

CHEYENNE APARTMENTS

Nov 11/89

Translator a champion to outraged Asians

Lam Vong isn't sure if filing a formal complaint against Cheyenne Avenue apartment building landlord Elijah Elieff "is going to help . . . but it's something."



A complaint will be filed with a race relations group against landlord Elijah Elieff over racial slurs about his tenants.

By Greg Van Moorsel
The London Free Press

Asian immigrants outraged by the racial slurs of their London landlord have found a champion in a young Cambodian translator.

Lam Vong confirmed Friday he will file a formal complaint Monday against Elijah Elieff with a community race relations group, clearing the way for a possible investigation by the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Vong said remarks Elieff made in an interview with *The London Free Press*, likening his tenants to "pigs" from a "jungle," were too hurtful to be ignored by Vong and fellow countrymen in the Cheyenne Avenue apartment buildings.

"The racial comment is not fair," said Vong, a Cambodian representative at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre. "I'm not 100-per cent sure this is going to help . . . but it's something."

BLAMED IMMIGRANTS: Earlier this week, Elieff told *The Free Press* his tenants — mainly Cambodian and Vietnamese immigrants — are largely to blame for conditions at his two 20-unit apart-

ment blocks at 95 and 105 Cheyenne Ave.

"They're like little pigs," he said in a story Wednesday. "They think they're still living in the jungle."

The remark came a day after Elieff's company was fined \$6,000 in court, convicted for the second time in less than a year of not completing building repairs ordered by the city in May, 1987.

Elieff, who has said his Cambodian tenants regard cockroaches as "pets," refused comment Friday. He accused a reporter, who toured his three-storey walkups, of bias against him. "I brought you over to show you what's happening to me, and you take it against me," he said, hanging up the phone.

PROTEST TO ALLIANCE: Vong said he will be accompanied by Asian immigrants from Elieff's property when he lodges his protest on their behalf with the London Urban Alliance on Race Relations.

An alliance representative said a copy of the complaint will be sent to London's race relations advisory committee — city council's racism watchdog — with a "suggestion" the human rights commission be asked to take action.

"What we'll be saying is, 'here's the ammunition you need and here's what you need to do,'" Lorna Martin said. She was angry the commission hasn't used its power to launch an investigation without being asked.

But Walter Burns, the commission's regional manager, said "complaint-driven" rules make it difficult to respond to allegations of discrimination without being asked by persons or groups directly affected.

ISSUE COMPLICATED: The fact Elieff's remarks were made to a newspaper — and not to one of his Asian tenants — complicates the issue, Burns said. He noted the agency lacks vital "first-hand" information to justify launching a probe on its own.

Gretta Grant, chairman of the city's advisory committee, has said the committee will support tenants trying to counter Elieff's remarks but they must file any complaint with the commission themselves.

Complaints upheld by the commission can lead to negotiated settlements between injured parties and respondents, or hearings before a board able to impose penalties and award compensation.

CAMBODIAN IMMIGRANTS IN LONDON

WHO THEY ARE: Former residents of Cambodia, a strife-torn country in Southeast Asia bordered by Thailand and Laos on the north and Vietnam on the east and south.

HOW MANY: The 1986 federal census listed 245 persons of Cambodian origin in London but the number is now more than 1,000, a community spokesman said — less than one per cent of London's total population.

WHERE THEY LIVE: Concentrated mainly in low-cost rental housing in the northeast end, especially along Cheyenne Avenue and Huron Street, close to the Cuddy Food Products plant where many work.

HOW THEY GET HERE: Many arrived from refugee camps just inside the border between Cambodia and Thailand, sponsored by the Canadian government, church groups or private sponsors, said Lam Vong, a spokesman for London's Cambodian community. Others come from elsewhere in Canada, mainly Windsor and Toronto, drawn by family ties or job opportunities.

WHAT THEY LEFT BEHIND: A country torn by 20 years of war and a brutal revolution led by Communist Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot. He seized power in 1975 and was responsible for the infamous killing fields, the slaughter of more than a million Cambodians between 1975 and the end of 1978 when invading Vietnamese troops toppled the regime. The last occupying Vietnamese forces left in September, raising fears the Khmer Rouge will return to power.