

JOINT STATEMENT – Phnom Penh, 24 December 2016
Civil society condemns harassment and obstruction of staff and film crew in Pursat province

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, condemn the harassment and obstruction of the staff of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) and a film crew contracted by ActionAid Cambodia by district officials and environmental police in Thmar Da commune on 23-24 December 2016.

Mr. Vandy Buth, a CCHR staff member, and Mr. Phan Ream, Mr. Voun Boren and Mr. Soung Sopheak, three documentary filmmakers with the company One Plus Media (contracted by ActionAid Cambodia), were prevented from leaving the village of Sangkom Thmey, Thmar Da Commune, Veal Veng district in Pursat province after their car was stopped by environmental police at approximately 10.30am this morning.

The team travelled to Thmar Da commune on 22 December 2016 to film footage and conduct video interviews with villagers [affected by forced evictions](#) due to development of agribusiness and a Special Economic Zone operated by timber magnate Try Pheap. The filming is an activity of CCHR and Actionaid Cambodia’s joint Business and Human Rights Project, which aims to encourage greater respect for human rights among corporate actors working in Cambodia’s land sector.

On 23 December 2016, Mr. Vandy Buth was the subject of threats from local authorities. The Veal Veng District Governor issued an invitation to him to meet at his office that day to discuss the video documentary; when Mr. Vandy Buth declined, local police approached him on two separate occasions to tell him that the District Governor wanted to meet him that day. With the support of the local community, the team attempted to continue their work. However, they were ultimately forced to stop as authorities blocked the road and prevented them from filming at the site of the disputed land.

On the morning of 24 December 2016, the team resumed their work. However, at 09.20am today, as the team prepared to depart, the environmental police shouted that they should not be allowed to leave. The team retreated while the local community came to support. However, at approximately 10.30am their car was stopped while attempting to leave the village and the team were briefly detained at the environmental police station. At approximately 11am they were allowed to leave in their vehicle, accompanied by a community member.

The environmental police have given no reason for this obstruction of the team’s movements or the restriction of their work, nor did the District Governor give any reason for wishing to meet with CCHR’s staff.

Today’s events come in the context of an escalating crackdown on fundamental freedoms over the past year, and represent a further example of the increasingly severe restrictions placed on the ability of civil society in Cambodia to freely carry out their work. These threats and actions appear to be nothing more than a blatant attempt to obstruct the legitimate work of civil society organizations to investigate and raise awareness of forced evictions and land rights abuses in the area, and we condemn this clear violation of the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression of the civil society organizations and communities involved, as well as the right to liberty of movement. We call on the relevant local authorities

in the area to immediately cease all threats and harassment against members of civil society, as well as all attempts to illegitimately interfere with their work.

This statement is endorsed by:

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