

Serving the People:

Raising the Voices of Cambodian Women



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF MU SOCHUA, MP

FALL-WINTER 2008



MP Mu encourages women to speak up and take the microphone.

Community Organizing:

Throughout Cambodia, citizens are afraid to organize and participate in civic groups due to intimidation by local officials. Citizens fear that participation in political activities will lead to ostracism from the community or physical violence. Women's voices are particularly ignored or silenced, especially in minority communities such as the Muslim community in Kampot. These women deserve to be heard. MP Mu Sochua attended a community forum organized in her constituency of Kampot by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights. The forum

was well-attended by over one hundred members of the community.

MP Mu Sochua's Response:

At each forum, MP Mu Sochua stressed that citizens have the right to organize and assemble peaceably, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Cambodia.

Chapter 3, Article 41 of the Constitution states, "Khmer citizens shall have freedom of expression, press, publication and assembly. No one shall exercise this right to infringe upon the rights of others, to affect the good traditions of the society, to violate public law and order and national security."

Citizens *do* have the right to organize and participate in civic groups despite intimidation from local officials.

Land-Grabbing:

Cambodian citizens' land, which they have occupied for generations, is being repossessed by large corporations and rich land-owners for re-development. Citizens feel hopeless in the face of these evictions by powerful forces. Sadly, women may be the most disenfranchised due to miscarriage of the joint titling portion of the 2001 land law. In particular, women who are divorced or separated may not be entitled to full rights on their land because of joint ownership with estranged husbands, who may be abusive or have



Disputed mangrove fields in Kampot. MP Mu toured the land with community members in October 2008.

abandoned their family. Though official procedures exist to address problems with titling, they are often unknown to citizens and local officials. MP Mu Sochua visited disputed lands in Kampot and talked to local leaders. Villagers rely on the land and fields of mangroves and worry about their future. She informed villagers of their legal rights to the land, as set forth in the 2001 Land Law.

MP Mu Sochua's Response:

MP Mu Sochua has actively supported citizens protesting the land-grabbing, including five women from the Roulous village. She has met with these women and other citizens, discussing the issues at hand urging their continued action. In addition, she has applied to and received a grant with Strey Khmer through the Urgent Action Fund. This money will be used to provide legal representation as well as leadership and advocacy training for citizens protesting eviction. In addition, the funds will be used to assist citizens in creating an action plan for fighting this injustice and publicizing their cause in the media.

Forced Evictions in Kampot Province:

Anlong Kraom Village is the latest target of land-grabbing, as the nationwide forced evictions campaign continues. Thirty representatives of the 300 families who had their entire village and

harvest burned down met with MP Mu Sochua on November 25, 2008 to make a plea for assistance. The group of mostly women exhibited grief, despair and shock. One woman, clinging to her three-month-old child, explained that the experience was reminiscent of the Khmer Rouge era, as soldiers threatened to take her baby and throw it to the ground. Another woman explained that as



Women from Anlong Kraom, many traumatized or seriously injured by hundreds of troops from RCAF's Brigade 31, who arrived without warning from Nov. 17-18.

a single mother, all she had in the world was a small plot of land, much smaller than plots belonging to the men in her village, but that was now gone. Fears escalated as the group was being overtly monitored by unidentified individuals who were not only following the movements of the villagers, but also taking pictures and talking into cell phones. After the meeting with MP Mu, the remaining villagers at the site called in reports of soldiers evicting families from their roadside tents as retaliation for the delegation approaching the government.

MP Mu Sochua's response:

MP Mu Sochua believes government needs to put an end to the violent land-grabbings, which further disenfranchise the poorest of Cambodia's poor. This demographic most often includes female-headed households, who are the most vulnerable to physical attacks and threats or other intimidation tactics. This form of gender-biased violence by

the state should be monitored by international women's and human-rights agencies.

Riverbank Pumping in Kampot Province:

Kompong Kreang Village is the current site of a massive sand-pumping venture, which is destroying the local mangrove forests and livelihoods of the largely fishing community. Rights to pump were sold to a Cambodian company, but the villagers were not consulted in this process, nor do they receive any monetary compensation. MP Mu toured the site on November 26, 2008, and again on December 12 2008, and residents were willing to openly discuss the problem until local police officials arrived, then no one dared to speak, though the costs associated with this violation are shared by the entire village. Women especially are affected by this policy, as many women single-

handedly support their families with revenues from small orchards. With their trees destroyed, these women's survival is in jeopardy.

MP Mu Sochua's response:

Once more, this form of localized intimidation needs to be addressed at all levels of government, in order for the democratic process to fully function in Cambodia. The residents should be consulted, and a task force created to help mitigate the environmental and monetary costs associated with such an invasive procedure.



Exposed roots on the riverbank are evidence of erosion caused by sand-pumping, which threatens farmers' livelihoods.

Threat of evictions for entire village:

MP Mu met in a town hall-style meeting on November 27 2008, with villagers of Sre Cheang Village, who have been given a mass notice of eviction. The developers had marked off the boundaries with spray paint, in one instance going directly through one family's house. At the meeting, the



MP Mu Sochua attended a town hall meeting in Sre Cheang Village, listening to citizens' concerns and offering her support

developers and local government officials observed as a group from a distance, exhibiting mass disapproval for this display of community organization.

MP Mu Sochua's response:

MP Mu believes that regarding land rights and development projects should be discussed collaboratively and transparently with each community, and residents should be given the option of just compensation for their and, should they choose to sell.

Local government officials should discontinue actions that could be portrayed as threats or intimidation

tactics. Massive land concessions to private companies in the name of development while poor farmers are threatened by lost of their crops and land must be stopped and can only be stopped when farmers organize and challenge the authorities to use the land law.