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Cambodian Journalists Alliance

CamboJA Concerned by Conviction of Sovann Rithy for Covid-19-Related Reporting

Phnom Penh, October 5, 2020 – The Cambodian Journalists Alliance (CamboJA) is concerned by the conviction of former TVFB director Sovann Rithy for incitement on Monday, October 5 by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court, which handed down a 18-month suspended prison sentence against him.

The municipal court held its trial and sentencing of Sovann Rithy on the morning of October 5, 2020. It pronounced Sovann Rithy guilty of incitement, handing him an 18-month prison sentence that was suspended from the date of the verdict, effectively reducing the term to five months and 28 days. Sovann Rithy was consequently released on October 5, according to Kuch Kimlong, spokesman for the Phnom Penh Municipal Court.

CamboJA, which has been following the case closely, welcomes the release of Sovann Rithy. However, CamboJA is disappointed by the conviction. This is the first time a journalist has been convicted for coverage related to the Covid-19 pandemic. It amounts to a threat against the freedoms of professional journalists who have been reporting on Covid-19, including Sovann Rithy.

Nop Vy, executive director of CamboJA, said: “Sovann Rithy was simply fulfilling his role as a journalist by quoting sources, so the punishment under the Criminal Code is a threat against journalism. It creates fear among other journalists and shows that the Press Law is not being enforced.”

CamboJA calls on the court to drop charges against other journalists, including Ros Sokhet and Sok Udom, former RFA journalists Uon Chhin and Yeang Sothearin, also known as Yeang Socheameta, and former Cambodia Daily journalists Aun Pheap and Zsombor Peter.

CamboJA also appeals to the Ministry of Information to renew the license of TVFB, www.tvfb.com.kh and www.fbtv.news for Sovann Rithy so that he can continue his career as a journalist.

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