



**UN Human Rights Council
21st session
Item 10**

**Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on Cambodia
Statement delivered by Renate Bloem, CIVICUS UN Representative, Geneva**

Thank you, Madam President

CIVICUS thanks Professor Subedi for his report, his proposals for electoral reform and for all progress noted. However, we are concerned about the economic and land concessions. Environmental and land rights activists exposing human rights abuses have become increasingly at risk as Cambodia's government seeks to promote rapid economic growth through policies that favour the private sector over citizens' rights.

According to the Director of the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights, 2012 has been the worst year for human rights in Cambodia in over a decade. From increasingly violent crackdowns on peaceful protests, to arbitrary arrests and unwarranted criminal charges against protestors and human rights workers, and to the killing of a prominent environmental activist, civil society in Cambodia is under siege.

71 year-old veteran activist Mam Sonando has been in detention since 15 July on charges of committing public order crimes, including "participating in an insurrectionary movement." His detention follows a protest by villagers against the forcible acquisition of their land in Kratie province, during which security forces killed a 14 year-old girl. Prior to his arrest, Mam Sonando's radio station, Beehive Radio, highlighted a complaint by an overseas opposition political movement to the International Criminal Court that argued that large-scale forced evictions by the Cambodian government that displaced thousands of people amounted to crimes against humanity. It is widely believed that Mam Sonando's arrest was in response to this independent reporting by Beehive.

In addition, Chan Soveth, a senior investigator at the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association, has now been summoned to appear before an investigating judge on 24 August in connection with the Kratie protest. His summons comes eight days after the Prime Minister made accusatory references blaming an unnamed "human rights worker" for his role in providing assistance to villagers in the Kratie land dispute.

Madam President, Although the Cambodian government, having experienced domestic and international pressure, delayed the adoption of a restrictive NGO bill until 2014, the operating environment for civil society in Cambodia remains fraught with difficulties. In the light of this restrictive climate, CIVICUS asks the Special Rapporteur to urge the Cambodian government to:

- guarantee the protection of civil society activists and their organisations;
- unconditionally release all activists in detention as a result of their civil society work; and

- end further harassment of people involved in the peaceful exercise of their rights to assemble and express.

I thank you for your attention.