

# **Prey Trolach families win key battle**

Friday, 16 November 2012 David Boyle

After an eight-year struggle, about 825 families fighting to save their natural surroundings were granted a Community Forestry Agreement over the Prey Trolach forest yesterday, though they fear the battle may not be over.

Social welfare groups supporting the families in Battambang's Roka Kiri district are worried a celebration they are planning this Sunday in Prey Trolach commune could still be drowned out by the sound of chainsaws employed by long-encroaching illegal loggers.

Nhov Nharn, director of Ockenden Cambodia, accused members of the police and army of making a last ditch grasp to log as much of the area as possible, build houses and plant crops in the community forest – in attempt to claim the land that belongs to them.

“They returned last weekend to clear more land, about 30 hectares [cleared] up until yesterday [since they returned],” he said.

The land-grabbers had erected a makeshift fence, hoping volunteers in the national land-titling scheme would measure the territory in their favour, Nharn said.

That was until Ly Chou Beang, director of forestry administration's Battambang provincial cantonment, stepped in last night and cleared out the offenders, he added.

Chou Beang, who signed the Community Forestry Agreement, which represents step six of eight in the process of establishing a Permanent Forest Reserve of Cambodia, could not be reached for comment yesterday.

In Oeun, the Community Forestry Management Committee leader, also could not be reached.

John Macgregor, a project adviser for the livelihood group After the Flood, said district and provincial level officials, who everyone was too scared to name, had been providing political cover for the land grabbers.

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