

Joint Statement: CSOs call on Cambodian authorities to step up the fight against impunity for crimes committed against journalists

Phnom Penh, 2 November 2021 — On International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, we, the undersigned civil society organizations, express our deep concern over the Cambodian Government's failure to bring to justice perpetrators of crimes committed against journalists in Cambodia. We urge the Cambodian authorities to take immediate action to ensure that effective, independent, and transparent investigations into such crimes are conducted and that justice is served.

Since 1994, at least 17 journalists have been killed and died in Cambodia. In almost all cases, the victims were targeted because of their work. Twelve of the 17 journalists killed were reporting on sensitive issues at the time of their death. Furthermore, perpetrators are yet to be brought to justice in 12 cases.

Worryingly, the persecution of and crimes against journalists seem to be on the rise. According to the media organization CamboJA, 81 journalists were targeted in the last ten months alone (January to October 2021). Of those journalists, 31 were arrested (including four women), 20 were subjected to violence, 16 were threatened, eight faced judicial harassment, five were detained for questioning and one female journalist experienced sexual harassment.

Crimes against journalists are egregious and constitute a real threat —and not just to reporters themselves. Journalists have the important mission to report news and write analyses and articles that support lively expression and access to information and foster public debate. In addition, independent journalists play a vital role in holding those in power accountable and thus make a significant contribution to a just and democratic society.

When journalists are targeted for conducting their legitimate reporting activities, freedom of expression is undermined and replaced by the fear that the public will no longer have access to information and that those in power will not be held accountable for their wrongdoings. In addition, when the Government fails to properly investigate and punish crimes against journalists, it sends the message that such crimes are allowed.

Therefore, we, the undersigned civil society organizations, condemn the impunity with which crimes committed against journalists are met in Cambodia, a problem that affects Cambodian society as a whole. We call on the Cambodian authorities to take concrete action to ensure that effective, independent, and transparent investigations into such egregious crimes are conducted and that perpetrators are brought to justice. We also call on the Cambodian Government to take immediate measures to ensure the safety of all the journalists operating in the country in order to enable them to exercise their freedom of expression and conduct their legitimate reporting work freely and without fear.

This statement was endorsed by:

1. Alliance for Conflict Transformation Organization (ACT)
2. Building Community Voice (BCV)
3. Cambodian Association for Protection of Journalists (CAPJ)
4. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
5. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
6. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
7. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
8. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
9. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)