Media Statement

May 22, 2012

Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF), Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT), Equitable Cambodia, Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) and Licadho Canada condemn the unjustified and violent response to a peaceful demonstration by Boeung Kak residents and call for the immediate release of the 13 detained women.

On the morning of May 22, some 18 families of Village 1 in Boeung Kak arrived at the sand dunes covering their homes in the lakeside village. Equipped with wood, one family attempted to erect poles at the location of their destroyed home. Soon after, however, police arrived at the site trying to confiscate the wood and prevent the family from demarcating the boundary of their submerged house.

During the morning, police presence in Village 1 intensified, including the arrival of military police, “anti-riot” intervention police, and Daun Penh district security guards at the scene. A few dozen hired demolition men bearing hammers and metal sticks also came.

Unable to go on with the original plan, the Boeung Kak residents staged a peaceful demonstration, complete with singing and speeches, on the sand used to fill the lake. Shortly before noon, a small group of women kept singing while other villagers sought shade nearby. The group of women was then surrounded by a mixed force of police and district guards, who proceeded to violently put a stop to the singing. As the demonstrators dispersed, they were chased down by the authorities, who proceeded to arrest 13 women, including a 72-year-old. The women were subsequently taken to Phnom Penh Municipal Police Station.

“The use of violence and arrests against peaceful demonstrators is unacceptable, yet we are seeing more and more of it every day,” said Sia Phearum, Secretariat Director of HRTF. “For years the Boeung Kak residents have called for the authorities to respect
their rights and solve this ongoing land dispute, yet time and again the authorities respond with unreasonable violence.”

“The crackdown this morning highlights the authorities’ continued lack of tolerance of peaceful gatherings and expression by Cambodian citizens,” said Ee Sarom, Representative of STT. “It is worth repeating again: violence will not resolve the land dispute at Boeung Kak lake.”

The undersigned organisations call for an end to violent responses to peaceful demonstrations and for the detained women: Nget Khun; Tep Vanny; Kong Chantha; Srong Srey Leap; Tho Davy; Chan Navy; Ngoun Kimlang; Pao Saopea; Cheng Leap; Soung Samai; Phan Chan Reth; Heng Mom; and Toul Srey Pov to be released immediately and without conditions.

For video from the crackdown, please go to: http://licadho-cambodia.org/video.php?perm=31

For more information, please contact:

Am Sam Ath, Monitoring Supervisor, LICADHO, 012 327 770 (mon1@licadho-cambodia.org)
Sia Phearum, Secretariat Director, HRTF, 012 852 325 (sd@hrtfcambodia.org)
Ee Sarom, Representative, STT, 012 836 533 (sarom@teangtnaut.org)
Eang Vuthy, Representative, Equitable Cambodia, 012 791 700 (vuthy@equitablecambodia.org)