

Licensed Media Publisher Threatens to Kill Cambodia Daily Khmer Journalist on Facebook



A group of men view the Cambodia Daily Khmer website on their smart phone in a Phnom Penh coffee shop on June 23, 2023. (CamboJA/ Pring Samrang)

Updated: Licensed media publisher and popular social media commentator Pheng Vannak has repeatedly threatened to kill Cambodia Daily Khmer journalist Taing Sarada via Facebook.

“Do not come into Cambodian territory, if you dare to enter Cambodian territory, I will cut off your head with an ax,” Vannak

said in an audio message sent via Facebook to Sarada on June 19. CamboJA obtained the audio messages.

“If you [Sarada] were in Cambodia, I would slash your head with an ax and walk into prison, national traitor, you are so cheap” Vannak continued. He has also made misogynistic comments about Sarada’s wife.

Vannak issued similar threats on a Facebook Live post broadcast June 22 from his [public page](#), which is followed by more than 328,000 people. His [Pheng Vannak News Facebook](#) page also has more than 689,000 followers.

Vannak said in his public Facebook post that he was willing to kill Sarada and his family to maintain peace in Cambodia.

“Tang Sarada, you must first ask yourself, why Pheng Vannak threatens to cut your head with an ax,” Vannak said on Facebook Live. “This is nothing serious, you dare to threaten to overthrow the whole nation, do you think it is right?”

“As a citizen, living in peace there is nothing to be afraid of beating the heads of four or 10 people in order to maintain peace, I am willing to be illegal as long as my people are safe,” he said.

The link to the video was removed after CamboJA contacted Vannak but portions of the video have since [circulated on social media](#). Vannak did not respond to requests for comment.

On Tuesday, Meta, Facebook's parent company, told CamboJA: "We have removed the content for violating our policies against violence and incitement."

"This is a desperate threat to my life," Sarada said. "I fear for my life and the life of those close to me due to my work as a journalist."

Sarada has worked for Voice of Democracy, Radio Free Asia and currently hosts a talk radio show for the Cambodia Daily Khmer. He broadcasts a regular Khmer language discussion program, "Idea Talk," featuring civil society, human rights activists and opposition politicians.

Sarada lives in the US capitol of the District of Columbia, where he has resided since 2008.

Sarada said he was concerned that Vannak could enforce the threat through inciting or directing sympathetic members of the Cambodian diaspora community.

The day after Vannak issued a private death threat, a stranger knocked on the door of Sarada's home, scaring his family, he said. A black car remained outside his house for several hours, he added.

Ruling CPP spokesperson Sok Eysan said the CPP is not involved in death threats against Sarada.

"I think it is not involved with the party [CPP], it is anger between person and person, and let them settle the problem by the law," said

Eysan, who suggested Sarada file a complaint with relevant authorities in Cambodia.

In mid-February, [forty NGOs urged](#) the Royal Government to take legal action Vannak's media license after he used his Facebook page to make [misogynistic and abusive comments](#) about a female journalist working for Voice of Democracy.

Sarada urged Cambodian authorities to take action against Vannak for his public and private threats of violence.

Vannak [formerly held the rank of lieutenant colonel](#) with the Ministry of National Defense but was removed from his position in 2019 and served several months in prison for defamatory comments.

Information Ministry spokesperson Meas Sophorn said that Vannak's media license was renewed on May 5. Previously, the Information Ministry had [revoked his license](#) on March 18, 2021 after he insulted a monk.

“In the case of journalists who have insulted or threatened, [the Information Ministry] has to look at the way they have been broadcasted,” he said.

“If journalists who have published in the media were officially registered with the Ministry of Information, it is one thing,” Sophorn said. “And if journalists would use means that are not officially registered with the Ministry of Information, it is another thing.

“You have to look at the case whether the person he commented on, what way they have used it?” Sophorn added. “Does he use the media outlet that he has officially registered with the ministry?”

Sophorn said that victims have the right to protect themselves from threats through Cambodian law.

Cambodian Center for Independent Media director Ith Sothoeuth said that in professional journalism there should be no use of abusive or threatening words.

“Regarding the journalism profession, I encourage professional settlement or use of our existing laws,” he said.

Cambodian Center for Human Rights executive director Chak Sopheap said that all citizens should be protected by the authorities in case of death threats, even if they live abroad because the victims are also Cambodians.

”Even though they do not live in Cambodia, as a Cambodian citizen, the authorities should also provide protection for them,” she said.

Phnom Penh Police spokesperson San Sok Seyha could not be reached for comment.

Additional reporting by Sovann Sreypich and Khuon Narim.