

Cambodia Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Killings and other instances of violent deaths documented in and around

Phnom Penh between 7 and 19 September 1998

1. Chem Pich, alias Horn Keo Davy, 38, a moto taxi driver living in the Tonle Bassac quarter, was killed by a bullet in the head on the evening of 7 September, in front of the Cambodiana. On that evening, Chem Pich had gone out to join the demonstration in front of the National Assembly and subsequently joined protesters in front of the Cambodiana Hotel. He was shot in the upper back of the head, and then reportedly beaten with a rifle butt on the shoulders, upper back and neck. He was taken to Calmette hospital but died on the way, at about 8:00 PM. An autopsy carried out at the request of the family confirmed the death by gunshot in the head and the allegation of beatings.

His body was released to his family and brought to Wat Lanka on the evening of 8 September for cremation. The identity of the victim was confirmed by the family and identity documents found in his wallet.

[1]

2. On 10 September at approximately 13:00, according to witnesses, a group of plainclothes policemen and district gendarmes took two young men to Kmouegn village, Kmouegn commune, in the capital's Phnom Penh Thmei quarter and summarily executed them. Both victims were seen being taken to that location alive in a pick-up truck. They were dressed only in their underwear with their hands tied behind their backs. On the following day, the bodies of the two men were found at the location of the killing, buried in two shallow graves. One of the bodies was identified as Sath Sopheakra, male, 19, a student from Bak Touk high school. His body was dressed with underwear only. He had a large bruise of about 10 cms on his left hip; an entrance bullet hole on the right hip and a second one in the groin; a large wound in the back of the head, possibly from a bullet. His skull was smashed. Evidence collected by the COHCHR indicates that Sath Sopheakra had probably taken part in the demonstrations on the morning of his execution. The body of the second man was riddled with about 20 bullets, 5 of which had been fired into the face, rendering identification difficult. Witnesses stated that he did not die on the spot. He regained consciousness after he was shot, crawled out of the ditch where he was lying, and cried for help. The district gendarmes who had shot him were alerted by villagers to the fact that he was still alive. They returned to the location and shot him again to kill him. Witnesses stated that they kept shooting into the body well after he was dead. Witnesses also stated that the gendarmes alleged that the two victims were involved in a motorbike robbery. They photographed a motorbike they had brought along and placed near the bodies, apparently to fabricate evidence. There is so far no evidence to support the accusation of robbery.

[2-3]

3. Several witnesses interviewed by the COHCHR saw the body of a young man in his early twenties floating on the Tonle Sap river, off Dong village, Prek Phneuv commune, Kandal province on 9 September at about 5:00 pm. The body was dressed in "Leo" underwear. The arms were tied to a pole across the back in a crucifixion

position. The neck displayed marks of possible strangulation. He was described by the witnesses as "good looking", with a "light complexion," as if "looking Chinese" and with a short hairstyle. The body was beginning to swell, indicating that the death may have occurred a couple of days earlier. Local residents could not identify the body and no one in the area claimed a missing relative. It was left floating downstream.

[4]

4. Several villagers interviewed by the COHCHR witnessed three bodies floating on the Tonle Sap river, near Chrey Andet village, in Ponhea Loeu district, Kandal province. Two of the three bodies, seen on the morning of 10 September, were described as those of young women, apparently in their early twenties, dressed in what appeared to be underwear. The two bodies were floating separately. Their hands were tied. One source stated that their faces showed dark marks. Another source said that their heads appeared to have been smashed with a hard object. A third source mentioned that the faces displayed marks of cutting. The third body was that of a man in his early twenties. It was seen on 9 September stranded on the bank of the river. His hands were tied behind his back. His throat showed dark marks which could be that of strangulation. He had a bullet hole in the left side of the back. The body was pushed back into the river several times by local residents. None of the three bodies could be identified. No one in the area claimed missing relatives or persons. They were left floating downstream. According to villagers it was the first time that they had ever seen floating bodies there.

[5-6-7]

5. On 10 September 1998, at about 6:00 PM, a dead body was seen floating on the Bassac river near the Naga casino by a local boatman. The witness, who was interviewed by the COHCHR, stated that the body was wearing what he described as a monk's saffron robe. The body was left floating downstream.

[8]

6. On 11 September, at about 9:00 AM, at the corner of Street 240 and Monivong boulevard, a demonstrator was shot and killed, apparently by security personnel. The victim was apparently shot at close range and received a bullet in the upper back. He was taken to Kossamak hospital in a United Nations vehicle and died shortly afterwards. He was identified the same day by his relative as Chhun Samnang, a 28-year old teacher, native of Prey Veng and father of two, who resided in Phnom Penh. Photographs of the victim at the time medical staff tried in vain to reanimate him and after he was confirmed dead are available to the COHCHR.

[9]

7. Three bodies were witnessed by several villagers on Friday 11 September floating on the Bassac river in Saang district, opposite Saang district town. Kandal province, a first time near Koh Ko village (at about 7:00 AM) and a second time near Wat Chumleap market (at around 8:00 AM).

Three bodies, which may be the same, were witnessed on the following morning (12 September) about 10 kilometers downstream, opposite Saang jetty. They were witnessed by fisherman, local merchants and the ferry staff. One of the three, seen at about 9:00 PM by villagers, was said to be a woman. Villagers informed the

COHCHR on 13 September that this body had been carried kilometers downstream into Prek You Heng. On 17 September, villagers at the mouth of the canal in Trae Sla commune, Village 3, confirmed they saw three bodies on 12 September. They said two bodies had gone downstream. They described them as having their hands tied behind their backs. The third body was that of a woman. They confirmed that it entered the canal on the same day and had been pushed back into the river several times by local residents. On 17 September, COHCHR staff found the body stuck in the reeds of La Theng lake, 4 kms away, at the end of the canal. The body was indeed that of a woman, dressed in a pair of black trousers, a white T-shirt on the upper body and a red chequered open shirt on top of it. The body was in an advanced state of decay, with maggots on the face, a very swollen belly and darkened skin. It was lying face upwards, arms stretched out. It could not be identified. Photographs were taken by the COHCHR.

[10-11-12]

8. On 11 September, at about 6:00 AM, in Peam Okhna Ong commune, Lvea aem district, Kandal Province, several witnesses interviewed by the COHCHR saw a corpse floating in front of the district hospital. The body's hands were tied behind the back. No other details could be provided as it was passing at some distance from the bank. The following day, at about 6:00 AM, at the same location, another body was seen floating downriver, also with hands tied behind the back.

[13-14]

9. Several villagers interviewed by the COHCHR on 13 September 1998 reported seeing the bodies of three men floating off the Toek Thlaa dam, on the Prek Thnaot river, in Kraing Pongro commune, Dangkor district, Phnom Penh municipality. The bodies were seen floating in the middle of the wide flooded area produced by the dam, covered with lotus, off National Road 3. The COHCHR visited the area a second time on 14 September to look for the bodies but could not locate them, but found another dead body, upstream from the dam (see case # 13, below).

[15-16-17]

10. The body of a man, in his late thirties or early forties, was observed on the morning of 13 September 1998 by the COHCHR at Kilometer 19 on National Road 2, in Srey Snom village, prek Kampis commune, Kandal Stoeng district, at about 200 meters after the metal bridge, in a rice field irrigation canal. On the same morning the local Police came to look at the body but did not examine it. It was later examined by the COHCHR. The body was dark-skinned, tall (about 1,80m), blindfolded with the hands tightly tied behind the back with electric wire. There was no apparent bullet injury. There was blood in the mouth. There was a apparent bullet injury. There was blood in the mouth. There was a dark mark around the neck, possibly of strangulation. A red and white krama was stuffed in the mouth. The man was wearing kaki/brown colour jeans, a long-sleeved red/brown and white shirt, a pair of dark blue shorts with pockets on both sides, and a pair of western-type underpants. He also had an amulet string around his waist. The victim could not be identified. The body was swollen after being in the water apparently for several days. Photographs were taken by the COHCHR before and after examination.

[18]

11, On 14 September, at about 7:00 AM, in Ta Sko village, Sarikakeo commune, Lvea Aem district, several villagers observed a corpse floating near the bank. The body displayed a bullet mark near the neck and a cut on the shoulder. The throat was half slit open. He wore blue shorts. The body was pushed back into the river in several villages downstream (Peam Okhna Ong, Koh Reah Loeu, Koh Reah Kraom) before being taken away according to witnesses by a boat of Kandal provincial police. [19]

12. The body of a man, apparently in late twenties, was examined by COHCHR staff in the afternoon of 14 September 1998 in Ang village, Prateah Lang commune of Dangkor district, Phnom Penh. The body was lying in water near the Prek Thnaot river bank. It was about 1,65 m tall, with the hands tied behind the back with hammock string. Another piece of rope used to tie cows was seen around the neck. There was gunshot wound in the right side of the chest close to the nipple and an exit bullet hole in the back. There was also an open injury at the front part of the neck. The abdomen was opened and intestines were coming out. The face was badly swollen and partly decomposed. The body was dressed only in Cambodian handmade underpants, olive green colour.

There was an amulet string around the waist. The body was not claimed and could not be identified. A corpse corresponding to the same description was cremated on 16 September 1998, at about 10.30 AM, on the river bank near the Toek Thla pagoda. Villagers who cremated the body observed the tattoo of an eagle on the left shoulder. Photographs of the body and of the cremation were taken by the COHCHR. [20]

13. An eyewitness interviewed by the COHCHR at the Prek Eng ferry in Kien Svay district, Kandal province, stated that on 15 September, at around 4:00 PM, he saw three dead bodies floating on the Mekong river about 20 meters from the bank opposite Ta Sko village, Sarikakeo commune. Two of them were dressed as civilians and the third was wearing a monk's saffron robe. All three had their hands tied behind their backs. [21-22-23]

14, The body of a person was found on 16 September by the COHCHR on the Mekong bank near Koh Pos, in Dei Et commune of Kien Svay district. The skull had been smashed into very small pieces and the hands were tied behind the back with a thick nylon rope. A krama was tied around the neck. The body was in an advanced state of decay, with parts of the flesh and skin drying up to the sun. Because of this the sex of the victim could not be determined. Photographs were taken by the COHCHR. [24]

15. The body of a man was found on 18 September 1998 in Prek Thnaot river, Ang village, Prateah Lang commune, Dangkor district, Phnom Penh. (This is the same location where a body was found on 14 September 1998 which was cremated on 16 September - see case # 13 above). The body was floating face down, naked, legs apart, upstream from the dam, its arms were tied by the forearms behind the back with a white cotton T-shirt. There was a hammock string around the neck. The left arm was broken in the middle. The right arm was broken at the wrist. There were no visible bullet injuries on the back. The neck appeared to have been broken and most

of the skull had disappeared as if the head had been completely smashed. The front part of the thorax and abdomen which were immersed in water were badly damaged (rotted and eaten away by fish). Local and Phnom Penh municipal police came to inspect the body on the same day (18 September). Photographs were taken by the COHCHR.

[25]

16. Chey Oudom (alias A-Chen, or "the Chinese"), aged 29, was shot dead by two unidentified men wearing civilian clothes at about 7:30 PM on 17 September 1998, on street 150, in Phnom Penh. He had just left the house of a relative on his motorcycle when two unidentified men on a motorcycle, who had apparently been waiting for him, drove up next to his motorbike and shot one bullet at point blank range into his head. The bullet entered the left cheek and came out from the back of the head, killing him almost instantly. Preliminary findings indicate that the victim was working as a bodyguard for a FUNCINPEC member of parliament for Kandal province. He had also been an electoral observer for that party during the July elections. The COHCHR is also verifying allegations that he had taken an active part in the demonstrations. The Tuol Kork district police inspected the body shortly after the killing. The body was taken on the same evening by relatives to Preah Put pagoda for cremation. Photographs of the victim shortly after the murder were taken by the COHCHR.

[26]

Phnom Penh, 25 September 1998