PRESS RELEASE

The Cambodia Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”): International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalist
Phnom Penh, 1 November 2020

On International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) urges the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) to unconditionally release all journalists and human rights defenders who have been arrested or prosecuted for exercising their fundamental right to the freedom of expression. CCHR further calls for the RGC to take immediate and concrete action to ensure the effective, independent, and transparent investigation of all crimes against journalists and human rights defenders in the Kingdom of Cambodia (“Cambodia”).

Since 1994, at least 13 journalists have been murdered for undertaking their work: Thou Char Mongkol, Nun Chan, Chan Dara, Thun Bun Ly, Chet Duong Daravuth, Pich Em, Dok Sokhan, Ou Saroeun, Chour Chetharith, Khim Sambo, Hang Serei Oudom, Suon Chan, and Taing Try. At the time of their deaths, 12 of the victims were engaged in activities that posed a direct threat to powerful individuals within the Cambodian elite. Five worked for media outlets critical of the ruling party, while seven were investigating and reporting on allegations of corruption by high-level individuals in the RGC and military.

Impunity for extrajudicial crimes in Cambodia is not merely limited to attacks against journalists. The lack of effective, independent, and transparent investigations and lack of proper criminal proceedings into the deaths of environmental activist Chut Wutty, trade unionists Chea Vichea and Ros Sovannareth, and political analyst Kem Ley further illustrate the pervasive culture of impunity that prevails in Cambodia. The cases outlined above represent a fraction of the thousands of instances of harassment or abuse of journalists, human rights defenders, political opposition members, trade unionists, and activists, that have gone unaddressed by the institutions tasked with protecting fundamental rights and freedoms in Cambodia.

CCHR condemns the rampant impunity that harms Cambodian people and society, and demands justice for all those whose rights have been cast aside. We call upon the RGC to prosecute perpetrators of crimes committed against journalists and human rights defenders by undertaking independent, transparent, and expeditious investigations in accordance with international human rights standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and the United Nations Economic and Social Council’s updated set of principles for the protection and promotion of human rights through action to combat impunity.

Over the past four years there have been no recorded incidents of extrajudicial killings of journalists or human rights defenders, however, in 2020 there has been one journalist death
with some speculated concern that the death was extrajudicial and the case is no further investigation since the authority already concluded the case as the traffic accident. Recently, media outlets perceived as critical of the RGC have been forced to close, and journalists are frequently targeted through violent attacks or judicial harassment; therefore, freedom of information is under threat in Cambodia.

CCHR would like to provide a list of our online campaign activities to raise awareness of the important role journalists play in a democratic society. CCHR hopes to publicize the impunity afforded to perpetrators for crimes committed against journalists and human rights defenders in Cambodia and strengthen the rule of law, respect for human rights, and call for an end to impunity for crimes against journalists. Please join CCHR for the following events this month:

On 2 November CCHR will release an updated map illustrating the location of murdered journalists, and you can find this on our website or social media pages (Please click the link here: https://bit.ly/34y3QsE). On the same day, CCHR will release a series of photos with our bespoke no impunity photo frame showcasing our key messages of combatting impunity. You can also add this photo frame to your Facebook profile photo.

At 11am on the 3 November you can join CCHR for our Radio Talk Show on the topic of “International Day to End impunity for Crimes Against Journalist” with our two guest speakers, Ms. Chak Sopheap, CCHR’s Executive Director and Ms. Kann Vicheika, a freelance journalist. You can tune in through our livestream on Facebook or through radio FM 105.5 MH in Phnom Penh, FM 88 in Preah Sihanouk, FM 88 Siem Reap, FM88 in Battambang and FM 100.75 MHz in Kampot.

On 4 and 5 of November look out for the release of two CCHR videos highlighting the roles of journalists in bringing information to the public as well as the emotional, physical, and legal challenges they face while fulfilling their duties. These videos will be shared on our website and social media pages.

On 6 November you can watch CCHR’s video highlighting the profiles of 13 journalists who were murdered in Cambodia and for whom justice has not been achieved. Finally, on 7 November, you can tune in to CCHR’s radio drama “Neak Bontor Ven” (meaning successor) explaining the story of a family whose lives have been affected by impunity for a crime against a journalist.

For more information, please contact CCHR’s Promoting and Protecting Freedom of Expression and Independent Media Project Coordinator, Mr. Houn Phorn, at phorn@cchrcambodia.org or +855 (0) 70 757 884.

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Notes to the Editor:

Founded in November 2002, CCHR is a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights – primarily civil and political rights - in Cambodia.

CCHR is a member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression, and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. CCHR is also a member of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) SOS-Torture Network and OECD Watch.

The Cambodian Human Rights Portal www.sithi.org is the 2011 winner of the Information Society Innovation Fund Award in the category of Rights and Freedoms and the 2013 winner of the Communication for Social Change Award awarded by the Centre for Communication and Social Change at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.