Thousands Set to Mark International Human Rights Day in Cambodia

Phnom Penh, December 8, 2012 - Nearly 62,000 Cambodians will gather on Dec. 8, 9 & 10 to mark International Human Rights Day (IHRD) – including hundreds who will convene another day in front of the National Assembly in Phnom Penh to present petitions to the country’s lawmakers.

The National Assembly gathering will be the final event in a series of celebrations designed to highlight this year’s IHRD theme “We All Need Justice & Freedom!” The exact date of the gathering will be announced shortly after IHRD on Dec. 10. Organizers plan to present hundreds of petitions to the National Assembly at the conclusion of the event. The signatures express support for a collection of petitions organized under three major rights themes: land, labor, human rights & democracy.

Organizers will also present the Assembly with nearly 40,000 signatures gathered by Amnesty International – sent by supporters from Germany, France, South Korea and New Zealand – calling for an end to forced evictions in Cambodia. The supporters also sent thousands of messages for affected communities, human rights defenders and activists. The messages include drawings by children, inspiring words, thumbprints and handprints.

The Amnesty International petitions and support messages will be carried to the Assembly in creative ways, some hung as “leaves” on replica sacred Bodhi trees and others dangling from traditional bamboo poles slung over the shoulders of participants.

“IHRD should be a fun & festive event – it’s a celebration of our rights, our hopes for the future and our vision for society,” said Tim Malay, President of Cambodian Youth Network (CYN). “But at the same time, it also draws attention to a very serious issue: The fact is that the human rights situation in Cambodia has taken a very disturbing turn in the past year.”

An additional 198 events in 23 provinces are planned prior to the Dec. 14 event. Participants will include community groups, trade unionists, land activists, students, farmers, fishermen, musicians, entertainment workers, tuk tuk drivers, motorcycle drivers and NGO workers.

The gatherings will mark the achievements made to advance human rights in Cambodia, but will also focus on critical issues still facing Cambodian citizens, particularly the exploitation of land and natural resources, labor abuses and the need for a legitimate democracy.

“Land and labor, in particular, have emerged as the most pressing human rights issues in Cambodia today,” said Vorn Pao, President of Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA). “Land and labor also form the foundation of peoples’ livelihoods – they are at the core of any society. When there is no justice in these sectors, there is no justice in any sector.”

“Immediately releasing all imprisoned human rights defenders would be a good start toward improving the human rights environment in Cambodia,” said Pilorge Naly, Director of LICADHO. “And there is no better time to do it than during IHRD celebrations.”

IHRD is celebrated worldwide every year on December 10 as a reminder of the enduring human rights struggles which continue to affect people around the world. IHRD bears witness to and highlights pervasive human rights abuses and serves as standing call for action against abuses everywhere. IHRD also marks an opportunity for civil
society, governments, international organizations and citizens themselves to highlight their efforts in securing recognition and observance of human rights principles.

All of the celebrations are tied together with the common theme "We All Need Justice & Freedom!" and a common symbol the blue Kramar to represent the important role of human rights defenders in Cambodia. The events are organized by Friends of December 10th, an informal group of human rights defenders working to support and assist local initiatives to celebrate IHRD throughout Cambodia.

Media are invited to attend the IHRD celebrations. Please contact event organizers listed for more information on individual IHRD events in Phnom Penh and 23 provinces.

For more information, please contact:

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- Mr. Sar Mora, President of Cambodian Food Service Workers Federation (CFSWF) at president@cswf.org
- Mr. Yeng Virak, Executive Director of Community Legal Education Center (CLEC) at virakyeng@clec.org.kh
- Ms. Pilorge Naly, Director of Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) at director@licadho-cambodia.org