



Case Brief: Long Kunthea

Long Kunthea is a 27-year-old woman human rights defender, who advocates against environmental destruction as part of the group Mother Nature Cambodia. From Kampong Cham province, Long Kunthea was a teacher when she first got involved in environmental protection activities in 2018. The following year, she quit her teaching job in order to dedicate her time fully to environmental protection advocacy with Mother Nature.

Case chronology

3 September 2020:

Long Kunthea was arrested, along with two fellow Mother Nature activists for planning a peaceful, one-woman march from Wat Phnom to the Prime Minister's residence, to protest the filling-in of Boeung Tamok lake. She was charged with "incitement" and placed in pre-trial detention.

5 May 2021:

The Phnom Penh Municipal Court convicted Long Kunthea and sentenced her to 18 months in prison and a fine of 4 million riel (1,000 USD).

21 July 2021:

Long Kunthea was charged with "plotting" (Article 453, Criminal Code) in a separate case, in relation to leaked footage of a Zoom meeting of Mother Nature activists.. The previous month, Mother Nature members Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth, Yim Leanghy, and Alejandro González-Davidson had been charged with plotting. Sun Ratha, Yim Leanghy, and Alejandro González-Davidson were additionally charged with "insulting the king" (Article 437 (bis)).

5 November 2021:

The Phnom Penh Appeal Court upheld the "incitement" conviction of Long Kunthea and the two other Mother Nature activists. The Court also suspended four months of the prison sentences of Long Kunthea. All three were placed under probation measures for three years.

12 November 2021:

Long Kunthea and two other Mother Nature activists were released under probation conditions.

29 July 2022:

The Supreme Court upheld the Phnom Penh Appeal Court conviction for Long Kunthea and two other activists.

29 May 2024:

After three years, the trial of the Mother Nature activists on the charge of plotting and insulting the king began before the Phnom Penh Municipal Court. It lasted until 24 June, during which eight hearings were conducted over five non-consecutive days.

2 July 2024:

The Phnom Penh Municipal Court convicted Long Kunthea and the nine other Mother Nature activists in the case of all charges. She was sentenced to six years in prison. After the verdict was issued, Long Kunthea and four other activists, who were gathered outside the court with their families and supporters, were violently arrested by police and forced into five separate vehicles. They were sent to five different prisons across the country, in an unprecedented move. Long Kunthea was sent to serve her sentence in Preah Vihear Provincial Prison.

18 February 2025:

The Phnom Penh Appeal Court denied bail for Long Kunthea and the four other imprisoned Mother Nature activists.

30 April 2025:

The Supreme Court denied bail for Long Kunthea and four other activists, upholding the decision of the Phnom Penh Appeal Court.

1 December 2025:

The Phnom Penh Appeal Court denied a bail request for Long Kunthea and the four other Mother Nature activists. By this stage, Long Kunthea and the other four activists had now spent 1.5 years in prison.

23 February 2026:

The Supreme Court held a hearing for the bail request for Long Kunthea and the four Mother Nature activists.

2 March 2026:

The Supreme Court denied bail requests for Long Kunthea and the four Mother Nature activists. Long Kunthea was not brought to the court at all.

Long Kunthea's words to others from prison, encouraging them to continue advocating for human rights:

"I cannot change the world, but I can make it different. If we all stand in solidarity, we will make the world change. [I] hope that everyone will continue to protect the environment for us. You all are the hope for Cambodia's natural resources 😊"