

Joint Open Letter

Re-open the investigation into the murder of Chut Wutty

Phnom Penh 26 April 2024

Today marks 12 years since Chut Wutty was shot dead on April 26, 2012. Wutty was killed by In Ratana, a military police officer, in the Veal Bey area of Bak Khlong Commune, Mondol Seima District, Koh Kong province, while he accompanied two journalists from The Cambodia Daily investigating a forestry crime near a protected area in Phnom Kravanh mountain. Wutty's death and the lack of justice for the murder have caused a great pain and sorrow for his family, friends, environmental activists, forest activists, forest communities, and their supporters.

The incident of Chut Wutty's murder by a gunman serving in the military makes it clear that citizens' activism in the conservation of natural resources continues to be a target, facing intimidation, harassment and attack by forest criminals with close ties to the authorities.

The murder of Wutty and the lack of justice for the past 12 years have had a profound negative impact on the fundamental freedoms of citizens, forest communities and activists, environmental activists, and other lovers of natural resources in protecting and conserving natural resources. Rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution to participate in the protection and conservation of natural resources are increasingly restricted. In addition to being threatened and intimidated by forest offenders, forest protection communities and environmental activists continue to be unfairly accused by local authorities and restricted from patrolling forests, including Preah Roka and Prey Lang sanctuary.

The court's hearing resulting in a 2-year prison verdict to Ran Borath, a staff of the Timber Green company to 2 years in prison on 22 October 2012 on charges of manslaughter left a lot of unanswered questions from the public, national and international civil society groups, family, friends, and supporters. The testimony of the perpetrator and the presentation of the perpetrator during the trial were inconsistent. In particular, Borath's re-enactment of the shooting at Ratana in the courtroom clarified that the story of the incident was unbelievable, because it was impossible for Ratana's AK-47 rifle to turn around 180 degrees, which caused the shot to hit two different places at a distance from each other, one in the chest and the other in the abdomen of Ratana.

On the 12th anniversary of his murder and the lack of justice, we, the undersigned grassroots communities, civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, and unions, reiterate the call to H.E. Koet Rith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice to intervene and consider doing the following:

1. Re-open the investigation with an independent commission of inquiry into the murder of Wutty in a transparent, impartial and prompt manner.
2. The Ministry of Justice should push for the prosecution to investigate the case and bring all those responsible to account before a court of law.
3. The Ministry of Interior must ensure that the judicial police officers under its supervision conduct a prompt and independent investigation into the case.

4. The Cambodian government should stop restricting fundamental rights and freedoms and intimidating and judicially harassing grassroots communities, environmental youth, and activists because of their work to protect Cambodia's forests and natural resources.
5. Allow the construction of a statue to commemorate and honor a forest hero, to admire his devotion, and to encourage other forest activists, environmental activists, forest communities and those who love the forest and other natural resources to continue their work together with the government to protect and conserve natural resources in Cambodia.

This open letter is endorsed by:

1. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
2. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
3. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
4. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
5. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
6. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
7. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
8. Khmer Student Intelligent League Association (KSILA)
9. Planète Enfants & Développement Cambodia-PED