

Bunong Community affected by a land dispute calls on the French Government to respect their right to a fair trial



Today, 12 February 2019, representatives of the Bunong Community, indigenous peoples from Bousra commune in Mondulhiri province decided to hold a press conference in Phnom Penh. But they were not supposed to be there. They should have been in France alongside their lawyer, ready to attend their hearing, stand before a French judge and tell their story, the story of an ethnic group who has been tirelessly struggling against the powerful French Bolloré Group over a decade-old land dispute.

In 2008, the Royal Government of Cambodia granted an Economic Land Concession of 5 300 hectares to the Socfin-KCD company affiliated to the French Bolloré Group, affecting hundreds of families living in 7 Bunong villages of this area. The Bunong community has suffered from much more than the deprivation of their lands. They are subsistence farmers possessing their own agricultural practices. Their entire lifestyle is based on their belief that nature is populated by spirits that must be respected, revered and appeased. The ELC has, therefore, not only affected their livelihood but also probably their most valuable possession, their cultural traditions, customs and beliefs.

After filing a complaint against the Bolloré group and being officially invited by the judge to attend the preliminary hearing today in France, the French Embassy rejected the visa application of the 9 Bunong representatives as well as their Cambodian lawyer and translator, violating their right to a fair trial enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and preventing them to be heard and seek justice.

ADHOC, as a fervent defender of land rights in Cambodia, is deeply saddened to hear that the Bunong Community members have once more being deprived of their most fundamental rights. We hope that the French judiciary will postpone the hearing and call on the French Embassy to allow Bunong community members to attend the hearing, testify in person before the Court and enable their voices to be heard.

The full statement made by the Bunong community on 12 February in Phnom Penh is available below.

[Statement of the Bunong Community 12-02-2019](#)