

## **More reforms needed beyond conditional releases of activists**

24 November 2021

We the undersigned civil society groups welcome the release of more than 27 wrongfully imprisoned and unjustly convicted activists from prison in recent days and celebrate the fact that they are reunited with their families. However, many of these activists continue to face criminal charges or remain under judicial supervision with onerous conditions as a result of exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. No action has been taken to reform the laws and systems that led to their persecution and which have destroyed the space for activism and political participation in Cambodia.

Considering that many of the activists have been released on bail or remain subject to probation for several years following a suspended sentence, they are no longer able to undertake their work to defend human rights or the environment, speak out against injustices, or participate in political life without fear of arrest. Such releases also do not remedy the fact that the activists were wrongfully convicted and that many were detained for over one year in overcrowded prisons that one activist described as “hell”.

In addition, more than 60 other people, including journalists, political activists, social media users, and more than a dozen land rights activists, remain in prison over their work and activism. Charges of incitement and plotting are still regularly levelled against anyone who dares to speak out or criticise the government, and the normalisation of this repression and increasing self-censorship is a growing threat.

These releases are not substitutes for fundamental reforms to Cambodia’s laws and institutions. Cambodians face ongoing restrictions to the right to participate freely in politics and choose their leaders. The Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) remains dissolved; other parties are denied the right to be formed; and all parties are subject to the decisions of the partial judiciary and the Ministry of Interior, which hold ultimate decision power over whether they can compete in upcoming elections.

Human rights in the country remain under constant threat by a politicised judiciary and repressive laws and decrees. Problematic legislative instruments include recent amendments to the Constitution, Law on Political Parties and election laws, as well as the Trade Union Law, the law governing NGOs and associations, the Covid-19 law, the Law on Telecommunications, and the establishment of a new National Internet Gateway. These amendments and laws must be repealed to restore Cambodia’s civic and political space.

While we celebrate these activists’ release, we also are reminded that their conditional release does not fix the structural injustices that they spoke out against prior to their arrest and that they and others remain under threat. We call on the government to take structural steps to restore democracy and civic space in the country, and to restore the fundamental rights of all Cambodians prior to the next elections. We further call on the government to release all political prisoners and activists persecuted for exercising their

fundamental rights; to overturn existing wrongful convictions; and to drop all charges, probationary requirements and judicial supervision for these released activists.

**Joined by:**

1. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
2. Am Leang Community (Kampong Speu)
3. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
4. Activities for Environment Community (AEC)
5. Areng Indigenous Community
6. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
7. Building Community Voices (BCV)
8. Buddhism for Peace Organization (BPO)
9. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
10. Cambodian Labor Confederation (CLC)
11. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
12. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
13. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
14. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC)
15. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
16. Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA)
17. Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID)
18. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
19. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
20. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
21. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
22. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
23. Chi Kha Leu Land Community (Koh Kong)
24. Charay Indigenous Community (Ratanakiri)
25. Choam Kravien Community (Tboung Khmum)
26. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)
27. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC)
28. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
29. Community Peace-Building Network (CPN)
30. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
31. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
32. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
33. Gender and Development Cambodia (GADC)

34. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
35. Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ)
36. Khmer Kampuchea Krom For Human Rights and Development Association (KKKHRDA)
37. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
38. Kleang Toek 78 Community (Siemreap)
39. Koh Sralao Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
40. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
41. Land Community (Pailin)
42. Lor Peang Land Community (Kampong Chhnang)
43. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
44. Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)
45. People Center for Development and Peace (PDP-Center)
46. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
47. Ponlok Khmer (PKH)
48. Prek Ksach Land Community (Koh Kong)
49. Prey Peay Fishery Community (Kampot)
50. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
51. Prey Lang Community (Kampong Thom)
52. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
53. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
54. Samaki Chek Meas Community (Svay Rieng)
55. Samaki Romeas Haek Community (Svay Rieng)
56. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
57. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
58. Sre Prang Community (Tboung Khmum)
59. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
60. Ta Ni Land Community (Siemreap)
61. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
62. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
63. Tonlung Community (Tboung Khmum)
64. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)
65. Transparency International Cambodia (TIC)
66. Youth Resources Development Program (YRDP)