

Second Eviction Protester Jailed In Two Days

BY KHUON NARIM
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Police and court officials yesterday questioned, charged and imprisoned an elderly woman involved in the long-running land dispute at the Borei Keila community in Phnom Penh, a day after an anti-eviction protester from the Boeng Kak community met a similar fate.

In both cases, police and court officials would not explain the charges against the women, who have been protesting against their evictions at the hands of two well-connected property firms: the Phanimex firm at Borei Keila and the Shukaku firm at Boeng Kak.

Phnom Penh Municipal Court investigating Judge Ly Lipmeng said Toem Sakmony, 64, who was among some 100 families violently evicted from the city's Borei Keila community in January, was summoned for questioning yesterday and subsequently charged with making a "false declaration," which is a crime under the Penal Code.

"Toem Sakmony was charged with false declaration and she has been imprisoned," Judge Lipmeng said, declining to explain the reasons for the charge.

The Penal Code describes Ms. Sakmony's alleged offense as "an act of providing false declaration to a public administration for the purpose of obtaining an allowance, a

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Siv Channa

Un Reaksa, 12, holds a photograph of her grandmother, anti-eviction demonstrator Toem Sakmony, outside the Phnom Penh Municipal Court yesterday. Ms. Sakmony, 64, was detained yesterday, charged with making an unspecified 'false declaration' and sent immediately to Prey Sar prison.

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By HENRY CHU

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payment or any unlawful advantage" and lays out penalties of up to two years in prison and 4 million riel, or about \$1,000, in fines.

In a strikingly similar case to Ms. Sakmony's, Yorm Bopha was on her way to apply for a new national identity card on Tuesday when plainclothes police officers arrested her and her husband and took them to the municipal court for questioning. The court then charged them both with intentional violence, but released the husband on bail.

Ms. Bopha, 32, was sent to Prey Sar prison, and as in Ms. Sakmony's case, court officials have refused to explain the "intentional violence" charge.

Ms. Bopha is a resident of the Boeng Kak community, which has been fighting its own battle

against eviction at the hands of Shukaku, a private firm owned by CPP Senator Lao Meng Khin.

Dozens of Boeng Kak residents were among the 180-strong crowd that protested outside the municipal court yesterday and later moved on to the gates of Prey Sar, where the two women are jailed ahead of trial.

Chum Ngan, who was among the protesters outside the municipal court yesterday, said that Ms. Sakmony had been wrongfully charged.

"The court is not independent because she never did anything wrong," Ms. Ngan said. "We have done nothing wrong. We are protesting to get shelter because [Phanimex Director-General] Suy Sophan destroyed our houses."

The Borei Keila families accuse Phanimex of failing to make good on a written agreement to build the last two of 10 promised apart-

ment buildings to compensate them for their displacement from their land at Borei Keila.

Authorities in turn have accused some of the Borei Keila families of making fraudulent claims to be included in the deal to get the promised apartments.

While most of the families evicted in January from Borei Keila have grudgingly accepted ill-equipped plots of land at a relocation site on the city's outskirts, Ms. Sakmony was among a few dozen who refused to move and have taken shelter in the stairwells of one of the completed apartment blocks.

Yin Savath, a lawyer at the Community Legal Education Center assigned to defend Ms. Sakmony, said he would file a request for his client's release on bail.

"It was a summary decision to put my client in prison because she answered [during question-

ing] that she never did what she was accused of," Mr. Savath said.

Mr. Savath said that the court has also detained and imprisoned the Borei Keila village chief, but he did not know why.

Borei Keila residents identified the village chief as Tip Kimhong. The residents said they lodged a complaint against Mr. Kimhong in 2011 accusing him of colluding with Phanimex in their evictions.

Tep Vanny, a Boeng Kak resident who was imprisoned earlier this year for protesting against the evictions and later released on appeal, said the jailing of the women reminded her of the Khmer Rouge era.

"Where is justice and liberty?" Ms. Vanny asked.

"It is like the Pol Pot regime because in Pol Pot's time, there was no justice.... If they wanted to kill, they killed. If they wanted to put you in prison, they did."