

Mr. Kevin Doyle  
Editor-in-Chief  
Cambodia Daily

November 18, 2009

Dear Mr. Doyle,

I write regarding Cambodia Daily article on the violent standoff over an economic land concession in Kompong Thom province (*K. Thom Villagers Torch Vehicles, Vent Rage Over Land Dispute, Wednesday November 18, 2009*). Although LICADHO condemns any use of violence in defending legal rights to land, this incident does raise two critical questions regarding the government's conduct.

First, why did the authorities use the military to threaten and intimidate villagers in Santuk District, Kompong Thom? According to information that LICADHO has documented, the authorities failed to seek a peaceful resolution to the dispute, which first emerged in early 2008. The illegal mobilization of military personnel against civilians in land disputes is a clear indication of their priority: to defend private business interests over the rule of law. Deploying armed soldiers only raises the risk that evictions and land disputes will turn violent.

Second, what was the government's response to reports that the police beat a 13-year-old village boy prior to Tuesday's violence? The seriousness of this allegation and photos of the wounds on the boy demand an investigation, yet according to the Daily's story, police refused to even speak to villagers who came to demand an explanation. Instead, officers fired shots, which in turn sparked the villagers' reactions.

LICADHO urges the government to cease using military forces in land evictions and land disputes, and to investigate the allegations of threats and physical assaults by the police and soldiers against villagers in this case.

Regards,  
Naly Pilorge  
Director of LICADHO