

Hundreds Rally to Stop Forced Land Evictions in Phnom Penh

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Hundreds of families from more than a dozen communities joined local human rights groups yesterday as they rallied outside the National Assembly for World Habitat Day, calling for an end to forced land evictions in Phnom Penh.

Gripping lotus flowers and wearing black T-shirts that read “eviction free zone,” the group of about 700 chanted, “We need houses. We need land. We all have rights.”

Some of the protesters could be seen donning cardboard hats fashioned in the shape of homes as they marched toward the National Assembly to submit petitions requesting intervention in ongoing land disputes in the city.

“We met with a National Assembly administrative official, and he promised with us that he will pass our letters to the top level, and he will let us know soon,” said Chum Lai Im, 47, one of five representatives present to submit the petitions.

Among those protesting were residents from the Boeng Kak



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Anti-eviction protesters rally yesterday outside the National Assembly in Phnom Penh demanding an end to forced evictions in the city.

and Borei Keila communities, who are still embroiled in long-running disputes with powerful property firms after being forcefully evicted from their homes. Protesters from the former Group 78 and Dey Krahorm communities—both of which were violently evicted from prime real estate in Phnom Penh in 2009—were also present at the demonstration.

The latest group to be threatened

with eviction came from Pur Senchey district’s Choam Chao commune, where three villages near Phnom Penh International Airport face imminent eviction as part of security preparations for world leaders ahead of next month’s Asean and East Asia summits.

Chray Nin, 34, a representative for the airport families, submitted a petition demanding fair compensation if they are evicted. While vil-

lagers say they possess documents proving they own the land, local officials have said the residents are living there illegally.

“We are here because we heard authorities will start implementing removal soon,” Ms. Nin said. “If they give compensation, that’s fine. But if not, then we will continue to protest.”

On Thursday, the government approved the demolition of the homes surrounding the airport.

“We already sent a report to Deputy Prime Minister Sok An, and the removal will start soon,” said Eang Sousey, undersecretary of state for the State Secretariat of Civil Aviation.

Local rights groups appealed to the government to halt the eviction.

“We want to send a message to the National Assembly to make sure the government guarantees adequate housing to the people and follows the law,” Ee Sarom, program coordinator of Sahmakum Teang Tnaut, a housing rights NGO, said during the rally. “Stop the violence and respect the rights of people.”