

CamboJA calls for action against officials who harass and obstruct the work of journalists

Phnom Penh, September 6, 2021 – CamboJA deeply regrets that two journalists were threatened and intimidated while covering a land dispute at a new international airport in Kandal province, bringing the total number of journalists harassed this year to more than 50.

At 3:30 pm on September 4, 2021, Pork Kheuy, an intern at Voice of Democracy (VOD), visited the disputed site of the new International Airport in Kampong Talong village, Boeung Khyang commune, Kandal Stung district, Kandal province. He went attend a press conference held by villagers.

Kheuy told CamboJA that about 10 minutes after he arrived at the press conference venue, authorities dressed in civilian clothes, holding walkie-talkies, arrived and began taking pictures of him and his motorcycle. At that time, he continued his interviews and spoke with people as usual.

When he finished his interviews at around 5:00 pm, he left the press conference to return home.

He was followed by two men dressed civilian clothes driving a motorbike with state license plates. As he was driving, Kheuy received a phone call from villagers, telling him that the men driving behind him were police. After learning he was being followed, Kheuy sped up his motorcycle, and the men following him sped up as well.

At that point, Kheuy feared the police might try and stop him. Shortly after, five uniformed police jumped out on the road: Kheuy believed they wanted to arrest him and force him to delete his interviews, photos, and videos. Rather than stop, he veered around them and sped up. The two men following him exchanged motorbikes with the police and then began following him again, shouting for him to stop and saying they were police. After driving about another 500 meters, the two officers stopped chasing him and he continued home.

“In this incident, I was terrified, thinking about the photos and the information that I was trying to get in my interviews, for fear that the authorities would force me to delete them and that I would be beaten violently when I was caught,” said Kheuy. “The fact that the police authorities chased me on a motorbike is an act that shows the persecution and obstruction of journalists and that they want to demoralize the journalists who take pictures and report alone, as in my case” he added.

Another journalist, Lous Seng, publisher of the LSN online TV, who also covered the disputed land area, told CamboJA that he had been informed that police had been deployed at the

conference venue and planned to arrest him. He said that at around 3 pm on September 4, shortly before the villagers began their press conference, a village representative called and told him not to attend because there were many police on the streets and at the press conference venue to monitor journalists and prevent them from covering and broadcasting the event — which was held in response to a letter from the Kandal provincial administration on the closure of the village dam and demolition of Dam Road 54.

After receiving this news, he and his team decided to suspend their reporting on the press conference.

Nop Vy, executive director of CamboJA, said: “Intimidation of journalists and threats through various forms seriously affects press freedom, the state of freedom of expression in Cambodia, and both journalists’ and the public’s right to information.”

From January to early September 2021, CamboJA recorded 38 cases of harassment against journalists, involving 56 journalists (including four female journalists), most of which involved arrests and violence.

CamboJA urges senior officials at the concerned ministries, including the Ministry of Interior, to guide their local officials so that they understand the roles and responsibilities of journalists, the principles of rights and freedoms of journalists, and the relevant legal principles that support journalists in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, and end all forms of harassment and intimidation of all journalists.

CamboJA also urges the Ministry of Interior to investigate those authorities who have obstructed and intimidated journalists and to educate and advise them to stop all such illegal activities and harassment.

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