

## PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 2 October 2012

### **The international human rights movement announces the 2012 Martin Ennals Award winner, A Cambodian Monk working to prevent Forced Evictions**

**The Jury of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA), met in Geneva today and selected the Venerable LUON Sovath as the 2012 Martin Ennals Award winner. The Prize winner was announced at a ceremony hosted by the City of Geneva at Victoria Hall.**

The Venerable Luon Sovath, a Buddhist monk from Siem Reap, Cambodia witnessed his family and fellow villagers being forcibly evicted from their homes in 2009. Since then he has been a strong advocate against forced evictions, which remove families from their homes, often violently and little or no compensation. Despite threats to his person, of arrest and disrobing, the Venerable Sovath, a non-violent Buddhist monk, uses videos, poems and songs to defend the right to housing. His advocacy touches powerful economic interests. The threats against the Venerable Sovath are very real.

Venerable Sovath was selected from among three final Nominees. Also nominated was Nasrin Sotoudeh, an Iranian Lawyer serving a 6 year prison sentence in Iran for her Human Rights work . She is known particularly for her work on behalf of women and children's rights, especially juveniles facing execution. The third nominee is the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, who report widely on human rights abuses in Bahrain. Many of their key staff are currently imprisoned for their work.

The New Chair of the Martin Ennals Foundation, **Micheline Calmy-Rey**, the former Swiss President and Foreign Minister said: *"This year's novel format with three nominees made the Jury's decision particularly difficult. As a Buddhist monk, Venerable Sovath has managed to raise wider attention to the issue of forced evictions in Cambodia."*

OMCT Secretary General **Gerald Staberock**, member of the ten organisations jury noted: *"This price honours the extraordinary courage of a human rights defender in Cambodia fighting with innovative means and under threats to his life and liberty against forced evictions. It is representative of the many man and women in other regions of the world defending land rights and documenting forced evictions often in the face of mighty private and state interests. It should remind us all that they deserve our active support, protection and solidarity"*.

**The main award of the human rights movement.** The Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) is a unique collaboration among ten of the world's leading human rights organizations to give **protection** to human rights defenders worldwide. The **Jury** is composed of the following NGOs: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights

First, International Federation for Human Rights, World Organisation Against Torture, Front Line, International Commission of Jurists, German Diakonie, International Service for Human Rights and HURIDOCS.

**Previous laureates :** Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera (2011) Muhannad Al-Hassani, Syria, Emad Baghi, Iran; Mutabar Tadjibaeva, Uzbekistan; Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, Burundi and Rajan Hoole-Kopalasingham Sritharan, Sri Lanka; Akbar Ganji, Iran and Arnold Tsunga, Zimbabwe; Aktham Naisse, Syria; Lida Yusupova, Russia; Alirio Uribe Muñoz, Colombia; Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad; Peace Brigades International; Immaculée Birhaheka, DR Congo; Natasha Kandic, Yugoslavia; Eyad El Sarraj, Palestine; Samuel Ruiz, Mexico; Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria; Asma Jahangir, Pakistan; Harry Wu, China.

**Patrons** of the Martin Ennals Award: Asma Jahangir, Barbara Hendricks, José Ramos-Horta, Adama Dieng, Leandro Despouy, Louise Arbour, Robert Fulghum, Irene Khan, Theo van Boven and Werner Lottje†.

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