

JOINT STATEMENT: Journalists must be free from threats to work in an indispensable and effective partnership as requested by the Government

13 May 2021 – On behalf of the media organizations and associations, non-government organizations and media networks listed below, we once again urge the head of government to take effective action and advise officials and local authorities to end all acts of intimidation, insults and restrictions against journalists performing their duties in an ethical and professional way.

In the message to journalists on World Press Freedom Day on May 3, Prime Minister Hun Sen emphasized that the media sector is increasingly important in serving the public interest by providing a link between government and the people for effectively sharing information in both directions, showing that the media is an indispensable partner of the government. Despite the assertion of the head of government, lower-level officials appear to be disobeying and undermining the effectiveness of this government-media partnership.

On May 11, 2021, VOD reporter Khuth Sokun was confronted by Pursat provincial authorities and banned from taking photographs while covering a protest in Kampong Chhang province, where citizens blocked National Road 5 to demand that authorities resolve their land dispute in Ansa Chambok commune, Krakor district, Pursat province. Mr. Khuth Sokun made an audio recording and took written notes as Pursat province Deputy Governor Mr. Cheng Lai told the protesters that Kampong Chhnang residents who own land in Pursat province can no longer enjoy that land. Shortly after, Sokun was summoned by police, who confiscated his recorder and notebook.

“The police called me and confiscated my book and recorder and deleted my recording, and he tried to stop us from taking pictures.” he said, adding that authorities took this action even after he had identified himself as an accredited reporter. The authorities returned the recorder and book to him after the meeting between Deputy Governor Cheng Lai and the protesters was over.

A similar incident occurred with another journalist, Keo Ratana, publisher of TN Hotnews, on the morning of May 11, 2021, while he was covering a land dispute in Village 7, Sangkat Ksam, Kompong Chhnang city, Kampong Chhnang province, where 37 families protested against a Kampong Chhnang Provincial court ruling in favor of Mr. Ly Pheng, allowing him to take ownership of more than five hectares and clear 8,178 square meters of land claimed by the protesters.

Mr. Keo Ratana said that while he was covering the land dispute, he was threatened and harassed by a person named Lon Leng, who is a bodyguard for the parties who received the verdict.

We consider the insults and harassment of journalists, as described above, a serious threat to journalistic rights and freedoms.

Mr. Nop Vy, executive director of CamboJA said: “These activities threaten, interfere with and violate the freedom and important role of journalists and undermine the will of the head of the government to position journalists as an indispensable partner of the government.”

Once again, we call on the Royal Government to act against officials who intimidate and disrupt the work of journalists, to ensure the effectiveness of comprehensive access to information and promotion of citizens’ access to information.

At the same time, we would like to appeal to all journalists to respect the ethics and professionalism of the profession, especially some online journalists who continue to engage in inappropriate activities such as using journalists’ cards issued by the Ministry of Information to intimidate and extort money in exchange for publishing or not publishing news.

For more details please contact:

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Signed,

1. Alliance for Conflict Transformation Organization (ACT)
2. Building Community Voices (BCV)
3. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
4. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
5. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
6. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
7. Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP)