culture of impunity and corruption by
prosecuting government officials responsible for threats and attacks, including investigations into the “unresolved assassinations or disappearances” of 10 journalists since the 1990s.

Licadho also called on the government to cease arresting rights workers in the middle of their duties, to allow peaceful protests to proceed “unhindered by police obstruction of violence” and to “cease using bail as a way of threatening human rights defenders.”

“Bail is meant to avoid unnecessary pretrial detention, not as a probation mechanism to intimidate or control the activities of human rights defenders,” the group said.

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