



Press Release

For immediate release: 29th September 2005

Murder of Rangers highlights threat to Cambodia's forests

At just after midnight on the night of 27/28 September 2005 a group of at least three men attacked the Ministry of Environment (MoE) ranger substation at Trapeang Cho, Kampong Speu Province on the boundary of Phnom Aural Wildlife Sanctuary, killing two of the five rangers on duty. The other three were able to escape, reportedly because the gun of the attacker jammed; a local villager was also wounded. The attackers then looted the substation taking weapons, motorbikes, radios and other equipment. The attack is a clear indication of the extreme threats facing Cambodia's forest resources and those who protect them; it was planned with the intention to kill and cause maximum intimidation to the MoE rangers protecting the sanctuary from illegal loggers and other criminal elements.

The murdered rangers were local men Noun Chorn (27, unmarried), and Kim Poyt (38, married with 5 children). It is likely that they were killed in revenge for the increasing effectiveness of their forest protection efforts, that have in the past year closed down 24 illegal sawmills and seized over 1000 cubic metres of illegally cut timber. Fauna & Flora International (FFI) extends its deepest sympathies to their families and will provide humanitarian assistance for them. We are working with local and national authorities to ensure that the witnesses to the attack are protected, and the criminals responsible are caught and brought to justice.

FFI has been working with the Cambodian Ministry of Environment to protect the biodiversity of the Cardamom mountains where the Phnom Aural Wildlife sanctuary is located. FFI believes the attack underlines the critical importance of increasing protection to forest resources in Cambodia, for the benefit of the Cambodian people as well as the country's unique wildlife. Around 15,000 people live in and around the Sanctuary and many of them traditionally depend on forest products for survival. FFI is working with these communities to help them live sustainably in the sanctuary and assist with its management. An upsurge in illegal logging and land grabbing by armed groups threatens these people as well as the sanctuary's globally important wildlife.

Officials from the MoE, Provincial Authorities and Police are investigating the attack. FFI is working with donors and other NGOs to urge national authorities to assist the investigation and to combat forest crime, land grabbing and lawlessness in Cambodia's forests.

"Forest rangers do not just protect animals and trees, they also protect the livelihoods and rights of thousands of poor people" said FFI Chief Executive Mark Rose. "They deserve our support"

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Notes for Editors:

FFI-Cardamom Mountains Wildlife Sanctuaries Project (FFI-CMWSP) is a joint project of the Cambodian Ministry of Environment and Fauna & Flora International, focusing on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the Phnom Samkos and Phnom Aural Wildlife Sanctuaries. Support for CMWSP is provided by the United Nations Development Programme, the Global Environment Facility, the European Union and the United Nations Foundation.

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) acts to conserve threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science, and take account of human needs. Founded in 1903, FFI is the longest-established international conservation organization, and is currently supporting conservation through partners in more than 40 countries worldwide.

Conservation in the Cardamom Mountains, Cambodia

Isolated by their remoteness and rugged terrain and forgotten during years of conflict in Cambodia, the Cardamoms have at their core a virtually undisturbed forest covering over 10,000 square kilometres. Extensive field surveys in 1999 and 2000, conducted by FFI in partnership with the Cambodian Ministry of Environment and Wildlife Protection Office, established the Cardamom mountains in south-west Cambodia as one of the last forest wilderness areas in mainland south-east Asia. A preliminary survey of the mountains confirmed their global importance for threatened wildlife, identified great habitat diversity based on variations in geology, altitude and aspect and the presence of unique vegetation formations within the area, hinted at the possibility of major discoveries and emphasized the need for a more comprehensive biodiversity assessment.

The forest fauna was found to be virtually intact, with exceptional diversity, including animals and plants potentially new to science, and relatively high densities of globally threatened species such as gaur, pileated gibbon and tiger. Significant populations of wild elephants are believed to be present, despite evidence of hunting and habitat degradation. The team also confirmed the presence of the critically endangered Siamese crocodile.

FFI is at the forefront of mobilising efforts to conserve this globally important region, working to help the Cambodian authorities to protect and manage the Cardamoms in perpetuity. Working in collaboration with Conservation International and Global Witness and in partnership with government authorities, we have the following objectives:

- Establish a programme aimed at developing and implementing best practice models for conserving the Cardamoms, including protected areas management, World Heritage Site nomination and establishment of a central Cardamoms protected forest zone.
- Build national capacity at government and NGO levels for developing, funding and managing conservation projects.
- Raise awareness nationally and in focal project areas about Cambodia's unique biodiversity and the benefits of conserving it.
- Promote more active consideration of biodiversity conservation among aid and development programmes, donor and implementing agencies.