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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 Demands Fair Trial Against Khmer Krom and Khmer Charged with Conspiring to commit Treason

Court proceedings against seven Khmer Krom and Khmer men will begin at Phnom Penh Municipality Court on Friday, 28 March 2014. They are charged with providing a foreign state with means to undertake hostilities and aggression (Penal Code Art. 453) and face sentences between five and ten years. Four of the men are additionally accused of illegally crossing the border.

The men were arrested by Thai authorities and Cambodian police in Thailand on 08 and 14 March 2013 respectively, and transferred to Cambodia, where they have been detained in Prey Sar prison in Phnom Penh up to now. The initial charge of forming an armed terrorist group could not be upheld and was later changed to delivering equipment for national defense to a foreign state. Apparently, this indictment was also lacking substance and was altered once again. MIRO believes that these repeated modifications of charges signify the lack of credible proof for an existing criminal offence.

MIRO claims that the arrest of the seven men has been unlawful. No weapons were found when they were taken into custody. What is more, they were neither informed about the reason for their arrest nor were they shown a warrant. Two of the defendants confided to MIRO that they were beaten and tortured in police custody. MIRO fears that the information revealed under duress will be used as evidence against them.

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure, pre-trial detention in cases of felony may not exceed six months. In case of prolongation, the lawyer of a defendant needs to be informed. As the investigating judge failed to observe this requirement, the men have been held without legal grounds. Equally, MIRO has reason to doubt the validity of the documents obtained from one of the defendant's computer as official evidence; these records bear neither a stamp nor a signature/fingerprint to prove their validity. "Thus, we ask the judges to conduct full and independent investigations into the case", urges ANG Chanrith, Executive Director of MIRO, in Phnom Penh today.

Over the past few years, several movements have been formed in Thailand to promote human rights respect in Cambodia and Vietnam. Some groups support Khmer Krom families who have escaped from Vietnam to seek refuge in Thailand. No intentions of any unlawful objectives can be found in their statutes or activities. MIRO argues that their members should be allowed to exercise their right to freedom of expression pursuant to national and international law.

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