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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Report launched today: “Bittersweet Harvest”
A human rights impact assessment of the EU Everything But Arms Initiative in Cambodia

8 November 2013, Bangkok – Today, at an event at Chulalongkorn University, Cambodian NGO Equitable Cambodia and Inclusive Development International (IDI) launched their report, [“Bittersweet Harvest: A Human Rights Impact Assessment of the European Union’s Everything But Arms Initiative in Cambodia.”](#)

In recent years, there has been a surge in forced displacement resulting from land concessions for agro-industrial development in Cambodia. Among the worst offenders have been sugar companies that were motivated by the EBA preferential trade scheme to develop industrial plantations in Cambodia to produce raw sugar for export to Europe.

The report documents human rights violations suffered by Cambodian farmers affected by industrial sugarcane development across three provinces - Koh Kong, Kampong Speu and Oddar Meanchey. It found that the Thai sugar companies operating in Cambodia, Mitr Phol and Khon Khaen Sugar (KSL), disregarded Cambodian law and a plethora of social and environmental regulations, as well as their responsibility under international law to respect human rights. Yet, the assessment identifies the policies that facilitated these violations as the root cause of the problem:

“In the absence of effective human rights safeguards, Cambodia’s policy of granting large-scale land concessions to private investors for agro-industrial development and the EU’s policy of granting preferential tariffs to spur such investment in least developed countries both carry risks of devastating human rights impacts.”

The report goes on to describe how “these risks have materialized in forced evictions and land seizures that have been part and parcel of the development of Cambodia’s sugar industry,” resulting in affected people suffering “a severe rollback in their enjoyment of basic human rights, including the rights to adequate food, water and housing, as well as the right to work, the right to education and the right to health.”

Teng Kao, one of the affected farmers from Sre Ambel district in Koh Kong province, who attended the event, said: “Before the company came...we had

enough food to eat. We had no problem with our income and we were able to send out children to school and attend to them when they were sick. Now we have nothing and even though we are the children of the land, we never saw children as young as eight working in the plantations.”

The assessment identified 85 children, some as young as 8 years old, that worked on the Koh Kong plantation that supplies UK refiner Tate & Lyle Sugars.

During the event, Hoy Mai, a representative from Samrong district in Oddar Meanchey province, handed over a complaint against Mitr Phol to Dr. Nirun Phitakwatchara, Chairman of the Thai Human Rights Commission, who was in the audience. More than 600 villagers from affected communities in Oddar Meanchey originally filed the complaint with the Commission in May 2013.

“I beg you to please investigate the activities of this particular Thai company and to help the villagers that have been displaced to end our hardships, “ she said.

After accepting the complaint, Dr. Nirun Phitakwatchara raised concerns about corporate accountability in the ASEAN countries and said: “This case, as many others raising allegations of human rights abuses by Thai companies abroad, demonstrate that the ASEAN economic community is overrun by the interests of multinationals. Instead of bringing benefits to its citizens it tends to bring benefits to business enterprises and capitalists.”

Eang Vuthy, Executive Director of Equitable Cambodia, called for a radical reform of the EBA initiative that would allow the EU to blacklist companies from the trade scheme that are implicated in human rights violations. He also called up the Thai government to regulate the overseas investments of its businesses in order to protect human rights.

“We need binding regulations to hold these corporations accountable both in our country and in their home countries,” he said.

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The report is available here at this link:
http://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Bittersweet_Harvest_web-version.pdf

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