

Campaigner against illegal logging wins Goldman Prize

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

May – August 2015

Ouch Leng is the head of the environment-human rights NGO Cambodian Human Rights Task Force (CHRTF). The CHRTF investigates and reports on illegal logging activities, particularly rosewood logging, by corrupt officials and business leaders in Cambodia. CHRTF has produced three important reports on what it calls 'Cambodia's illegal logging crisis.' The reports have exposed corruption within government agencies, and have called for the licenses of certain companies to be revoked.

In June 2015, two men in plain clothes, riding motorcycles, came to Mr Ouch Leng's house at night. They asked where he was and asked to see him. His wife replied that he was not at home.

In September 2015, a CHRTF team member was arrested in Koh Kong, following a peaceful protest against the Chinese company Union Development Group. He was interrogated and asked about the whereabouts of Ouch Leng. He admitted to working with Ouch Leng, and was subsequently released.

As pressure on and intimidation against Ouch Leng grew, he and his family moved to a safe house in another province (using funds provided by international civil society supporters). During this time (from June 2015) he remained in close contact with the NGO Civil Rights Defenders' (CRD) South East Asia team. In August, he applied for and secured a security grant. Later, in 2015, he applied for another security grant from the EU's Human Rights Defenders Fund, which was also approved.

At a time when it was becoming increasingly difficult for Ouch Leng to continue his work, these grants provided a lifeline. With this financial support, in August he was able to publish a third report on illegal logging, published in Khmer.

In April 2016, Ouch Leng was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize for Asia. Amongst other benefits, being a recipient of the prize has helped raise his profile (with important security benefits), has strengthened his international connections and support, and has, through international media interest, helped put pressure on corrupt officials and illegal loggers.