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Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association

CAMBODIAN JOURNALISM SITUATION REPORT 2020

An annual record of reported
harassment cases against
journalists

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Executive Summary

Among the many challenges facing Cambodian journalists, the fear of physical violence and legal trouble continues to be a daily part of the job. This report marks the start of an effort by CamboJA to monitor harassment cases against journalists, and advance a conversation about how stakeholders — including the government — can better protect journalists in Cambodia.

CamboJA recorded 35 cases of harassment against 72 journalists in 2020, based on news reports, social media posts, court documents and interviews. More than 42 of those journalists involved (about 58% of the total) were detained for questioning or imprisoned. Violence also remains a risk of the job. At least 22 journalists were either attacked or threatened with violence while on duty (12 journalists were physically attacked while nine others received violent threats). One journalist died in what police concluded was a traffic accident without proper investigation.

The Criminal Code remains a powerful legal tool, which is too often used to intimidate and jail journalists. CamboJA's research shows that most of the journalists who were arrested in 2020 were charged with incitement to commit felony or extortion under Articles 495 and 232 of the Criminal Code. As of December 2020, at least ten journalists remain in prison, eight of which are in pre-trial detention for criminal charges.

The ongoing imprisonment, detention and physical threats against journalists undermines the media's role in a democratic society and strikes fear in those who cover stories or cases involving powerful officials. For instance, in Kampong Chhnang province, the arrest of Mr. Sok Oudom and Mr. Keo Hour – accused of broadcasting false news about a land dispute between citizens and the military – had a chilling effect on all journalists in the province, who largely stopped covering sensitive or controversial news.

Journalists have generally been unsuccessful when turning to the courts for justice or protection, even when they are able to identify perpetrators such as military police, district security guards, timber traders and cock fighters. This impunity for crimes against journalists compounds the sense of fear and futility for those seeking to expose bad actors inside and outside of government.

This report is dedicated to the journalists and their families who have faced threats, violence, false accusations and imprisonment for their reporting. Too many have lost months and years of their lives to Cambodia's overcrowded prisons.

Introduction

Though there has been an increase in the number of media outlets in Cambodia, especially online media outlets and media associations, freedom of the press remains a challenge.

According to a Ministry of Information report¹, in 2020 there were 669 online media outlets, including 588 news websites and 81 online TV channels, as well as 450 newspapers, 196 magazines, 220 FM radio stations (83 in Phnom Penh), one AM radio station, eight digital TV stations, 212 cable TV stations (two in Phnom Penh), two satellite TV stations, and 51 media associations. A total of 4,230 journalists received press cards from the ministry, including 496 female journalists (about 12%) and 108 foreign journalists.

Since 2017, the Cambodian government has severely cracked down on media freedom. The government harasses independent journalists and has significantly restricted online expression. Discrimination, intimidation, imprisonment, false accusations, harassment and violent attacks are regularly committed against journalists. Cambodia's ranking on the World Press Freedom Index drop from 132 in 2017 to 144 in 2020.²

A number of high-profile legal cases against journalists remained active through 2020. Former Radio Free Asia journalists Uon Chhin and Yeang Sothearin, who were arrested in November 2017 and spent more than nine months in pre-trial detention before being granted bail, remain locked in legal purgatory after the

Supreme Court threw out their request in October 2020 to dismiss dubious espionage and pornography charges.

The case of former Cambodia Daily reporters Aun Pheap and Zsombor Peter, who had been facing trial since May 2017 on baseless charges related to their reporting on elections, was dropped by the Ratanakiri provincial court in November but the Ratanakkiri prosecutor's office filed an appeal against provincial judge Kong Tang Meng's decision to drop incitement charges against the two reporters. Both Aun Pheap and Peter left Cambodia under legal threat. Pheap is now living in the U.S., away from his wife and children.

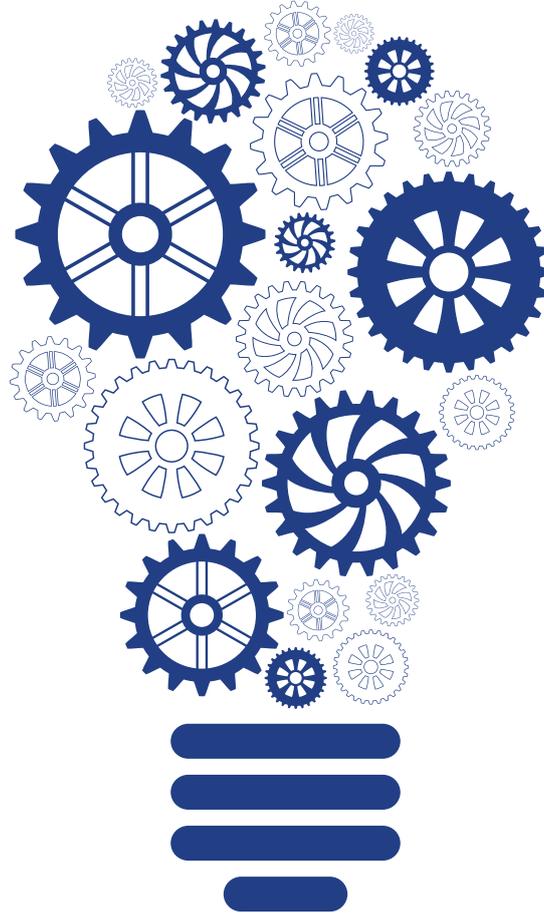
Rath Roth Mony, a fixer for Russian state broadcaster RT who was arrested in December 2018 and sentenced to two years in prison for "incitement to discriminate" over his reporting on child prostitution, was released from prison in December 2020 after completing his sentence.

On the other hand, the ethics and standards practiced by Cambodia's press corps, especially online media reporters, remains inconsistent, leading to unprofessional conduct and unethical journalism that sometimes leads to justified prosecution and accusations of impropriety.

The Cambodian Journalism Situation Report seeks to highlight the frequency of harassment cases against journalists, who are often unfairly targeted for exercising their legal rights and freedoms under both Cambodia's Constitution and under international law.

¹ Ministry of Information's spokesperson, Meas Sophorn released the data to CamboJA on Jan 14, 2021

² Reporters Without Border, "2020 World Press Freedom Index", <https://rsf.org/en/cambodia>



Methodology

1. Method & Data Collection

This report employed a qualitative method. Data on harassment cases against journalists was compiled using reported cases in various media outlets, social media posts and public announcements from courts on arrest warrants or judgements. Cases were verified through phone calls, desk review, closely monitoring the trial process and through consultation with lawyers and interviews with their family members.

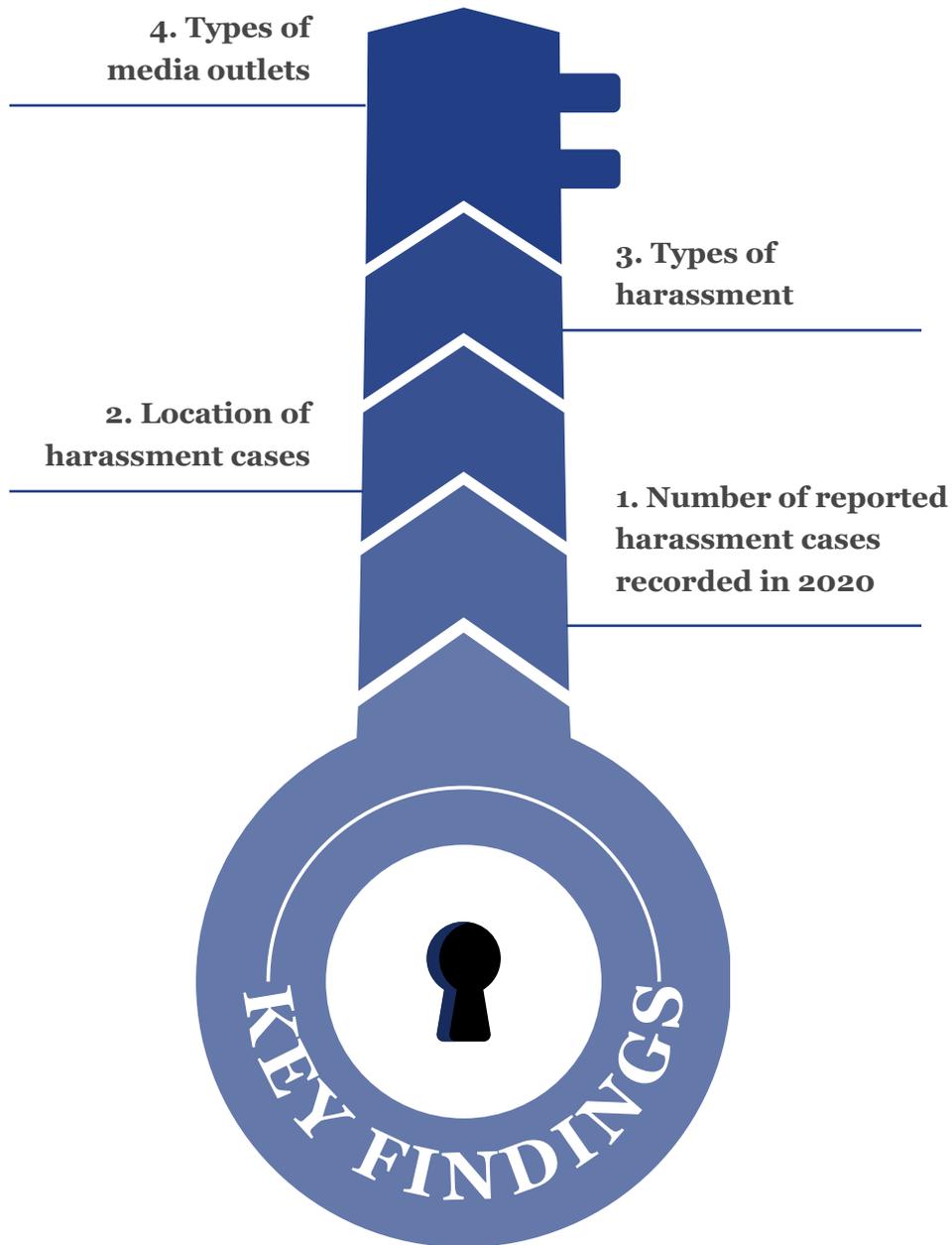
2. Scope and limitations

The report had some limitations and gaps. It does not necessarily include all reported harassment cases against journalists in 2020, but only reported cases from January-December 2020 that were identified during CamboJA's research. It is likely that many additional cases went unreported, as journalists often face harassment in the provinces, where incidents are more likely to remain hidden due to limited resources for monitoring and legal assistance.

Some key terms used in this report are defined as follows:

- Journalists includes media workers such as reporters, freelancers, photojournalists, support staff and fixers and others with press cards from the Ministry of Information or ID cards from their own outlets. It does not include social media users without any of these professional credentials.
- Harassment cases cover all types of attacks, from violence to threats, arrest, jailing and other legal actions.
- Legal action means legal or judicial actions against journalists, including complaints and summons for questioning.
- Violence covers physical violence, threats of physical violence and death.
- Detention means detained for questioning for few hours or overnight and then released.
- Imprisonment means placed in jail or prison for pre-trial detention or after conviction.

Key Findings



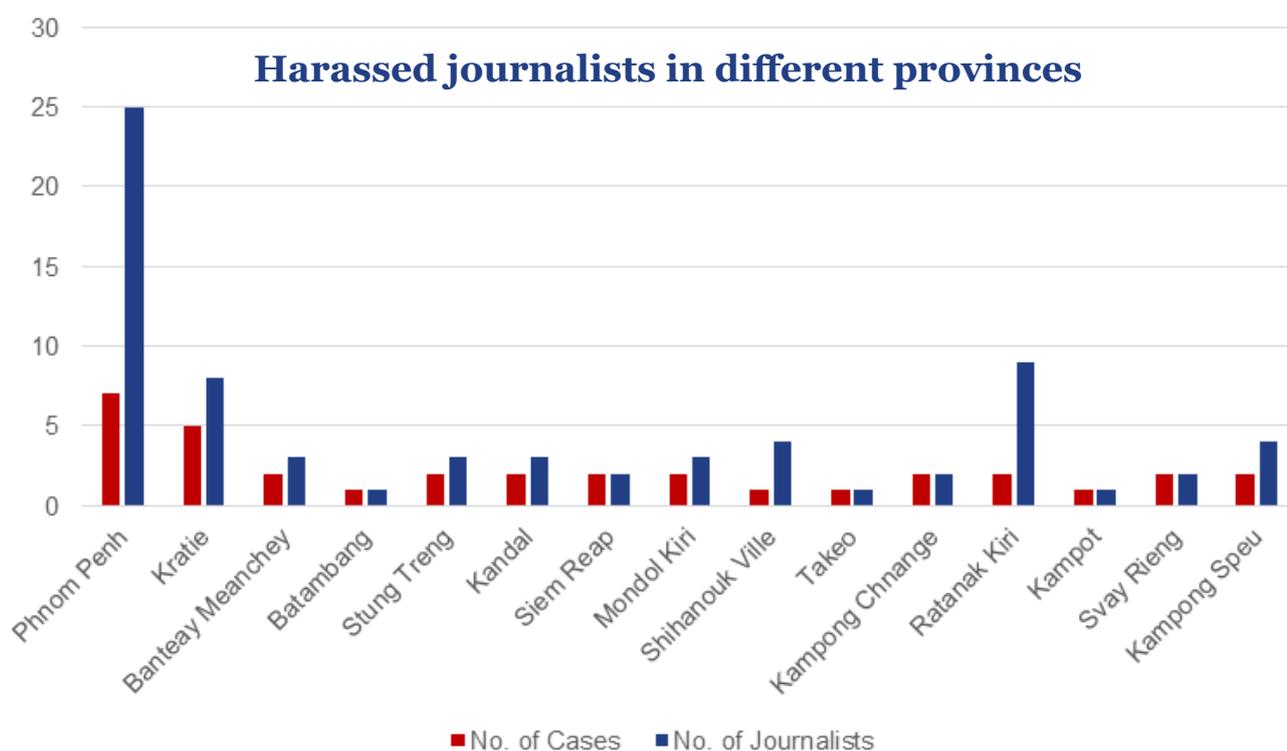
1. Number of reported harassment cases recorded in 2020

CamboJA confirmed 32 cases of harassment, including physical attacks, threats of violence, arrest, imprisonment and other legal actions involving 57 journalists (three of whom were women). There were also 3 cases of arrest, involving 15 journalists, related other criminal charges, which some believe were motivated by their work as journalists.

2. Location of harassment cases

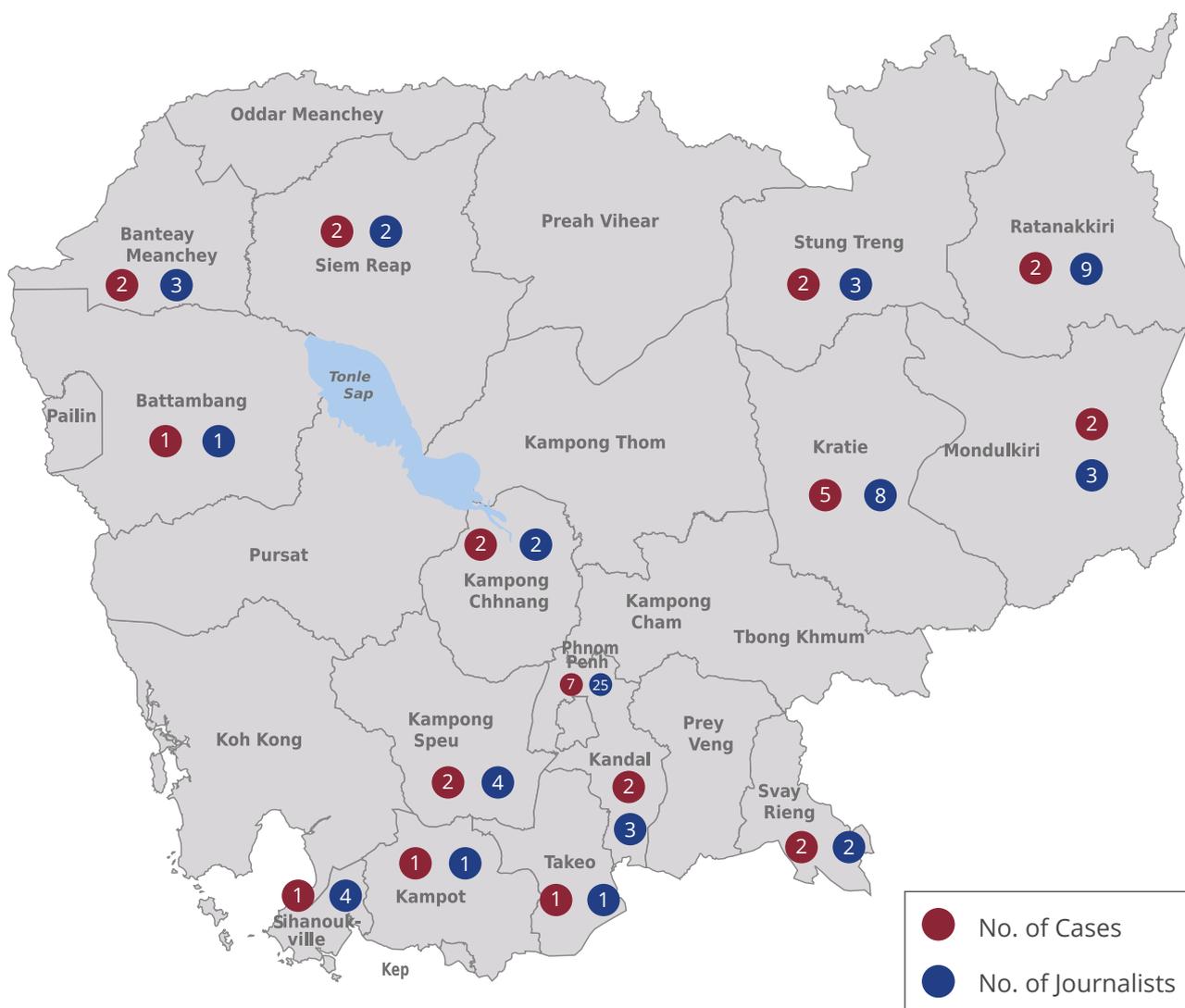
Cases of harassment were widespread, with incidents recorded in 15 different provinces throughout the country.

Figure 1: Journalists were harassed in 15 different provinces



Among those 15 provinces, the majority of cases were in the capital city, Phnom Penh, and the provinces of Ratanakiri and Kratie. Those three locations accounted for 58% of harassed journalists (42 out of 72 total). Most cases in these two provinces involved journalists being physically or legally harassed for reporting on illegal logging and timber trading, while the illegal loggers and traders faced no such consequences.

Most journalists in these two provinces faced two types of harassment: violence and arrest. For the case in Phnom Penh, where 25 journalists were harassed, most of the cases involved charges related to reporting and commentary on politics and COVID-19 issues. Most of them faced legal action and arrest.



3. Types of harassment

The following table breaks down the 35 reported harassment cases against 72 journalists into four major types: legal action, violence, detained for questioning and imprisonment.

Table 1: Types of Harassment

Type of harassment	No. of cases	No. of journalists
Legal action	6	8
Violence	11	22
Detained for questioning	3	11
Imprisonment	15	31

The highest group was imprisonment, which accounted for 15 cases involving 31 journalists or over 43% of the total 72 recorded harassed journalists in 2020. The second largest sub-group was violence, which accounted for 11 cases involving 22 journalists.

3.1. Legal action:

Local officials and powerful businessmen at times used the courts as a tool to silence the media. Eight journalists from six different media outlets, including TV and online media, have been subject to legal accusations, summoned and questioned by police and judicial authorities in five different provinces, including Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Mondul Kiri, Takeo and Phnom Penh. All eight journalists in this category did not receive legal support.

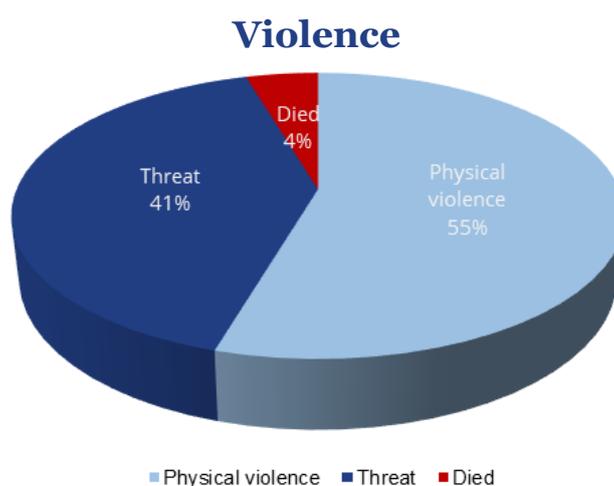
In four cases, the courts convicted journalists with incitement to commit felonies, defamation and ordered journalists to pay money to plaintiffs (Sovuthy, 2020). As one example, BTV journalist Bosavy Chhet was sentenced in absentia by the Siem Reap provincial court over erroneous defamation claims related to a Facebook post, without being given any opportunity to defend himself.

In some cases, journalists were forced to write confession letters and retract or delete their published news articles, in exchange for dropping the legal action against them. Three of the cases involving four journalists (including two women) were dropped following written apologies and confession letters from the journalists. (Please see annex 11, 21 and 23)

3.2. Violence:

Among 22 journalists who were subjected to violence while on duty, more than half (12 journalists) were physically attacked, while 9 journalists faced threats of violence or even death, and one died in what police concluded was a traffic accident without proper investigation (case study below).

Figure 2: Types of violence



In all 22 cases, the perpetrators were not brought to justice despite being identified and even sued by the journalists. Suspected perpetrators included police, military police, district security guards, timber traders and cock fighters.

³ Khy Sovuthy, "Ratanakiri journalist summoned to court for alleged incitement," *CamboJA News*, June 12, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/ratanakiri-journalist-summoned-to-court-for-alleged-incitement/>



CASE STUDY: FOUR ONLINE NEWS JOURNALISTS ATTACKED

At 12:30 a.m. on September 28 near the border of Memot district, Tbong Khmum province, four online news journalists were attacked as they were sleeping in two private cars. The assault was carried out by a group of five to seven men, suspected to be timber traders, armed with knives, axes and large sticks. Ren Samnang, a reporter for PMN News, received a serious rib injury in the attack, while Chakrapop news reporter Mou Saren was slightly injured.

The reporters were taking a rest while traveling from Kratie province to Phnom Penh. Samnang said he knew attackers and believed the assault was in retaliation for the journalists' investigation into forestry crimes in the areas. On September 26, they had reported an incident of illegal logging to military police in Memot district, which resulted in officials stopping a truck transporting timber through the area.

Ren Samnang said the day after the incident, he and Mou Saren filed a complaint at a local police station and the police said they would investigate. But since then, he has heard nothing about the complaint. "The police in Memot district haven't investigated the incident. It's been quiet," he said.⁴



“ I just want justice for me, my colleague Mou Saren and justice for all journalists.⁵ ”

CASE STUDY: SIX JOURNALISTS PERSECUTED WHILE ON DUTY

Six journalists were intimidated and threatened by the authorities on the morning of Friday, October 23, as they were reporting on a protest in front of the Chinese Embassy marking the 29th anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreement. A VOD Reporter was chased by authorities as she stood near the Chinese Embassy to monitor and interview a female protestor. Two other VOD journalists were ordered to stop filming the protests.

⁴ CamboJA video interview with Mr. Ren Samnang, October 14, 2020

⁵ Ren Samnang, "Where is Justice for Journalists?," CamboJA video, 7:24, November 2, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1717577435068360>

Khan Leakhena, the VOD reporter, said she saw a protester fall on the sidewalk and pulled out her phone to take photos. A man in civilian clothes approached her, ordered her to stop photographing, and tried to take away her phone, Leakhena said.⁶

Mech Dara, another VOD reporter, said district officials ordered he and several other reporters, including a journalist working for the Reuters news agency, to stop filming.



Other incidents that morning included district authorities confiscating a camera worn around the neck of a journalist from the Khmer Times newspaper and ordering him and another photographer working for the Reuters to delete their photos and leave the area.

Journalist Gerry Flynn said he was covering the protest for Thmey Thmey and, while being pushed back from observing the protesters, was hit in the face with a walkie-talkie.

He turned around and an officer yelled at him, he said. A U.N. observer at the scene intervened, and told him the guard had shouted, “Better watch out because this is Cambodian land,” Flynn said. A freelance cameraman working with Flynn also had his camera lens grabbed, and authorities tried to seize and open his bag, Flynn added.

CASE STUDY: KOUY PISETH

Kouy Piseth, a reporter for CBN TV online, died in Phnom Penh early in the morning of September 29, in what police said was a traffic accident. Local authorities found the 23-year-old’s body 40 meters from his motorbike on a concrete road in a residential area.

Kouy Piseth had left his workplace at 11:30 p.m. on September 28, recalled by Chhay Socheat, director general of CBN. Soon after finding his body at 3 a.m., and without conducting a thorough investigation, authorities concluded that his death was a result of a motorbike crash caused by Piseth.



Chak Sopheap, director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), said there should have been a proper investigation. “In Piseth’s case, we can see from local news and people at the scene that there are hints of an attack on him. If it is true, this is not merely a traffic accident, but it could be an attempt to attack him for being a journalist.”

⁶ Tran Techseng, “Rights Monitors, Journalists Threatened Over Taking Photos at Rally,” VOD, October 26, 2020, <https://vodenglish.news/rights-monitors-journalists-threatened-over-taking-photos-at-rally/>

Yort Tha, Kuy Piseth' mother, said her husband checked Piseth's body and found a major injury to the back of his head. However, she said:



3.3. Detained for questioning:

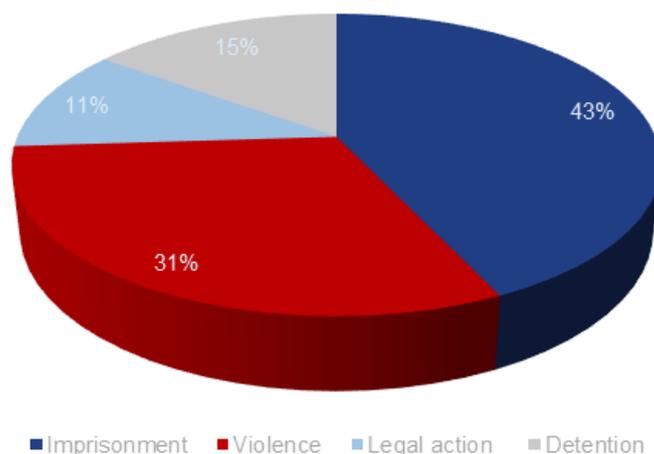
Eleven journalists, including two women, were detained for questioning because of their work. Most of them were detained overnight and then released after the journalists agreed to change their article and to stop reporting on the case. For example, two female publishers in Kandal province were summoned and questioned for 12 hours by criminal police at the Ministry of Interior for their article on a cosmetics business (Annex 21). And a TV3 journalist was summoned for questioning by the Ratanakiri Provincial Court and detained for one night at the police station for his coverage of a land clearing at the site of the deserted Ratanakkiri Airport. He was also released the following day after he agreed to write a letter of apology and to stop reporting on the case (Annex 23).

3.4. Imprisonment:

Among the 72 harassed journalists, 31 journalists, or over 43%, were imprisoned. All 31 imprisoned journalists were charged with incitement to commit felonies, extortion and other criminal charges, including cock fighting and illegal drug use, which journalists believe was motivated by their work.

Figure 3: Imprisonment cases vs. other cases

Imprisonment cases vs. other cases

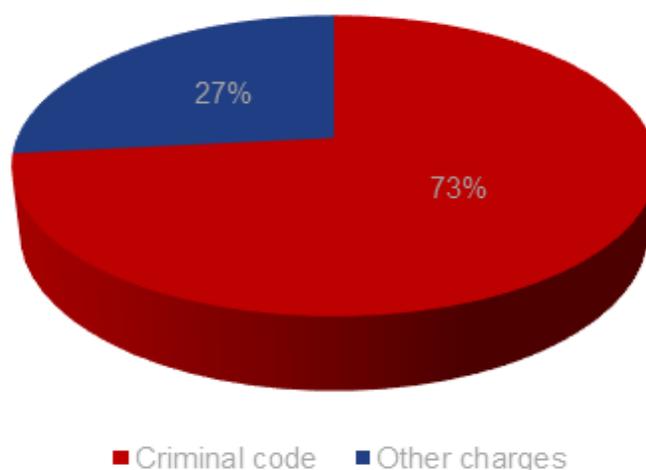


3.4.1. Conviction using criminal code:

Among the 15 imprisonment cases involving 31 journalists, there were 11 cases (or over 73%) in which journalists were charged with incitement to commit felony and extortion under articles 495 and 232 of the Criminal Code. In most of these cases, the journalists were arrested without a warrant.

Figure 4: Arrest cases using criminal code

Arrest cases using criminal code



Another report from the Union of Journalist Federations of Cambodia (UJFC) cited 33 cases where that group intervened following criminal legal complaints against journalists in 2020.⁷

Some of these criminal charges led to journalists being arrested and jailed for months or even years. These included the cases of Sovann Rithy, former editor-in-chief of TVFB; Ros Sokhet, Cheat Khmer newspaper publisher; Hang Sopheap, reporter for VD7 News based in Kampot; Keo Hour, reporter for San Buntheurn/SBT hot news based in Kampong Chhnang; Eng Narong, publisher for MSM news in Kampong Chhnang and Sok Oudom, the owner of Rithysen Radio and website in Kampong Chhnang.

As of December 2020, ten journalists remained in prison and pre-trial detention because of criminal charges, including Ros Sokhet and Sok Oudom, who were already convicted and charged with incitement to commit felony. Eight other journalists from online media are still in pre-trial detention on extortion charges, namely Eng Narong, Hout Davy, Khoem Phally, Hes Hin, Hak Sophanha, Oun Bros, Sim Sokda, and Chin Bunthoeun. (see annex 1, 5, and 18)

⁷The Union of Journalist Federations of Cambodia (UJFC), "Complaints Report on Cambodian Journalists in 2020," January 11, 2021,



CASE STUDY: SOK OUDOM

On December 22, 2020, the Kampong Chhnang Provincial Court convicted and sentenced Sok Oudom, the owner of Ritysen radio station and website, to 20 months in prison with a fine of 20 million riel (about \$5,000) over incitement charges. The complaint was filed by Nou Samreth, deputy commander of Kampong Chhnang military operations area, after Sok Oudom used a Facebook livestream to report on an ongoing land dispute involving local residents and the military in the province.

Following the online broadcast on May 12, Sok Oudom was arrested on May 13 without a warrant and detained at the Kampong Chhnang Provincial Prison on May 15, 2020. Sok Oudom was accused of broadcasting false news along with a group of journalists and eventually charged with “incitement to commit felonies” under articles 495 of the Criminal Code. Many other journalists who went to cover the same land dispute on the same day were not charged. Authorities said Sok Oudom violated the law because he live-streamed his on-the-ground reporting.

At his trial on November 3, Sok Oudom maintained he had not incited villagers against the military and said he was only asking authorities to resolve the dispute. Following the guilty verdict, Sok Oudom expressed frustration at the court’s decision and said he would appeal the conviction.⁸

The day before Oudom’s arrest, the Ministry of Information revoked the media license of his Rithysen Radio Station and its website, despite the fact that Oudom had yet to be charged with any crime and remained in pre-trial detention.



CASE STUDY: ROS SOKHET

On November 11, 2020, The Phnom Penh Municipal Court sentenced Cheat Khmer newspaper publisher Ros Sokhet to 18 months in prison with a fine of 2 million riel (about \$500) for Facebook posts criticizing government officials, including Prime Minister Hun Sen.

⁸ CamboJA video interview with Mr. Sok Oudom, December 22, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/100130748124891/videos/404511220859318>

Ros Sokhet, 54, was arrested on June 25 “for incitement to provoke serious chaos in social security” in Kompong Chhnang province and transferred to Phnom Penh Municipal Police’s Cyber Crime Bureau. Ros Sokhet had criticized Hun Sen on June 24 after the prime minister confirmed he was grooming his eldest son Hun Manet to take over as Cambodia’s leader. Ros Sokhet’s Facebook posts alleged Hun Sen was also not offering a solution for people struggling to repay their debts to banks.

After additional interrogation on June 26, Ros Sokhet was transferred from police custody to pre-trial detention. On the same day, an information ministry spokesman said the ministry was considering rescinding Cheat Khmer’s license although it was renewed in April without any problem. On June 28, Ros Sokhet was finally charged with “incitement to commit a felony” under Articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code.

CASE STUDY: SOVANN RITHY

Sovann Rithy, the director of online news outlet TVFB, was sentenced to 18 months in prison on October 5, 2020, after reporting on advice from Prime Minister Hun Sen telling motorbike taxi drivers to sell their vehicles if the Covid-19 crisis is causing them financial distress.⁹

Sovann Rithy was arrested on the night of April 7, 2020. Authorities charged him with “incitement to commit a felony” and ordered his detention at the Phnom Penh Judiciary Police’s detention facility.



The municipal court tried and sentenced Sovann Rithy on the morning of October 5, 2020, handing him an 18-month prison sentence suspended from the date of the verdict, effectively reducing the term to his five months and 28 days in pre-trial detention. Sovann Rithy was released the day of the verdict.

The Information Ministry revoked its license TVFB on grounds that Sovann Rithy had broadcast information “to generate advice effecting the security, public order, and safety of society”. Sovann Rithy also missed the birth of his child while in prison.

3.4.2. Other criminal cases against journalists

Other criminal charges — related to activities including cock fighting and illegal drug use — were also used to arrest journalists. At least 15 of 31 journalists arrested in 2020 claim their work motivated the arrest, and in some cases that they were intentionally set up.

⁹ Khuon Narim, “Journalist handed 18-month sentence for incitement,” *CamboJA News*, October 5, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/journalist-handed-18-month-sentence-for-incitement/>

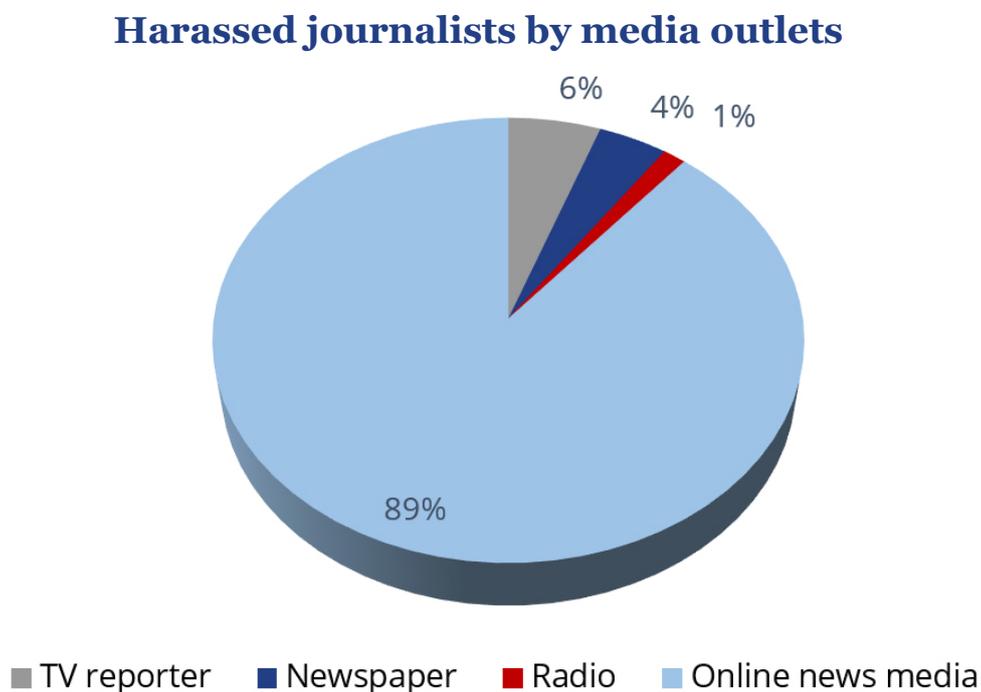
4. Types of media outlets

Among 72 reportedly harassed journalists, 64 journalists (or 89%) were online media reporters, which includes websites and online TV stations. Four journalists were TV reporters for stations including Bayon TV, Hang Meas TV and TV3. Three journalists were newspaper reporters including Koh Santepheap and Kampuchea Thmey. And one journalist from Rithysen radio station.

Table 3: Number of harassed journalists by type of media institutions

Type of media outlets	No. of journalists
TV	4
Newspaper	3
Radio	1
Online News Media	64

Figure 5: Harassed journalists by media outlets



The large majority of online journalists facing harassment likely reflects that the rapid increase in online media outlets and the lack of training or institutional protection for the journalists working for these outlets.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reported harassment cases against journalists in 2020 were widespread, with incidents recorded in 15 different provinces throughout the country. The majority of cases were in the capital city, Phnom Penh, and the provinces of Ratanakiri and Kratie, which together account for 58% of harassed journalists (42 out of 72 total).

The most common types of harassment against journalists were imprisonment (31 journalists, or 43% of cases) and violence (22 journalists, or 31%).

The type of journalists who faced the most harassment are online media reporters who accounted for 64 journalists out of 72 reported harassed journalists or 89%. This reflects, at least in part, a particular need for training of online reporters in the practices and principles of professional journalism.

Key recommendations include:

The Judiciary

- Drop all criminal charges against journalists including Ros Sokhet, Sok Oudom, Eng Narong, former RFA journalists Uon Chhin and Yeang Sothearin, and former Cambodia Daily reporters Aun Pheap and Zsombor Peter.
- Adhere to international human rights standards and legal principles by applying Cambodia's press law on cases related to the non-criminal work of journalists.

Government and Ministry of Information

- Ensure that all journalists can exercise their rights to report freely and without fear.
- Promote use of the press law, rather than criminal code, in cases related to journalism.
- Conduct a thorough investigation into attacks on journalists and bring offenders to justice.
- Engage all stakeholders, especially journalists, in the process of drafting all media-related laws, such as amendments to the Press Law, and other laws covering cybercrime, access to information, and the National Internet Gateway (NIG).
- The Ministry of Information in particular must play a more active role in supporting journalists facing harassment, and promote the use of the Press Law in media-related legal disputes.

Journalists, Media Organizations and Donor Communities

- With a focus on the growing group of online media reporters, provide trainings and opportunities related to fundamental principles of journalism, code of ethics for journalists and related laws and freedoms.
- Provide training on safety for journalists on physical and digital security.
- Provide psychological support to journalists.
- Provide legal support to journalists when they have been accused and charged.

V. Annex:

1. December 23, 2020: Kampong Chhnang province

Eng Narong, 43, publisher for MSM news, was arrested on December 23, 2020, in Tuol Kralanh village, Kampong Chhnang district, Kampong Chhnang province. He was charged with incitement to commit felony and extortion for allegedly demanding money from people in a land conflict on December 19, 2020.¹⁰

2. December 21, 2020: Kampong Speu

Seng Sokkheng, publisher of CNT Hot News, and En Say, a reporter for Sangkom News, were attacked by timber traders at Srekin village, Trapeang Cho commune, Oral district, Kampong Speu province while they were reporting on alleged illegal transportation of timber. The perpetrator used an axe to attack the two journalists at about 11:30 p.m. while they were in their parked car waiting to take photos of the illegal activity. "I jumped out the car and ran away, then they used an axe to smash my car's back window" Sokkeng said in an interview.¹¹ The two journalists filed a complaint at the Trapeang Cho police station the next day.

3. December 5, 2020: Phnom Penh

Sem Bora, director general of TNM TV online, was sued by businessman Nop Naro for defamation on November 26, 2020. The lawsuit was in response to a livestream show from Sem Bora on October 28, 2020 in which he claimed Nop Naro owed TNM TV online advertising fee. Nop Naro rejected the accusation.¹²

4. December 1, 2020: Kratie

Kin Sary, owner of Basith TV, alleged that the Kratie provincial Military Police commander threatened him for reporting on luxury timber trafficking involving military police.

The news publication owner said he was following four to five motorcycles carrying timber to the Vietnamese border on November 16 at 10 p.m. Kin Sary took photos and published a story the next day, he said.

After publishing the story, Kin Sary said Kratie Military Police Commander San Bunthan walked towards him at a restaurant on November 22 and threatened him, saying that you have to be careful with your news report, and questioning why he was the only journalist who dared to cover the story. "I fear for my personal security when I go to report somewhere, after [San Bunthan] threatened me," Sary said.¹³

5. November 30, 2020: Kratie

Three online news journalists from Kratie province were arrested and charged with extortion from November 30 to December 2 for allegedly demanding money in return for holding back a story about illegal land clearing.

¹⁰ Sbm news, December 24, 2020, <https://sbm.news/articles/5fe416ab72ba1ac28264679e>

¹¹ CamboJA phone interview with Mr. Seng Sokkheng, December 23, 2020,

¹² CPC News, "Court complaint," December 7, 2020, <https://www.cpc-news.com/archives/118488>

¹³ Khuon Narim, "Journalists alleges threats from Kratie Military Police official over illegal logging story," December 12, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/journalist-alleges-threats-from-kratie-military-police-official-over-illegal-logging-story/>

A court document shows that three journalists were arrested from November 30 to December 2 and charged under articles 363, 377, 378 for extortion and fraud. The three journalists are: Hout Davy, publisher of Samleng Ekreach; Khoem Phally of Kon Khmer Macha Proteh; and Heh Hin of Investigator Media.

Tuv Vuthen, a Kratie court spokesperson, said the three journalists had been sent to pre-trial detention on December 2nd, 2020 and declined to comment further.¹⁴ To this report writing date, they still in pre-trial detention.

6. November 21, 2020: Banteay Meanchey

Pen Noun, a publisher for Sratoap Yuvakvey News, was sued by two military police in Banteay Meanchey province after he reported on a military-linked land dispute. Military police officers Ouk Kimly and Yem Sen filed a complaint against Pen Noun at the Banteay Meanchey Provincial Court. Pen Noun was found guilty of defamation and fined 40 million riels (about \$10,000).¹⁵ However, Pen Noun reject the verdict and appeal the case.

7. November 16, 2020: Phnom Penh

Heng Vuthy, a reporter for TN TV news, said he was intimidated and threatened by authorities when he tried to photograph an event in front of CNRP's head office in Phnom Penh. The authorities asked him to hand over his phone and delete all photos in his phone. He handed over his phone and deleted all photos. He was chased by authorities even after showing his press card. "This is not the first incident that happened to me." He said.¹⁶

8. November 2, 2020: Battambang

Chorm Pisamey, a reporter for Koh Santepheap newspaper based in Battambang province, received a death threat from the son of the deputy Battambang City police chief of after reporting a story about the family divorce on October 31st. Pisamey said that he is worried about his security after the man threatened to kill him via Facebook live recently. Pisamey has filed a complaint to Battambang city police on November 2nd, 2020.¹⁷

9. October 25, 2020: Stung Treng

Chea Touch, 35, a publisher for PMN News, and Vuth Sopheak, 33, a reporter for Kon Khmer News, were attacked and beaten by a group of cock fighters in Stung Treng City. All their phones were stolen by fighters. The two journalists have filed complaints with the Stung Treng city police but haven't received any updates since.¹⁸

¹⁴ Khuon Narim, "Three Kratie journalists charged with extortion in suspicious land clearing case," *CamboJA News*, December 4, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/three-kratie-journalists-charged-with-extortion-in-suspicious-land-clearing-case/>

¹⁵ Banteay Meanchey provincial court, "Court Verdict," November 19, 2020,

¹⁶ *CamboJA* phone interview with Mr. Heng Vuthy, November 16, 2020,

¹⁷ Radio National Battambang, "Chorm Pisamey filed a complaint to Battambang city police after a man threatened to kill him," November 3, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/fm92.70/posts/4800468306661988>

¹⁸ Machastunleimekong News, "were attacked and beaten by a group of cock fighters," October 26, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/100852827968425/posts/400509181336120/>

10. October 25, 2020: Kampong Speu

Chon Makara, the publisher of Sangkom News, and Vann Rom, a reporter for Raksmei Chhnang Meas, were attacked while they were reporting on timber trafficking in Kampong Speu province's Oral district. The two journalists filed a complaint at Trapeang Cho commune police station on November 4, 2020. But the police haven't investigated the incident. "It's been quiet," Makara said.¹⁹

11. October 25, 2020: Kandal

Po Channy, aka Saek Slap Saek Slap, a reporter for San Prum News, was arrested by Ponhea Leu district police on October 25, 2020, in Kandal province. He was charged with incitement to commit felony and public defamation after a complaint by Mr. Pheng Vannak. But later, Pheng Vannak withdrew his complaint after Po Channy apologized and admitted his guilt.²⁰

12. October 23, 2020: Phnom Penh

Six journalists were intimidated and threatened by the authorities in different ways on the morning of October 23, 2020, as they were reporting on protest in front of the Chinese Embassy on the 29th anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreements. A reporter for VOD was chased by authorities as they stood near the Chinese embassy to monitor the questioning of a woman who joined the protest. Another VOD reporter said authorities asked them to hand over their phone when they tried to take a picture. Two other VOD journalists were ordered to stop filming the protests.

Other incidents on the day included authorities confiscating a camera worn on the neck of a journalist from the Khmer Times newspaper, and ordering him and a photographer working for the Reuters news agency to delete all their photos and leave the area.

13. October 20, 2020: Stung Treng

Him Math, a reporter for UMA TV online, was attacked by a group of timber traders while he was reporting on the illegal trafficking of timber over the Sekong bridge in Stung Treng province on October 20, 2020.

Him Math published an article on October 19 about how hundreds of wooden handicraft shops across the province had been fueling illegal logging by purchasing wood from the traders.

Him Math, who covers Kratie, Stung Treng, Monduliri, and Ratanakiri provinces, said he thought the story had angered the smugglers, and he called on the government to do more to protect journalists' freedom to collect information.²¹

¹⁹ CamboJA phone interview with Mr. Chon Makara, November 12, 2020,

²⁰ CPC News, "A journalist was arrested by Ponhea Leu district police," October 25, 2020, <https://www.cpc-news.com/archives/114902>

²¹ Khy Sovuthy, "Timber traders attack journalist in Stung Treng," CamboJA News, October 23, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/timber-traders-attack-journalist-in-stung-treng/>

14. September 29, 2020: Phnom Penh

Kouy Piseth, 24, a reporter for CBN TV online, died in Phnom Penh in the early hours of September 29 in what police said was a traffic accident. His body was found by local authorities on a concrete road in Por Senchey district, 40 meters from his motorbike. Kouy Piseth had left his workplace at 11:30 pm on September 28, according to Chhay Socheat, Director General of CBN. Immediately after finding his body and without conducting a thorough investigation, the authorities concluded that his death was the result of a motorbike crash that Piseth had caused, according to Mr. Theng Kosal, Choam Chao III commune chief. However, members of his family who inspected his body after the accident said he sustained injuries consistent with blunt force to the back of his head.²²

15. September 29, 2020: Kratie

Four online news journalists were beaten by a group of unknown attackers at 12:30 am. On September 28, 2020, while they were traveling from Kratie province to Phnom Penh. The group included Ren Samnang of PMN News, Teng Norin and Rarn Khorn of Esan Post, and Muok Saren of Chakkrapop News. The assault was allegedly carried out by a group of five to seven men, suspected to be timber traders, armed with knives, axes and large sticks. Ren Samnang of PMN News received a serious rib injury in the attack, while Muok Saren was slightly injured.²³

16. September 21, 2020: Siem Reap

Heroman News publisher Yen Soya, 36, was arrested by Siem Reap military police for allegedly drug using.²⁴

17. September 21, 2020: Mondulkiri

Prum Khan News publisher, Mr. Ma Meng Thy was arrested by provincial police and sent to Phnom Penh for allegedly land conflict and drug use involvement.²⁵

18. September 8, 2020: Sihanoukville

Four journalists, including Hak Sophanha, Oun Bros, Sim Sokda, and Chin Bunthoeun, of online news sites The Cambodia News Place, Cam Post, and News Online, were arrested for allegedly threatening and extorting money from a Chinese national. However, the families of the journalists reject the charge and said in interviews that those journalists were invited to cover a traffic accident involving the Chinese national, but then they were arrested.²⁶

²² Khuon Narim, "Journalists attacked after reporting forestry crime," *CamboJA News*, September 30, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/journalists-attacked-after-reporting-forestry-crime/>

²³ Khuon Narim, "Journalists attacked after reporting forestry crime," *CamboJA News*, September 30, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/journalists-attacked-after-reporting-forestry-crime/>

²⁴ Facebook post, "a journalist was arrested by Siem Reap military police for allegedly drug using," September 21, 2020,

²⁵ Facebook post, "Prum Khan News publisher was arrested and sent to Phnom Penh," September 22, 2020,

²⁶ Khuon Narim, "Four journalists arrested for extortion in Sihanoukville," *CamboJA News*, September 11, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/four-journalists-arrested-for-extortion-in-sihanoukville/>

19. August 10, 2020: Takeo

MSK News publisher Eak Vei Vong was the subject of a court complaint filed by a businessman for his news article on fraud in the real estate industry. He was charged with infringement of individual right by the Phnom Penh municipal court. The court issued a warrant on July 21, 2020 to question him on the above charge.²⁷

20. August 7, 2020: Kampong Chhnang

Keo Hour, 55, a reporter for San Buntheurn/SBT Hot News based in Kampong Chhnang province, was arrested on August 7, 2020 by military police following a court order dated June 24 in relation to his reporting on land disputes between local residents and members of the military.²⁸ His case is connected with Sok Oudom's case. His arrest came after he failed to appear in court in May or June. He has been charged with incitement to commit felony. He was placed in pre-trial detention in Kampong Chhnang Provincial Prison on August 8. One month later, on September 8 he was released on bail.

21. July 23, 2020: Kandal

Slapaka Abyear Krit News publisher Sum Solida and Serey Pheap Khmer News publisher Chey Chandavy were summoned and questioned on July 23, 2020, for 12 hours by criminal police at the Ministry of Interior for their news article about poor quality cosmetic products from a certain company. However, both of them were freed on July 24, 2020, after informal mediation and agreeing to change their news articles.²⁹

22. June 25, 2020: Kampong Chhnang

Ros Sokhet, 54, a publisher for the Cheat Khmer/Khmer Nation newspaper, was arrested on June 25 in Kompong Chhang province and transferred to Phnom Penh Municipal Police's Cyber Crime Bureau. Sokhet had criticized Prime Minister Hun Sen on June 24 after the premier confirmed he was grooming his eldest son Hun Manet to take over as Cambodia's leader. Sokhet's Facebook posts alleged Hun Sen was also not offering a solution for people struggling to repay their debts to banks. The Phnom Penh Municipal Court issued a warrant for Sokhet's arrest and questioning on June 24 "for incitement to provoke serious chaos in society," arresting him the following day.³⁰

The Phnom Penh municipal court held his trial on October 27, 2020 and postponed the verdict announcement to November 11, 2020, when it sentenced him to 18 months in prison with a fine of 2 million riels (about \$500).

²⁷ Phnom Penh municipal court, "Court warrant," July 21, 2020,

²⁸ CambouJA interviews with Mr. Keo Hour, October 21, 2020,

²⁹ Association of Freedom for Cambodian Journalists, "Media Statement," July 24, 2020,

³⁰ Khuon Narim, "Newspaper publisher arrested over Facebook posts," CambouJA News, June 27, 2020, <https://camboujanews.com/newspaper-publisher-arrested-over-facebook-posts/>

23. June 3, 2020: Ratanakiri

Phal Dam, a journalist for TV3, was summoned for questioning by the Ratanakiri Provincial Court on June 15 after Deputy Governor Puth Dany filed a complaint against him, alleging he had engaged in “incitement to commit a felony” in his coverage of recent land clearing at the site of the deserted Ratanakiri Airport.³¹ On June 25, he was questioned and detained for one night at the police station. He was released the following day after he agreed to write a letter of apology and to stop reporting on the case.

24. May 24, 2020: Phnom Penh

Thirteen journalists were arrested for attending a cock fight in Phnom Penh, with police saying they did not believe the group was only there to gather information for news stories on the illegal activity. The arrested journalists worked for ten low-profile news sites, including Preah Chan Kampuchea, Khmer Popular News, RAKY News and SNT News.

Preah Chan Kampuchea owner Pat Sok said one of his reporters, Pheng Sovannreaksmey, was among those arrested. He said he believed the group was targeted because of their past reporting, which he said scared the police.³² However, all were released the following day.

25. May 14, 2020: Kampong Chhnang

Sok Oudom, the owner of Rithysen Radio and website, was arrested on May 13 and detained on May 15, 2020 at Kampong Chhnang Provincial Prison after being accused of broadcasting false news about a land dispute in the province. He was charged with “incitement to commit felonies” on May 12, 2020.³³

On December 22, 2020, the Kampong Chhnang Provincial Court sentenced Sok Oudom to 20 months in prison with a fine of 20 million riel (about \$5,000) over incitement charges. The complaint was filed by Nou Samreth, deputy commander of the Kampong Chhnang military operations area, after Sok Oudom used a Facebook livestream to report about an ongoing land dispute involving the military in the province while many other journalists who went to cover the same land dispute on the same day were not charged. Authorities said Sok Oudom violated the law because he was live-streaming the events.

During his incitement trial on November 3, Sok Oudom maintained he had not incited villagers and asked the court to drop the charges and set him free.

26. April 16, 2020: Kampot

Hang Sopheap, a reporter for VD7 NEWS, FK NEWS, and CTV8, was arrested on April 16 by Kampot provincial authorities over his news article saying the provincial authorities had released a suspect who allegedly stabbed a widow and two daughters without notifying the victim’s family.

³¹ Khy Sovuthy, “Ratanakiri journalist summoned to court for alleged incitement,” *CamboJA News*, June 12, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/ratanakiri-journalist-summoned-to-court-for-alleged-incitement/>

³² Khy Sovuthy, “Flock of journalists nabbed over illegal cock fight,” *CamboJA News*, May 27, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/flock-of-journalists-nabbed-over-illegal-cock-fight/>

³³ Khy Sovuthy, “Radio station owner charged over alleged fake news,” *CamboJA News*, May 15, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/radio-station-owner-charged-over-alleged-fake-news/>

Hang Sopheap was charged with incitement to commit a crime and defamation on March 26, 2020.³⁴ VD7 News owner In Sarun says the arrest of Hang Sopheap was a violation of Cambodian Press Law.

Hang Sopheap was released after being detained for one week in provincial prison, after agreeing to write an apology letter to the provincial authorities.

27. April 7, 2020: Phnom Penh

Sovann Rithy, director of online news outlet TVFB, was arrested on April 7, 2020, over a Facebook post about Prime Minister Hun Sen advising local motorcycle-taxi drivers to sell their vehicles if they went bankrupt over the COVID-19 crisis.

Phnom Penh Municipal Police chief Sar Theth said Rithy was arrested for incitement to cause chaos and harm social security.³⁵ On the same day, Information Minister Khieu Kanharith issued a letter saying that TVFB's media license had been terminated and its website shut down over the matter.

On the morning of October 5, 2020, the Municipal Court sentenced Sovann Rithy to 18 months in prison, which was suspended effective the day of the verdict, reducing his prison time to the 5 months and 28 days of pre-trial detention. He was released on the same day of the verdict.

28. March 25, 2020: Ratanakiri

Eight journalists were detained by police overnight after they entered a private plantation in Ratanakiri province. Those eight journalists included a reporter from Bayon TV, HM TV, Reachsey Eysan website, Kampuchea Thmey, Koh Santepheap, Nokor Santepheap website, CRC and KPN website.

Chiep Sambath, one of the eight journalists, said the group was visiting the area on March 20 to report on school closures. However, when they arrived, the villagers told them that outsiders were not allowed to enter because it was a traditional day of celebration of indigenous people.

The journalists "rushed out" on a different road, but unknowingly entered SK Company land because the company had no fences, guards, banners or signs to indicate it was private, he said.³⁶

After being stopped by plantation workers, Kon Mom district police detained the journalists overnight. The following morning, the company and journalists reached an agreement and all journalists were released.

³⁴ Soth Sokprathna, "Kampot Police Arrest Journalist for Incitement and Defamation," VOD News, April 16, 2020, <https://vodkmer.news/2020/04/16/kampot-authoriy-arrested-a-jaunalist/>

³⁵ Khy Sovuthy, "Journalist arrested for repeating Hun Sen's advice to motorbike taxi drivers," Camboja News, April 8, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/journalist-arrested-for-repeating-hun-sens-advice-to-motorbike-taxi-drivers/>

³⁶ Khy Sovuthy, "Journalists complain of detention after trespassing," Camboja News, March 31, 2020, <https://cambojanews.com/journalists-complain-of-detention-after-trespassing/>

29. March 25, 2020: Svay Rieng

Two reporters were arrested for their news article on a wealthy businessman illegally exporting pigs to Vietnam.

Anachak Nokor Phnom News publisher, Un Sam Eurn, called Hang Bandit, and his colleague, Noy Chamnan, were arrested by Svay Rieng military police on March 25, 2020.³⁷ After being detained for 17 hours at the military police office, they were sent to court and finally dropped the charge and released the following day.

30. March 17, 2020: Siem Reap,

Sem Sam Aun, a journalist for BTV, was sentenced in absentia by the Siem Reap Provincial Court for his involvement in a public defamation case, according to the statement of the court issued on May 12.³⁸ The court convicted him of defamation for using the name Bosavy Chhet and Sem Sam Aun in Khmer, and ordered him to pay 5,000,000 riel [about \$1,250] to the court and 12,000,000 riel [about \$3,000] to the plaintiff, according to local news reports. Bosavy Chhet filed an appeal, explaining that was not his name or his Facebook account. Later on, the case was dropped after the court determined the defamation claims were erroneous and the offending Facebook post came from an account that didn't belong to Bosavy Chhet.

31. January 31, 2020: Banteay Meanchey,

Two journalists were summoned for questioning in relation to a land dispute between tycoon Lach Bunlim and local residents in Poipet City.

Teav Sam Ol, publisher of website Thngai Thmey, and Ly Meng Huy, who runs website Khmer Machaska, received a court summons from Banteay Meanchey Provincial Court.

Teav Sam Ol said he wrote about the land dispute on Dec. 21 and was questioned by the Poipet police chief five days later. He said he had simply written what the residents had told him, and that he would have made corrections if the information was shown to be incorrect. "For me, the act of making a [court] complaint threatens our journalists' spirit, to prevent journalists from playing the role as a mirror to reflect society," Sam Ol said, asking that the case should be handled using the Press Law rather than the Criminal Code.³⁹

Ly Meng Huy, who runs website Khmer Machaska, said he was also summoned for questioning, even though he had not reported about the land dispute, only writing about Sam Ol being questioned by police on Dec. 26.

³⁷ ICDTV online, "Livestream report," March 26, 2020,

https://web.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=149144423071028&ref=watch_permalink&_rdc=1&_rdr

³⁸ Khy Sovuthy, "Journalist summoned to court for alleged incitement," CamboJA News, June 12, 2020,

<https://cambojanews.com/ratanakkiri-journalist-summoned-to-court-for-alleged-incitement/>

³⁹ Khy Sovuthy, "Two journalists summoned for questioning in Banteay Meanchey," CamboJA News, March 12, 2020,

<https://cambojanews.com/two-journalists-summoned-for-questioning-in-banteay-meachey/>



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