Open Letter

Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet,

Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia

Phnom Penh, 17 July 2026

Dear Samdech Prime Minister,

We, the representatives of media associations and national and international civil society organizations, are deeply concerned over the recent court decision sentencing two journalists, Phon Sopheap and Pheap Pheara to 14 years' imprisonment each.

The two journalists were convicted of supplying a foreign state with information prejudicial to national defence and were sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment by the Siem Reap Provincial Court on 17 December 2025. The Battambang Appeal Court upheld the conviction on 26 March 2026, and the Supreme Court has now affirmed that decision.

At the Battambang Appeal Court hearing on 13 March 2026, the two journalists said they had travelled on 29 July 2025 with the [Chhumteav Me] delegation to deliver humanitarian donations to soldiers stationed near Ta Krabei Temple in Oddar Meanchey province. They told the court that they later separated from the delegation and visited the temple to report on the situation on the ground.

Both Phon Sopheap and Pheap Pheara told the court that, before taking the photo, they asked permission from soldiers stationed there and showed their official press passes issued by the Ministry of Information. They later posted a photograph showing landmines in the background, which was subsequently circulated by Thai media outlets.

However, both journalists told the court that they had no intention of providing information to Thailand. During the Supreme Court hearing, they reiterated their innocence and asked the court to drop the charge.

This case represents one of the most serious actions against journalists in Cambodia and raises significant concerns about freedom of expression, press freedom, and the use of national security laws against members of the media.

As a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Cambodia is obligated to respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, access to information, liberty, and a fair trial. Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

This case also undermines the government's commitment to implementing the recommendations it accepted during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), particularly those concerning media freedom and freedom of expression. The government's commitment to promoting a free and independent press is especially important for building international trust and credibility.

While national security is a legitimate concern for any state, restrictions on freedom of expression and journalistic activity should be necessary, proportionate, and consistent with Cambodia's constitutional and international human rights obligations. In this case, the severity of the sentence appears disproportionate to the alleged national security risk.

Article 27 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia provides that His Majesty the King has the constitutional authority to grant full or partial amnesty. Pursuant to Article 77 of the Law on Prisons, the Prime Minister holds the exclusive authority to submit requests for the granting of royal amnesty to His Majesty the King.

In accordance with these legal provisions, we respectfully ask Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, to exercise this authority by submitting a request to His Majesty the King to grant amnesty to Phon Sopheap and Pheap Pheara. Granting such clemency would enable them to regain their liberty, reunite with their families and young children, and resume their professional work as journalists.

For inquiries:
Nop Vy**,** Executive Director of Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
+855 12 519 261

Endorsed by:

1. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
2. Communication and Media Promotion Organization (CMPO)
3. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
4. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
5. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
6. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
7. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
8. Center for Business and Law Organization ((BHRE Center)
9. Partnership for Environment and Development (PED)
10. Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)
11. Association Journalist Timor Leste (AJTL)
12. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
13. Empowering Youth For An Equitable Society (EYES)
14. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
15. Overseas Press Club of Cambodia (OPCC)
16. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (Comfrel)