

Arrested union leader Vorn Pao speaks from prison



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In December last year, violence against garment workers began after Cambodian unions called a national strike. Workers were demanding an increase in the minimum wage to USD 160 per month. As protests continued, the police and military responded with violence on January 2 and 3, killing at least 4 people and injuring almost 40. Among those who were arrested with violence is Vorn Pao, union leader of the Independent Democratic Informal Economy Association (IDEA). In February, he smuggled a letter out of prison.

Letter from Vorn Pao to All Comrades, posted by his wife on Friday 14 February 2014

I, Vorn Pao, would like to say hello to all members of associations, unions, federations, confederations, international and national civil societies, international and national networks, and all Khmer patriots living both in the country and around the world!

I have known that there are millions of Khmer people inside and outside the country that are striving to advocate for our freedom and release from CC3 Prison. Your action is really a new, enormous driving force to demand rights and freedom for our nation and to show that we hunger for justice and peace for our nation as well. Moreover, I have known clearly that everyone has been busy day and night pushing for our freedom. For me, even though my body is being detained in prison, my soul, my ideals, my willingness and my consciousness is not being detained. Prison has provided me enormous life experience as a social advocate and shown various types of images, especially the life of prisoners.



Vorn Pao's wife and his children crying outside the court room after the appeal court denied on-bail request in a close door hearing on 11th February 2014 (credit: Licadho)

Many scars from wounds are on my body, creating a lot of pain for me, but it cannot shock me or depress me or make me forget the social struggle because I hope that one day in the near future, we will receive our freedom after our united sacrifice. Every activity is for the sake of our nation, ourselves and our next generation. Our nation has suffered so many years from people who have always mistreated and wanted to destroy our nation from generation to generation. Therefore, every action of sacrifice is for the sake of ourselves as well as our next generation.

We hope that our united struggle has contributed more and more to the struggle for real justice, and we struggle with all of you, every time. If we lose willingness, consciousness, independence, we will never realize our rights as human beings, rights to land, rights to housing, proper living wage, democracy and social justice. I will continue struggling living in hardship in this prison to wait for a new day of hope for everyone, and I truly hope that I will be free and receive justice from everyone's sacrifice, for the sake of our nation.

I hope our struggle will be fruitful soon. I, Vorn Pao, wish all people and monks to be blessed, safety everywhere and success in every mission for our nation. I also hope that our 20 friends and I will be free and be able to meet all of you soon and will join the advocacy campaign with all of you.

I want to say bye for a while, but I will meet all of you outside prison soon.

Wishing you a prosperous life eternally,

Vorn Pao, one of the struggling patriots
CC3, February 14, 2014

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