



1. Is there any current information about the prevalence or otherwise of acid attacks in Cambodia?

A report published in May 2010 by the Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity (CASC) defines acid violence as “an attack against an individual in which [a corrosive substance] is employed as a weapon to cause severe burns”. The report explains that over the last few years, the number of acid attacks in Cambodia has been increasing, particularly in 2010, although documentation of the precise number of attacks is difficult as many cases are unreported due to the victim’s fear of reprisal.¹ A *BBC News* article dated 22 March 2010 similarly explains that acid attacks in Cambodia have increased in recent months, with the 11 acid attacks reported in January and February 2010 alone almost equalling the total number of attacks reported in 2009.²

The CASC report indicates that the prevalence of acid attacks in Cambodia can be attributed in part to the high availability, low cost and unregulated use of acid, which is not categorised as a weapon under Cambodian law. Statistics provided in the report indicate that the overwhelming majority of acid attacks committed between 1985 and 2009 occurred in Kampong Cham province (located in the south-east of Cambodia), in which 96 out of 236 survivors reside, followed by Phnom Penh in which 38 survivors of attacks are identified (the report identifies 236 survivors from 216 acid attacks, with the location of the attacks displayed according to the number of survivors).³

Although acid attacks are committed by both men and women, who are also in equal shares the victims of such attacks, women are more likely to be the perpetrators. Such attacks are often a result of personal and family disputes, and are sometimes motivated by jealousy or revenge for sexual infidelity. For example, where wives attack their husbands, their husband’s mistresses or second wives; and mistresses attack the wives of their lovers. As a result, female victims of acid attacks are often viewed in their communities as being at fault for unfaithfulness. Nevertheless, it is reported that “[o]ne-third of the people injured in acid attacks are not the intended victims, but rather innocent bystanders that are inadvertently splashed with acid”; and that although revenge for sexual infidelity is “[o]ne of the most prevalent reasons cited for attacks... in many cases motivations are unclear and perpetrators unidentified”. Statistics provided in the report indicate that out of 236 acid attack survivors identified during the period between 1985 and 2009, only 9 percent cite an extra-marital affair as the cause or motivation for the attack. However, a further 3

¹ Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity 2010, ‘Breaking the Silence: Addressing Acid Attacks in Cambodia’, Cambodia Human Rights Portal website, May, p. 3 [http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/\[2010-05-24\]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/[2010-05-24]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf) – Accessed 27 May 2010 - Attachment 1

² Delauney, G. 2010, ‘Cambodia’s acid attack victims appeal for justice’, *BBC News*, 22 March <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8576195.stm> – Accessed 27 May 2010 - Attachment 2

³ Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity 2010, ‘Breaking the Silence: Addressing Acid Attacks in Cambodia’, Cambodia Human Rights Portal website, May, pp. 5, 8, 45 [http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/\[2010-05-24\]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/[2010-05-24]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf) – Accessed 27 May 2010 - Attachment 1

percent attribute the attack to a family dispute; 28 percent cite hate/jealousy as a motivation and for 19 percent, the cause of the attack is unknown or unspecified. The remainder of the survivors cited an accident, a business or land/property dispute, robberies, or unintentional attacks (i.e. the perpetrator missed their intended target).⁴

Another comprehensive report on the prevalence of acid attacks in Cambodia was published by the Cambodian League for the Promotion of Human Rights (LICADHO) in 2003. LICADHO reported that “[a]t least 44 acid attacks were reported in Cambodia in a three year period up to November 2002, injuring 60 people and killing three others...The most common type of attack was a wife throwing acid on a suspected mistress or second wife”. It was reported that these attacks on second wives and mistresses occur in order “to take revenge and destroy the appearance of the victims so that the husbands will not stay with them”.⁵

2. What, if anything, do the authorities do to protect citizens from such attacks?

The Cambodian government is currently drafting a new law regarding the use and management of acid, under which perpetrators of acid violence could receive 30 year to life sentences if the attack results in the victim being permanently disabled or killed; and two to five year jail terms and a fine of up to 10 million riel (US\$2,500) if a victim sustains minor injuries from an acid attack. Regulations on the use of acid include requirements on importers and distributors to carry identification showing that they are at least 20 years old, hold a licence for any transaction involving acid and keep detailed records of acid purchases. Failure to comply could result in distributors receiving fines and/or a loss of their licence to sell the chemical. The law also makes provisions for improved medical assistance and social integration for acid attack survivors.^{6 7 8}

In addition, drafting committee deputy chairman Ouk Kimlek reportedly publicised the committee’s plans to establish “an acid foundation to generate money from all sources and NGOs to help provide skills and capital for [survivors of acid attacks]”.⁹ Although the committee responsible for drafting the law were due to meet at the end of May, they have not revealed a projected completion date.¹⁰

Human rights and victim support groups such as CASC are encouraged by the proposal, although stress the need for effective implementation and police enforcement once the law has been adopted, particularly given the high prevalence of impunity in Cambodia, and

⁴ Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity 2010, ‘Breaking the Silence: Addressing Acid Attacks in Cambodia’, Cambodia Human Rights Portal website, May, pp. 3-4, 43 [http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/\[2010-05-24\]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/[2010-05-24]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf) – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 1

⁵ Cambodian League for the Promotion of Human Rights (LICADHO) 2003, ‘Living in the Shadows: Acid attacks in Cambodia’, LICADHO Cambodia website, pp. 2, 7 <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/41acid%20report%20English.pdf> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 3

⁶ ‘CAMBODIA: Strict penalties planned for acid attacks’ 2010, IRIN News, 28 April <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88954> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 4

⁷ Samnang, P. 2010, ‘More for Victims in Acid Attack Law: Official’, VOA Khmer, 9 April <http://www1.voanews.com/khmer-english/news/cambodia/More-for-Victims-in-Acid-Attack-Law-Official-90391944.html> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 5

⁸ ‘Cambodia finally drafting laws to curb acid attacks’ 2010, News on Political Scandals website, source: Reuters Life! Online Report, 24 March <http://www.politicalscandalnews.com/article/Cambodia%20finally%20drafting%20laws%20to%20curb%20acid%20attacks/?k=j83s12y12h94s27k02> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 6

⁹ ‘CAMBODIA: Strict penalties planned for acid attacks’ 2010, IRIN News, 28 April <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88954> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 4

¹⁰ Kunthear, M. and Lewis, B. 2010, ‘Dispelling acid attack myths’, *The Phnom Penh Post*, 21 May <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2010052139229/National-news/dispelling-acid-attack-myths.html> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 7

commonality of illegal out-of-court settlements, for similar violent crimes such as rape and murder.¹¹ The May 2010 report published by CASC, as referred to in response to question one, echoes these concerns that out of court settlements and the culture of impunity in Cambodia relating to acid attacks, due to failures at all stages of the criminal justice process, ensure that perpetrators escape trial and punishment.¹² For example, the 2003 LICADHO report referred to in response to question one found that for the 44 acid attacks reported between 1999 and 2003, only 13 suspects were arrested, and only six went on trial.¹³ Acid attacks have also previously gone unpunished due to the widely held belief that they are “domestic rows”;¹⁴ and the public perception that acid violence is not a criminal offence and therefore it is at the discretion of the victim to seek justice. Evidence gathered by CASC shows that victims are unlikely to file criminal complaints due to distrust in law enforcement agencies, a lack of faith in the legal system’s ability to achieve justice, and a lack of adequate protection from the perpetrator.¹⁵

An article published in *The Phnom Penh Post* on 21 May 2010 indicates that programme manager for the CASC, Chhun Sophea, is hopeful that the low number of cases identified in the May 2010 report cited in response to question one as resulting from extra-marital affairs could assist in changing widely held perceptions in Cambodian society that acid attacks predominantly result from “love triangles”; a view which she believes “could be contributing to officials’ apparent reluctance to bring acid cases to court, with law enforcement officials reasoning that attacks resulting from private disputes should be settled privately unless victims file criminal complaints”.¹⁶

The current law regarding battery and unlawful killing does not expressly identify acid violence as a criminal offence, nor is it clear whether legislation regarding weapons includes acids. Although the Penal Code of Cambodia (2009) includes provisions which could be used for the strict sentencing of acid violence perpetrators, lack of specific identification of acid attacks, as well as the current community perceptions of such attacks, reduce the likelihood that these provisions will be applied to acid violence. In addition, cases of acid violence in which the perpetrators are tried in a court have resulted in inconsistent and disproportionate sentencing relative to the extent of the injuries sustained in the attacks.¹⁷

¹¹ ‘CAMBODIA: Strict penalties planned for acid attacks’ 2010, *IRIN News*, 28 April

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88954> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 4

¹² Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity 2010, ‘Breaking the Silence: Addressing Acid Attacks in Cambodia’, Cambodia Human Rights Portal website, May, pp. 16, 23 [http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/\[2010-05-24\]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/[2010-05-24]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf) – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 1

¹³ Samnang, P. 2010, ‘More for Victims in Acid Attack Law: Official’, *VOA Khmer*, 9 April <http://www1.voanews.com/khmer-english/news/cambodia/More-for-Victims-in-Acid-Attack-Law-Official-90391944.html> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 5

¹⁴ ‘Cambodia finally drafting laws to curb acid attacks’ 2010, News on Political Scandals website, source: Reuters Life! Online Report, 24 March <http://www.politicalscandalnews.com/article/Cambodia%20finally%20drafting%20laws%20to%20curb%20acid%20attacks/?k=j83s12y12h94s27k02> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 6

¹⁵ Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity 2010, ‘Breaking the Silence: Addressing Acid Attacks in Cambodia’, Cambodia Human Rights Portal website, May, pp. 16, 19 [http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/\[2010-05-24\]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/[2010-05-24]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf) – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 1

¹⁶ Kunthear, M. and Lewis, B. 2010, ‘Dispelling acid attack myths’, *The Phnom Penh Post*, 21 May <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2010052139229/National-news/dispelling-acid-attack-myths.html> – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 7

¹⁷ Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity 2010, ‘Breaking the Silence: Addressing Acid Attacks in Cambodia’, Cambodia Human Rights Portal website, May, p. 18 [http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/\[2010-05-24\]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/[2010-05-24]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf) – Accessed 27 May 2010 – Attachment 1

The CASC report was submitted to the Cambodian government committee responsible for drafting the new legislation concerning acid violence, making recommendations which include the adoption of “a multifaceted approach to combating acid attacks that touches on punishments for perpetrators, the regulation of acid sales, public awareness and victim assistance”; the inclusion of a provision which requires warning labels be clearly displayed on acid containers; severe punishments for perpetrators of acid attacks; government-endorsed efforts to reduce discrimination; damages and reparations for victims; and public education campaigns in first aid for acid burns.^{18 19}

Attachments

1. Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity 2010, ‘Breaking the Silence: Addressing Acid Attacks in Cambodia’, Cambodia Human Rights Portal website, May [http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/\[2010-05-24\]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](http://www.sithi.org/admin/upload/media/[2010-05-24]1230/Breaking%20the%20Silence%20--%20Addressing%20Acid%20Attacks%20in%20Cambodia.pdf) – Accessed 27 May 2010.
2. Delauney, G. 2010, ‘Cambodia’s acid attack victims appeal for justice’, *BBC News*, 22 March <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8576195.stm> – Accessed 27 May 2010.
3. Cambodian League for the Promotion of Human Rights (LICADHO) 2003, ‘Living in the Shadows: Acid attacks in Cambodia’, LICADHO Cambodia website <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/41acid%20report%20English.pdf> – Accessed 27 May 2010.
4. ‘CAMBODIA: Strict penalties planned for acid attacks’ 2010, *IRIN News*, 28 April <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88954> – Accessed 27 May 2010.
5. Samnang, P. 2010, ‘More for Victims in Acid Attack Law: Official’, *VOA Khmer*, 9 April <http://www1.voanews.com/khmer-english/news/cambodia/More-for-Victims-in-Acid-Attack-Law-Official-90391944.html> - Accessed 27 May 2010.
6. ‘Cambodia finally drafting laws to curb acid attacks’ 2010, News on Political Scandals website, source: Reuters Life! Online Report, 24 March <http://www.politicalscandalnews.com/article/Cambodia%20finally%20drafting%20laws%20to%20curb%20acid%20attacks/?k=j83s12y12h94s27k02> – Accessed 27 May 2010.
7. Kunthear, M. and Lewis, B. 2010, ‘Dispelling acid attack myths’, *The Phnom Penh Post*, 21 May <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2010052139229/National-news/dispelling-acid-attack-myths.html> - Accessed 27 May 2010.

¹⁸ Kunthear, M. and Lewis, B. 2010, ‘Dispelling acid attack myths’, *The Phnom Penh Post*, 21 May <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2010052139229/National-news/dispelling-acid-attack-myths.html> - Accessed 27 May 2010 — Attachment 7

¹⁹ Samnang, P. 2010, ‘More for Victims in Acid Attack Law: Official’, *VOA Khmer*, 9 April <http://www1.voanews.com/khmer-english/news/cambodia/More-for-Victims-in-Acid-Attack-Law-Official-90391944.html> - Accessed 27 May 2010 — Attachment 5