On International Children’s Day, LICADHO Urges Government to Support Child Rights and to Protect Youth in Prisons

31 May 2015 – LICADHO’s Children’s Rights Office (CRO), in partnership with the Child Protection Group (CPG) network, will celebrate International Children’s Day 2015 in several locations. On 28 May, early celebrations took place in Dangkor Middle School, Phnom Penh. On 1 June, the official date of International Children’s Day, celebrations will take place in the morning (8:30am-11:00am) at Sangkat Norkor Thom, Siem Reap, Sal Mohorsrop Theater, Koh Kong, and at Build Bright University in Sihanoukville, Preah Sihanouk. At these locations, the CRO and CPGs will organize public forums and interactive theatre performances concerning child rights, and help distribute social assistance packages to the families of vulnerable children and youth. Approximately 2,350 people are expected to attend the celebrations.

On 1 June, the CRO will also join LICADHO’s Prison Project Office to facilitate games and distribute materials to youth, pregnant women and the children of prison guards in Prey Sar’s Correctional Center 2 (CC2) prison and Takmao prison, Phnom Penh.

In addition, the CRO will be releasing a music video conceptualized by youth CPGs in Phnom Penh, which summarizes the four baskets of rights of children: to survive, to be protected, to develop and to participate. It will be released to raise awareness, and to appeal to the Cambodian government to further strengthen efforts to promote and protect the overall well-being, happiness and development of children.

"Poverty negatively impacts the health, education and happiness of many children in Cambodia," said Kong Socheat, LICADHO Children’s Rights Coordinator. “To protect the well-being and rights of children the government must not only raise awareness, but also help families of vulnerable children achieve socioeconomic stability. In part, this means putting an end to forced evictions, which intensify the effects of poverty.”

In addition to the activities in Prey Sar’s CC2 prison and Takhmao prison, LICADHO’s Prison Project Office will provide materials to youth, pregnant women, children imprisoned with their mothers and the children of prison guards in 12 other prisons across the country. LICADHO will also facilitate games and other forms of entertainment at some of these prisons.

At the end of April 2015, 342 juveniles were detained in the prisons monitored by LICADHO, including 322 young men and 20 young women. Amnesties issued during International Women’s Day and Khmer New Year earlier this year led to the release of nearly all pregnant women and children living with their incarcerated mothers in Cambodian prisons. There are now 18 pregnant women and two children living with their imprisoned mothers in the prisons monitored by LICADHO.

As prisoners, juveniles have special needs with regard to physical, mental and social development but these needs are rarely taken into account and as a result many juveniles in detention find themselves subject to the same abuse, humiliations and degradations as adults.

1 Kampong Som, Kampong Speu, Kampot, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom, Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Svy Rieng and Koh Kong.
Like adults, juveniles are likely to be treated according to their financial status rather than their age, increasing their risk of exploitation and subordination by older prisoners. Girls in Cambodian prisons are a minority group but are especially vulnerable, held in an environment designed primarily for adult males.

“It is really sad, to say the least, that girls in Cambodian prisons are unlikely to receive special care,” said LICADHO’s Director, Naly Pilorge. “The small number of girls imprisoned is absolutely no reason to neglect their particular health and hygiene requirements or their general conditions of detention.”

Juveniles have reported being beaten, slapped and kicked by other prisoners, sometimes under order of the prison guards, but they have no protection or effective mechanisms to complain against torture and ill-treatment. Moreover, they continue to be placed in pre-trial detention and given custodial sentences for the most minor offences with no regard for the potential long-term impact on their future prospects.

LICADHO urges the Cambodian government to establish a separate juvenile justice system by finalizing and implementing without delay the draft Law on Children in Conflict with the Law. This law must meet or exceed international standards and, in particular, ensure that young female prisoners are provided with special care according to their needs. LICADHO also urges judges to consider the potential long-term impact that imprisonment can have on a juvenile’s future prospects and ensure that pre-trial detention is only used when absolutely necessary and that alternatives to custodial sentences are used for those convicted of minor crimes.

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