The companies had been contracted to develop the sites, in the Sambo and Chetborei districts, as rubber plantations.

Nuth Vanneath, president of the Phnang Ethnic Association in Sambo district, told the forum the companies holding the concessions had also used them to extort money from villagers foraging in the forest.

“The companies charge from 30,000 riels (US$7.50) to 40,000 riels per ox cart if villagers go into the forest to cut bamboo to sell,” he said. Ethnic minorities, he said, were not against the concessions, provided land around their spirit forests and burial grounds was left alone because they “could not live without forest”. TEP NIMOL