



Special Representative of the Secretary-General
for Human Rights in Cambodia

តំណាងពិសេសរបស់លោកអគ្គលេខាធិការអន្តរជាតិសម្រាប់កម្ពុជា



Statement of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Human Rights in Cambodia about the incarceration of two human rights workers in Sihanoukville

The Special Representative is seriously concerned about the incarceration of two human rights workers of the Cambodian League for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (LICADHO) on December 21, 1998, after they monitored demonstrations and riots in Sihanoukville town.

Several hundred people demonstrated on December 19 and 20 to express their concerns about 3,000 tons of alleged toxic waste that had been dumped near Sihanoukville town. On December 20, 1998 the demonstrations degenerated into riots. Several public buildings and vehicles were destroyed, the house of the first deputy governor of the province was ransacked and looted, several rioters and policemen were reportedly injured.

In the morning of December 21 1998, local police brought the two human rights workers, Mr. Kim Sen and Mr. Meas Minear, to the provincial police commissariat. Mr. Kim Sen was approached by approximately ten police officers while eating breakfast in a restaurant in Bit Trang and was told to get into the policemen's car. Mr. Meas Minear was brought to the police commissariat from LICADHO's office where he was working. At the time of the arrests, no arrest warrants were presented. The two men were initially suspected of incitement to illegal demonstration. This accusation was later dropped. In the course of the day, accusations of robbery and wrongful damage of property, in connection with the looting of the house of the first deputy governor of the province, were brought forward. The two human rights workers are currently detained in Sihanoukville prison. According to information collected by the Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (COHCHR), the only involvement of the two human rights workers in the incidents was to meet with complainants on Friday about the toxic waste and to monitor the demonstrations on Saturday and Sunday.

The Special Representative is concerned that the detention of the two men will undermine the work of human rights defenders. It is the responsibility of the authorities to guarantee the safety of all human rights workers and the government should welcome their important contribution to the improvement of the human rights situation in Cambodia.

The Special Representative also hopes that the appropriate members of the international community will respond positively to the appeal by the Royal Government for expertise and assistance in addressing the problem of hazardous waste and its disposal.

12 December 1998