



International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights  
Red Internacional para los Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales  
Réseau international pour les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels  
الشبكة العالمية للحقوق الاقتصادية والاجتماعية و الثقافية

For immediate release

## **International organizations call for an end to arbitrary arrests against human rights defenders in Cambodia**

*New York, 8 December 2014.* The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) sent a letter on 5 December 2014, to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia to express serious concern over the recent detention, conviction and sentencing of seven female land rights activists who attempted to defend the human rights of families living around Boeung Kak Lake, formerly one of the largest in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia.

The women were arrested on 10 November, while demonstrating to draw attention to the severe flooding on their neighborhood in recent months. Later that same day, the seven defendants were tried, convicted, and sentenced to the maximum penalty of one year of imprisonment and two millions riels fine each.

The next day, four more human rights defenders were detained while peacefully protesting outside of the Phnom Penh Municipal Court to call for the release of the seven women. The following day, each defendant was sentenced to one year in prison. As more people gathered to protest the imprisonment of the women human rights defenders, they have been detained as well; at present, 19 people in total have been denied their freedom.

Human rights activists and residents blame the flooding on the filling of Boeung Kak Lake after it was drained to enable commercial real estate development, which has been carried out by Shukaku Inc., a construction company owned by Senator Lao Meng Khin.

The protesters allege that after the forcible eviction of almost 20,000 people from the area by the Municipality of Phnom Penh in 2008, chronic flooding around the community has created impacts on affected families' health, homes and businesses.

The letter, endorsed by more than 220 organizations and 50 individuals in 70 countries, raises particular concern that the arrests, summons and charges are acts of reprisal against those who seek to defend human rights and calls the Cambodian government to cease all politically motivated convictions against human rights defenders working to promote the rights of people living around the Boeung Kak Lake area.

ESCR-Net also calls for effective, independent, prompt and impartial investigations into all alleged human rights violations connected with the forced eviction of the Boeung Kak Lake communities, including addressing problems related to flooding, drainage, compensation, on-site infrastructure upgrading and off-site resettlement.

Finally, the letter asks the Government of Cambodia to carry out effective, independent, prompt and impartial investigations into all alleged human rights violations connected

with the actions of Shukaku Inc, and to take appropriate steps to ensure, through judicial, administrative, legislative or other appropriate means, that those communities affected by such business-related human rights abuses have access to effective remedy.

The complete letter is available at <http://www.escr-net.org/node/365714>

### **About ESCR-Net**

The International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) connects more than 270 NGOs, social movements and activists from 70 countries around the world, working to build a global movement to make human rights and social justice a reality for all.

### **For more information**

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