

Open Letter

To the USAID in Cambodia

Monday, March 22, 2021

We, the Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN) have worked for a generation to protect the Prey Lang Forest. We have come together from four provinces and more than 100 villages in appreciation of the Prey Lang Forest and to protect her. We have been working tirelessly to protect the Prey Lang forest from illegal logging, hunting, land concessions and mining. We have done so as volunteers, always donating our precious time to patrol Prey Lang.

We have been hungry and thirsty, we spent cold nights in the forest, and our motorbikes have been damaged beyond repair more times than we can count. We have faced threats from loggers that we would not see our families again, as well as threats of violence and arrest by the authorities. We have experienced accidents, violent attacks and even death. The spokesperson from the Ministry of Environment (MoE), USAID's partner in Prey Lang, has publicly threatened PLCN members with arrest if we use freely available satellite images to monitor deforestation in Prey Lang. In all of this, USAID never supported us or defended our rights.

We, the PLCN, were appalled to see that USAID in a recent statement claims to "work directly with the PLCN". We have never seen USAID coming to talk to us. USAID never informed us about the purpose of their Greening Prey Lang project. USAID has never asked us if we agree to what they are doing on our ancestral forest lands. We have never received any financial or technical support from USAID.

On the contrary, we have asked for meetings with USAID on many occasions, but these meetings were always delayed or cancelled. USAID has told us that their office is not big enough to invite PLCN representatives from four provinces but can only accommodate two PLCN members. This is not how we work. We work as a network, and not as individuals, whom you can buy or intimidate.

PLCN has frequently requested to be invited as a stakeholder in USAID-run projects in Prey Lang. In particular, our requests to be invited to the large USAID projects "Support for Forest Biodiversity" and "Greening Prey Lang" were turned down by USAID.

You claim that USAID supports PLCN in conducting patrols together with the MoE. This is not true. USAID has paid individual ex-members of PLCN to work with the MoE in Community Protected Areas (CPAs). These areas are small and of little value to biodiversity and intactness of the forest. We have to bring to your attention, that to patrol in the CPAs, the MoE forces us to promise that we will not patrol in Prey Lang again. This is how MoE tries to stop our documentation of illegal logging in Prey Lang - forcing us to accept such intimidation is not what working with PLCN means.

Therefore, our question to USAID is: why does USAID claim to work directly with PLCN?

If USAID does not wish to work with local and indigenous peoples, it is your decision. But please respect our network. Do not misuse our name, PLCN, for your own benefit. The statement by USAID is not acceptable to PLCN and we ask you to change it to reflect the facts.

If USAID genuinely wishes to collaborate or support PLCN, we welcome you. Therefore, please accept this invitation to come to the province to meet us.

To us, Prey Lang is life. We will continue to do our best to protect her. We hope that USAID will accept our invitation to come see our work and discuss how we can support each other.

For more information, please feel free to contact the community representatives.

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2. Mr. Svay Song, 071 451 9465
3. Mr. Srey Thei, 099 722 187
4. Mr. Khem Sokhy, 085 473 157
5. Mr. Menh Ny, 096 300 2762
6. Mr. Hoeun Sopheap, 012 373 441
7. Miss Chheang Ly, 096 668 0673
8. Mr. Kheng Kho, 071 451 9463

“Prey Lang, it’s Our Forest Too” Let’s protect Prey Lang together.