

Eviction on the Horizon for Chaiyaphum Community

GUEST CONTRIBUTION by Emma Tran and Jenny Dunn

CHAIYAPHUM– As part of the military government's new forestry policy, the 277 residents of Baw Kaew village in Khon San District received a thirty-day eviction notice on August 26.

The notice, issued by the Forest Industry Organization (FIO), cited Order 64/2557 of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), which seized power in May. The order instructs government agencies to eliminate deforestation and incursion on forest reserves nationwide.



Baw Kaew villagers recently celebrated the fifth anniversary of their community's re-establishment. Standing in front of their eviction notice, villagers intend to continue to fight peacefully for their land.

Photo credit: Wilder Nicholson, Bowdoin College

After villagers were originally removed from the Samphaknam Mountain Reserve Forest in 1978 by the FIO, the area was replanted with eucalyptus trees, used primarily in the paper pulp industry.

Sixty-four households returned to the Khon San Forest Project in 2009 to re-establish a village. Their protest of FIO policy highlights the plight of thousands in the Northeast and throughout Thailand facing eviction.

The community had been actively involved in working with a community land title scheme under the Abhisit and Yingluck administrations.

In the few days following the eviction notice, the villagers from Baw Kaew have submitted petition letters to six organizations, including the NCP0, the Secretary of the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), the Office of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC), the Chaiyaphum Provincial Governor, and the Commander of the Second Regional Army. More than eighty-percent of residents signed the petition, which calls for a cancellation of the eviction notice and for recognition of the community's right to their land.

In July, the military [used threats and arbitrary arrest](#) to evict more than a thousand villagers in Buri Ram province. International human rights NGOs at the time voiced concern at the worrying trend. The Asia director of Human Rights Watch, Brad Adams, [condemned](#) the evictions.

"Instead of resolving a land issue through legal means, the military is using its wide-reaching martial law powers to bludgeon human rights protections," he said in a statement released on July 19.



On September 25 families who have lived in the Khon San Forest` for generations are scheduled to be forcibly removed. Photo credit: Wilder Nicholson

There is no compensation or assistance for relocation available to those facing eviction. If the villagers choose to stay when their thirty-day notice has passed, they will likely face arrest.

Baw Kaew villagers claim this is the third eviction threat they have received since 2009.

Community members have no intention of leaving the land they believe is rightfully theirs, and plan to engage in nonviolent protests to fight eviction.



Suwan Daiphukieow has lived in the Khon San Forest Project area for over sixty years, five of which have been in Baw Kaew. Photo credit: Emma Tran

While the country is under martial law, it is unclear whether protests will be tolerated by the military government.

Among those who established Baw Kaew in 2009, Suwan Daiphukieow, a woman in her sixties, says, “Where should I go? I have nowhere to go. I’m going to keep on doing what I’m doing for as long as I can.”

Ms. Suwan has no family or friends outside of the area to turn to.

“I am quite scared, but I don’t know what to do because we have no other land,” she continued. “If they want us to leave,

they must find us a place to live.”

Pramote Phonphinyo, adviser to the Land Reform Network of the Northeast, states that villagers may have evidence that could help prove they own the land. Even with the evidence, there is no guarantee that villagers will be permitted to stay. He says their future remains uncertain.

Mr. Pramote estimates that as many as fifty communities across the Northeast are vulnerable to the military's new eviction policy.