

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

27th Session (8 - 26 septembre 2014)

ITEM 10: Special Rapporteur on Cambodia

Oral Statement by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights and the World Organisation against Torture

Thank you Mr. President.

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights and the World Organization against Torture express their concerns over the situation of human rights defenders in the Kingdom of Cambodia. Threats against Human Rights Defenders are widespread and systematic and frequently take the form of violence as well as judicial harassment.

Particularly at risk are Human Rights Defenders and activists who work on issues related to land and housing rights, which are some of the most frequently violated rights in Cambodia. Despite international and domestic legal obligations, vulnerable communities continue to see their land illegally taken away from them, land which is then usually transferred to powerful individuals or companies with links to the ruling party and to the Royal Government of Cambodia. Human Rights Defenders who engage in peaceful demonstrations are frequently attacked, harassed and arrested. The executive maintains a strong influence on the judiciary and renders the separation of power illusory. The government responds to criticism and demonstrations by charging community leaders and activists with criminal offences. In most cases, little or no genuine evidence is produced against them.

On 9 September 2014, for instance, two researchers employed by a Cambodian human rights organisation were detained by local police while investigating evictions due to sugarcane plantations in the Oddar Meanchey province. They were questioned for almost 24 hours and only released after signing an agreement promising to not file complaints over their arrest. This is only one example of many where Human Rights Defenders are forced to sign these types of agreements in order to be released from custody.

The government's practice of requiring Human Rights Defenders and activists to sign agreements to secure their release from illegal detention is a clear and unlawful restriction of the rights of Human Rights Defenders and dangerously restricts the environment in which they operate. These are tactics of intimidation which the government uses to silence its critics and form part of a larger pattern of restrictions for civil society.

Thank you very much Mr. President.