

Supreme Court Orders Eco-Activist's Appeal to Be Reheard

BY [AUN PHEAP](#) | JULY 6, 2017 | [អានជាភាសាខ្មែរ](#)

Environmental activist Ven Vorn has been given a second chance to have an illegal logging conviction overturned after the Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered his case sent back to the Appeal Court for review.

Mr. Vorn, who is allied with the NGO Mother Nature, received a one-year suspended sentence in March last year for cutting wood from inside a protected area to build a community center. His appeal was rejected in September.



Ven Vorn holds his 4-year-old daughter Vorn Sovann Sera as he speaks with reporters outside the Koh Kong Provincial Prison. (Den Seymar)

He then asked the Supreme Court to overturn the verdict last month, vowing to clear his name despite being free.

Presiding Judge Kem Sathavy on Wednesday ruled the Appeal Court needed to reassess its verdict.

“The Supreme Court has rejected the Appeal Court’s verdict and turns this case to the Appeal Court to reopen the trial,” the judge said.

Mr. Vorn, an ethnic Chong resident of Koh Kong province, maintains he had legally purchased the wood to construct the center for English studies, and was within his rights as an indigenous Cambodian harvesting timber for community use.

Chan Soheat, a former lawyer who defended Mr. Vorn at the Appeal Court, said returning the case to the Appeal Court was “a good opportunity to find justice for Mr. Ven Vorn.”

“I think that the judgements of the Koh Kong Provincial Court and the Appeal Court were not fair for Mr. Ven Vorn because he did not commit a crime,” he said.

In Kongchet, provincial coordinator for rights group Licadho, applauded the decision and said the original case was a clear effort to intimidate ethnic minorities in the Areng Valley.

“I understand that the court just wanted to break the spirit of the minority people in the Areng area,” he said.

However, Koh Kong Provincial Court Judge Ang Chanda said he believed the original verdict was “perfect.”

“I have no idea what to say because this is the decision of the Supreme Court but I think our provincial court judgement was fair and perfect,” he said, before hanging up on a reporter.

Neither the Appeal Court nor Mr. Vorn could be reached.

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