

Release Imprisoned Journalists and End Media Crackdown

18 May, 2020 – We, the undersigned civil society groups, urgently call on the government to drop all charges against imprisoned journalists Sok Oudom and Sovann Rithy and to halt all harassment of other journalists in Cambodia facing prosecution for their critical reporting. We also urge the government to immediately restore the broadcasting licenses of all media outlets revoked before and during this latest assault on press freedom.

Police arrested local radio station owner Sok Oudom in Kampong Chhnang province on Wednesday on charges of “incitement to commit a felony”. Oudom regularly reported on longstanding land disputes between local farming communities and powerful district officials. The day before Oudom’s arrest, the Ministry of Information revoked the media license of his Rithysen Radio Station and its website, despite the fact that Oudom had yet to be charged with any crime. He remains in pre-trial detention.

The incarceration of Sok Oudom and the abrupt silencing of his media outlet follows the arrest of popular journalist Sovann Rithy in early April for accurately quoting Prime Minister Hun Sen’s own words from a public speech on the government’s response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing the nation, the Prime Minister publicly and repeatedly stated that the government did not have enough money to support informal workers such as motorcycle taxi drivers through the COVID-19 economic crisis, and advised bankrupt taxi drivers to sell their vehicles in order to survive.

When Rithy reposted the Prime Minister’s remarks on his personal Facebook page, he was arrested that night and charged two days later – again with of “incitement to commit a felony”. Rithy’s news outlet TV FB stripped of its broadcasting license the day after his arrest. Rithy remains in pre-trial detention, having missed the birth of his child while in prison. Both Oudom and Rithy face up to two years in prison if convicted.

By arresting and charging a journalist for publicly quoting the Prime Minister’s own words about the pandemic, the government is sending a clear message that any discussion of the government’s response to the outbreak can and will be punished by imprisonment – a violation of the rights of all Cambodians.

Since the start of the year, at least a dozen journalists have been summoned and questioned by police and judicial authorities as a result of their reporting. The ongoing arrest, detention and judicial harassment of journalists for critical reporting is a serious violation of the Cambodian people’s right to information.

We strongly object to the arbitrary arrest and persecution of any journalist in Cambodia targeted over their reporting. Faced with an unprecedented public health crisis, it is now more important than ever that the government guarantees the right to a free press and freedom of expression. Without journalists who are free to honestly and accurately report on the reality of life in Cambodia during the global COVID-19 pandemic, the public are denied the right to make informed decisions to keep themselves and their families safe.

We call on the government to drop all charges against these journalists and to immediately halt this latest crackdown on press freedom in Cambodia.

Signed,

1. 92 Community (Phnom Penh)
2. 185K Tita Chambak Thom Community (Kampong Chnang)
3. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
4. 297 Land Community (Koh Kong)
5. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
6. Angdoug Thmor Community (Preah Sihanouk)
7. Angdoug Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
8. Areng Indigenous Community (Koh Kong)
9. Bat Khteah Community (Preah Sihanouk)
10. Boeng Chhuk Community (Phnom Penh)
11. Boeung Kak Community (Kampong Chhnang)
12. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
13. Borei Keila Community (Phnom Penh)
14. Bos Sa Am Community (Battambang)
15. Buddhism for Peace Organization (BPO)
16. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)
17. Building Community Voice (BCV)
18. CamASEAN Youth's Future (CamASEAN)
19. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
20. Cambodia Indigineous Youth Association (CIYA) (Ratanakiri)
21. Cambodia Youth and Monk Network (CYMN)
22. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
23. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
24. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
25. Cambodian Domestic Workers Network (CDWN)
26. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
27. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
28. Cambodian Informal Economy Workers Association (CIWA)
29. Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA)
30. Cambodian Journalists Alliance (CamboJA)
31. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
32. Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers Federation (CTSWF)
33. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
34. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)

35. Samaki Chek Meas Land Community (Svay Rieng)
36. Chikor Kraom Community (Koh Kong)
37. Chikor Leu Community (Koh Kong)
38. Choeung Prey Community (Kampong Cham)
39. Chorm Kravean Community (Tboung Khmum)
40. Chray Indigenous Community (Ratanakiri)
41. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)
42. Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C. CAWDU)
43. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC)
44. Collective Union of Movement of Workers (CUMW)
45. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
46. Community for Nature Protection (Pursat)
47. Da Commune Community (Tboung Khmum)
48. Dok Por Community (Kampong Speu)
49. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
50. Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
51. Forestry and Natural Resource Community (Pursat)
52. Free Trade Union of Workers of Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
53. Horng Samnom Community (Kampong Speu)
54. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
55. Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ)
56. Indradevi Association (IDA)
57. Kbal Tahean Forestry Community (Pursat)
58. Kean Teuk Land Community (Koh Kong)
59. Khmer Thavrak
60. Khmum Srakar Thlok Risey Community (Kampong Thom)
61. Klaing Teuk 78 Community (Siem Reap)
62. Koh Sdech Land Community (Koh Kong)
63. Koh Sralao Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
64. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
65. Land Community (Pailin)
66. Lor Peang Land Community (Kampong Chhnang)
67. Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC)
68. Network for Prey Lang Protection in Mean Rith Commune (Kampong Thom)
69. Not 1 More (N1M)
70. Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC)
71. Orm Laing Community (Kampong Spue)
72. Ou Ampil Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
73. Ou Chheu Teal Community (Preah Sihanouk)
74. Ou Tracheak Chet Community (Preah Sihanouk)
75. Ou Vor Preng Community (Battambang)
76. Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)
77. Peam Reus Community (Kampong Speu)

78. Phnom Bat Community (Phnom Penh)
79. Phnom Thnort Community (Kampot)
80. Phsar Kandal Village Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
81. Phnom Kram Community (Siem Reap)
82. Phnom Sleuk Community (Battambang)
83. Phnom Torteong Community (Kampot)
84. Phum 22 Community (Phnom Penh)
85. Phum Dei Chhnang Community (Kampong Speu)
86. Phum Khva Community (Phnom Penh)
87. Phum Samut Kram Community (Ratanakiri)
88. Phum Ou Svay Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
89. Phum Prasat Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
90. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
91. Ponlok Khmer (PKH)
92. Prek Ksach Land Community (Koh Kong)
93. Prek Takung Community (Phnom Penh)
94. Prek Tanou Community (Phnom Penh)
95. Prek Trae Community (Preah Sihanouk)
96. Prey Chher Pich Sangva Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
97. Prey Lang Community (Kampong Thom)
98. Prey Cheou Ou Domdek Community (Kampong Thom)
99. Prey Norin Community (Battambang)
100. Prey Peay Land Community (Kampot)
101. Railway Community (Phnom Penh)
102. Raksmeay Samaki Community (Kampong Speu)
103. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
104. Rum Cheik Land Community (Siem Reap)
105. Russey Sras Community (PP)
106. Samaki 4 Community (Phnom Penh)
107. Samaki Rung Roeung Community (Phnom Penh)
108. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
109. Sambok Chab Community (Phnom Penh)
110. Sdey Krom Fishery Community (Battambang)
111. Skun Land Community (Siem Reap)
112. Somros Koh Sdech Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
113. SOS International Airport Community (Phnom Penh)
114. Spean Chhes Community (Preah Sihanouk)
115. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
116. Sre Prang Community (Tbong Khmum)
117. Steung Bort village Land community (Banteay Meanchey)
118. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
119. Steung Meanchey Community (Phnom Penh)
120. Strey Klaing Sang Community (Phnom Penh)

121. Tani Land Community (Siem Reap)
122. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
123. Ta Pen Community (Siem Reap)
124. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
125. Thnong Land Community (Koh Kong)
126. Trapaing Chor Community (Kampong Speu)
127. Trapaing Krasaing Land Community (Siem Reap)
128. Thmor Da Community (Pursat)
129. Thmor Thom Community (Preah Sihanouk)
130. Toul Rada Community (Phnom Penh)
131. Toul Sangke A Community (PP)
132. Tunlong Community (Tboung Khmum)