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Minority Rights Organization

(Human Rights Respect, Legal Protection, Peace & Development for Minorities)

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PRESS RELEASE

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Minority Rights Organization Considers Verdicts as Untenable

Khmer Krom and Khmer Were Handed Down Prison Sentence of 5 to 9 Years for Conspiring to Commit Treason

The Phnom Penh Municipality Court rendered a prison sentence to thirteen Khmer Krom and Khmer men today in what Minority Rights Organization (MIRO) considers an unfair and partial trial. The judges take it as evident that the men conspired to topple the Government of Cambodia. Six accused men were sentenced in absentia. The remaining convicts plan to appeal the judgements.

MIRO rejects the court's decision as it is based on fabricated evidence. All men confirmed during the court hearing on 28 March 2014 that they were coerced into signing the statements of their interrogation and other documents during their examination at the Ministry of Interior. Two of them were subjected to torture. These reports falsely claim that they had collaborated into bringing down the Government of Cambodia. All men were denied a legal representative during the interrogations.

MIRO is critical of the fact that the judges solely focused on finding out whether the men are members of Denmark-based Khmer National Liberation Front (KNLF). "The judges neglected to examine whether KNLF advocates for violent actions", explains MIRO director ANG Chanrith in Phnom Penh. "If the Danish Government allows KNLF to operate on its territory, the Cambodian courts should not assume it has unlawful motives."

KNLF was set up as a movement in support of democracy and human rights respect in Cambodia and Vietnam. The Government of Cambodia harshly condemned KNLF and other organizations founded by Khmer nationals in the diaspora before the national elections in July 2013 for their alleged terrorist intentions. Therefore, MIRO claims that the verdict was rendered on political motives rather than the rule of law. Particularly, Khmer Krom are frequently targeted for their human rights activities.

The seven convicts were arrested by Thai authorities and Cambodian police in Thailand in March 2013 and transferred to a Phnom Penh prison where they were held in pre-trial detention for more than one year. Upon arrest, no weapons or documents proving intentions to forcefully remove the Cambodian government were detected. None of the men were presented with a warrant upon their arrest nor were they informed as to the reasons for their confinement.

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