

Joint Statement

Enough is Enough: Stop Persecuting LRSU Unionists

Phnom Penh, 6 May 2024

We, the undersigned civil society groups, unions and confederations, are dismayed by the Supreme Court's unjust decision last week to uphold convictions against current and former members of the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees of NagaWorld (LRSU). Authorities and courts have repeatedly failed to provide justice to LRSU activists. They must release union president Chhim Sithar from prison immediately and restore the freedoms of all defendants in this case.

On the morning of 3 May, the Supreme Court upheld convictions against eight current and former LRSU members, who were previously sentenced by the Phnom Penh Capital Court to prison sentences ranging from one to two years. Of the eight defendants, LRSU President Chhim Sithar is in prison serving a two-year sentence, and five other defendants are at risk of being immediately imprisoned. The five defendants — Chhim Sokhorn, Hay Sopheap, Kleang Soben, Sun Srey Pich and Touch Sereymeas — were sentenced by the Phnom Penh Capital Court to 18 months in prison.

Apart from the judicial harassment, Phnom Penh authorities and security personnel have tried every tactic to break the LRSU strike, including the use of physical violence and sexual harassment. The government also routinely detained workers and arbitrarily held them at facilities under the guise of enforcing COVID-19 law provisions. These actions underline the government's willingness to harass, intimidate and persecute peaceful strikers rather than work with unions and confederations in good faith to improve the lives of Cambodia's workers.

In May 2023, the Phnom Penh Capital Court convicted nine unionists on incitement charges linked to the union's peaceful and non-violent strike against mass layoffs at NagaWorld casino. Eight of the defendants appealed the verdict, and the Phnom Penh Appeal Court upheld the verdict in October 2023.

The nine defendants were arrested in late 2021 and early 2022, and sent to pretrial detention before being released in March 2022. Sithar was rearrested in November 2022 after returning from a labour conference in Australia. At the time, authorities alleged that Sithar had violated the conditions of her bail by leaving the country, despite her never being informed of the conditions and immigration officers allowing her to depart for Australia. Sithar is being held at the Correctional Center 2 in Phnom Penh, which is a notoriously overcrowded prison and lacking in basic amenities.

We demand that the government unconditionally release Sithar and allow the other defendants to return to their lives without fear of imprisonment or persecution. This is the only remaining way to rectify the baseless convictions and persecution against union members advocating for better workers' rights. The government must respect the fundamental rights of all workers and stop characterising peaceful union activity as criminal in nature.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
2. AmLeang Community (Kampong Speu)
3. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
4. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)

5. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
6. Cambodian Cross Sector Confederation (CCC)
7. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
8. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
9. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
10. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
11. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
12. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
13. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
14. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
15. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
16. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
17. Federation of free trade union of workers of the kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
18. Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUFU)
19. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
20. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
21. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
22. Khmer Student Intelligent League Association (KSILA)
23. Klahaan
24. Kouy Indigenous Community in Ngan commune (Kampong Thom)
25. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
26. Kouy Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear)
27. Land Community (Pailin)
28. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (LRSU)
29. Mother Nature Movement (MN)
30. Ou Bat Moan Community (Oddar Meanchey)
31. Partnership for Environment and Development (PED Cambodia)
32. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
33. Phnom Krom Community (Siem Reap)
34. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
35. Prey Lang Community (Kampong Thom)
36. Prey Lang Community (Preah Vihear)
37. Prey Lang Community (Steung Treng)
38. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
39. Samaki Chek Meas Community (Svay Rieng)
40. Samaki Romeas Haek Community (Svay Rieng)
41. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
42. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
43. Sre Prang Community (Tboung Khmum)
44. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
45. Ta Ni Land Community (Siem Reap)
46. Thnaot Chhum Land Community (Pursat)
47. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
48. Trapeang Chan Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
49. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)
50. Youth Education for Development and Peace (YEDP)