

# Tales of 'blood-stained' sugar

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**T**HE EUROPEAN Union should immediately remove trade preferences it gives to Cambodian sugar companies accused of human-rights violations including land grabs, representatives of the affected communities told a press conference in Phnom Penh yesterday.

Community representatives from Koh Kong, Kampong Speu and Oddar Meanchey provinces said exemptions from EU import duties or quotas granted under the Everything But Arms principle were rewarding politicians and foreign businessmen exploiting the poor.

Their calls come after the *Post* reported on June 19 fresh exploitation allegations against ruling CPP Senator Ly Yong Phat's Phnom Penh Sugar Company by workers that fled one of the firm's complexes in Kampong Speu province.

Phal Vannak, representative of about 2,000 families in Kampong Speu province's Omlaing community in dispute with sugar companies owned by Ly Yong Phat and his wife, said they had taken their campaign to the web.

"What is created in this website is based on the accurate research, so please, EU, boycott the sugar product stained with residents' blood," he said.

He added that contrary to the



A man harvests sugar cane on a farm in Cambodia last year. HENG CHIVOAN

claims of Phnom Penh Sugar Co and Kampong Speu Sugar Co, which hold concessions for a sugar plantation in Omlaing commune, no employment had been created for local people.

The group also called for consumers in Europe to boycott products from Lyle and Tate Sugars, a London-based firm they say signed a five-year contract in 2010 to source from a Khon Kaen Sugar Industry Public Company Limited [KSL] plantation in Koh Kong.

Ly Yong Phat was originally a 20 per cent shareholder in the 20,000-hectare sugar plantation in Sre Ambel district

with Taiwanese firm Ve Wong, though Khon Kaen Sugar's 2011 annual report suggests they bought out the CPP tycoon in 2010 to take a controlling 70 per cent share.

Eang Vuthy, a representative of NGO Equitable Cambodia, said the calls to boycott Lyle and Tate Sugars would not stop until some 200 families that had lost land since 2006 received remedial settlement.

"They're still responsible, and they still have this business to produce golden syrup, and they still have the contracts with KSL signed in 2010," he said.

Lyle and Tate Sugars did re-

spond to inquires yesterday.

EU ambassador to Cambodia, Jean-François Cautain, said disputes related to economic land concessions had been recently raised with the government.

"The EU raised again concerns about alleged violations for human [land] rights and their potential connection with the Everything But Arms initiative," he said by email.

Phnom Penh Sugar Co representative Chheang Kimsun said the Omlaing dispute had been solved two years ago and the campaign against the industry would hurt development. ■