



Impact Note:

Investigation of Suspected Toxic Weapons at the Thai-Cambodia Border

Background of the Impact Assessment:

In mid-2025, **Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC)** received information that nearby villagers were worried about the suspected use of toxic chemical weapons by the Thai military forces. Fear was spreading quickly through nearby communities. There were reports emerging of unexplained illnesses, dead livestock, and strange chemical odors.

The border situation was volatile, access remained dangerous, and Cambodia had limited laboratory capacity. Given the concerns for health and environment, there was an urgent need for timely and credible documentation. In response, CHRAC coordinated a cohort of eight key civil society leaders in land and environmental justice - Community Legal Education Center (CLEC), NGO Forum on Cambodia, Village Support Organization (VSO), Community Translation Organization (CTO), Cambodian Humanitarian Forum (CHF), Ponlout Khmer, and Freed Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC). Together they coordinated a Rapid Assessment on the Impact of Toxic Weapons—an initiative that demonstrated corporation under extreme pressure.

Given the dire situation of funding following the withdrawal of USAID and SIDA, and the urgent nature of the mission posed challenges for all involved.

- **Financial Support:** With vital assistance from flexible funding through a **Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF) grant**, CHRAC was able to establish a core budget was assembled. This included direct support for organizations without dedicated resources and shared transportation costs across the assessment team, funding for legal support and a documentation team.
- **Technical Coordination:** A common research plan and field protocols were prepared, and the final report was coordinated to meet international standards.
- **Collective Credibility:** Building on previous joint activities and recognition by key government ministries, the coalition provided a degree of confidence and credibility that helped the team gain access to sensitive areas under difficult conditions.





Courage in the Field

Using longstanding relationships with local authorities and communities, the group secured access to conflict-affected areas where others feared to go. The field teams reached villages in Preah Vihear and Oddar Meanchey provinces, collecting testimony and environmental evidence despite continuing insecurity. Villagers, including indigenous residents, shared their experiences out of trust in the collective effort and the respectful way the work was carried out.

This collaborative approach also gave partner organizations a sense of confidence and mutual support.



Interview gathered in the Chaom Ksvan district, the most affecting area, meeting with the senior district authority including the Vice District Governor and District Environment Chief, prior to the formal interview



Interview a soldier of the clash at the Oddarmeanchey provincial hospital, 7 September 2025

A Surprising—and Alarming—Primary Finding

The assessment’s most serious findings was deeply concerning: **residents of 121 villages along the Dongrek mountain range** appeared to be experiencing severe harm consistent with exposure to toxic agents. In light of this, the coalition called for urgent **national and international short-term and sustained intervention to prevent further impact on communities and the environment.**

Concrete Results

- **International Acknowledgement:** The **UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** commended the coalition’s professionalism and noted that the findings aligned with its own observations, affirming the validity and relevance of the joint statement.
- **Community engagement:** Grassroots and indigenous groups mobilized, strengthening the call for accountability.
- **Media coverage:**
- **Ongoing media coverage:** From 5–20 September 2025, local and international media continued reporting on the situation, with additional interviews from affected





communities helping to keep it in the public eyes and reinforcing the assessment's findings.

Enduring Significance

This rapid assessment not only exposed an urgent human-rights and environmental crisis but also proved the power of coordinated civil-society action. Through shared effort, combining financial support, technical input, and mutual protection, the investigation was carried out under difficult circumstances.

The findings now inform national and international stakeholders considering humanitarian relief, environmental remediation, and potential legal action. **Most importantly, communities along the border know their voices have been heard. This based a foundation that we can further help the affected community to claim their rights and the relevant stakeholders to protect the environment over there.**



The interview team, NGO Forum on Cambodia staff, conducting a focus group discussion with the IDPs, the victims of the fighting in Chaom Ksan district, at Travkeat Temple, IDP Camp, 5 September 2025



Interviewed a victim of the Chorkchey Village, the confronting area between Cambodian citizens and Thai armed soldiers.

With support from the Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF), careful coordination, and strong commitment, the coalition was able to turn a moment of fear into a meaningful step for human rights advocacy, showing that even under threat, collective action can make a difference.

Despite security concerns raised by some members, the team was encouraged and supported to complete the mission, ensuring the assessment met its objectives as fully as possible.



Some of the interview team members: FTUWKC, NGOF on Cambodia & CHRAC, taking a photo with the children of the victim families, IDPs, staying at Travkeat IDP Camp, Preah Vihear province, in a fearless atmosphere.

