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សមាគមសម្ព័ន្ធអ្នកសារព័ត៌មានកម្ពុជា
Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association

**Quarterly
Monitoring Report
Journalism
Situation
in Cambodia**

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This quarterly report from CamboJA is part of our ongoing efforts to monitor and advocate for press freedom in Cambodia. It includes brief summaries of incidents and news updates related to press freedom and freedom of expression of journalists from October-December 2021.

One significant development we have monitored this quarter is the arrest of two journalists covering land protests in Kampot province. Police accused the reporters of incitement to disturb social security and malicious denunciation, however Information Minister Khieu Kanharith said “Arresting them is wrong, it is arbitrary.” Another development in the legal arena is a renewed incitement case against ex-Cambodia Daily reporters Zsombor Peter and Aun Pheap, who have called the charges “bogus.”

CamboJA observed 5 incidents related to the violation of journalists’ rights to free expression during this quarter. Also in this report, we have compiled updates on fake news, online surveillance and gender-sensitive reporting guidelines.

Together for Free Press

Incidents reported in this quarter

Incidents

- 1 **Information Minister rebuffs governor: arresting journalists is ‘wrong’**
- 2 **Kampot residents, journalists released after land dispute arrests**
- 3 **Court hands prison sentences to eight journalists in timber extortion case**
- 4 **Appeals court hears incitement case against ex-Cambodia Daily reporters**
- 5 **Two journalists charged over alleged extortion attempt**
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Safety & Security of Journalists

An environment free from physical and mental hazards is essential for press freedom. Also, people must enjoy freedom of expression through media or any other means without repercussions. In the past quarter, these fundamental freedoms were again threatened by local authorities and the judiciary.

Table 1: Types of Harassment

Types of harassment	No. of incident reported	No. of journalists
Legal action	1	2
Violence/threats	2	2
Detained for questioning	1	2
Imprisonment	1	2
TOTAL	5	8

Summaries of Incidents of Harassment Against Journalists

1. Information Minister Rebuffs Governor: Arresting Journalists Is Wrong (Voice of Democracy)

In a rejection of a provincial leader’s push for hardline monitoring of journalists, the head of the Ministry of Information in mid-November denounced the arbitrary detention of two reporters and urged authorities to more closely cooperate with media workers.

Speaking on Tuesday at a seminar on press guidelines, Information Minister Khieu Kanharith referenced the case of two journalists arrested on Nov. 8 while covering land protests in Kampot province and said independent, nonpartisan media has played an important role in promoting democracy in Cambodia.

“If [journalists] take pictures in front of the provincial hall, why not let them take pictures?” Kanharith said. “Arresting them is wrong, it is arbitrary! So our administration is also abusive, we do not understand! Or, as a provincial governor has said, wherever journalists go, they have to report to the authorities — it is not like this.” Source: <https://bit.ly/3KKpn4l>

2. Kampot residents, journalists released after land dispute arrests (Voice of Democracy)

Two journalists arrested for covering a Kampot land protest were released on November 11 after being detained earlier that week, while three others who were part of the land dispute were released from detention.

Four residents of Chuuk district were arrested on November 7 for alleged violence against the owner of a property. The journalists, from Los Seng News, were arrested on November 8 when protesters demanded the release of the four villagers, which included a 4-year-old child. The child was reunited with his family on November 10.

Los Seng News also confirmed that their journalists, Say Sophea and Ing Thoeun, were released. The two journalists were allowed to make a public apology on Wednesday morning but then swiftly sent them to court for further questioning. Source: <https://bit.ly/33Pfn9v>

3. Court hands prison sentences to eight journalists in timber extortion case (CamboJA)

The Preah Vihear provincial court on October 21 sentenced eight journalists to prison after convicting them of extorting the owners of a timber warehouse in June.

The journalists were arrested shortly after the owner of the warehouse reported the group had been taking photographs without permission in a private area of the warehouse.

Kim Samleng, the provincial court's deputy prosecutor, told CamboJA that seven of the journalists were sentenced to two years in prison but will serve a term of only four months and 20 days, with the rest of their sentence suspended.

The eighth journalist has already been released on bail. The group was arrested June 4 and, the seven who served longer sentences are set to be released October 22.

Noun Phanith, the lawyer representing four among eight journalists, said that even though the court gave his clients the minimum sentence, they still had faced injustice as there was insufficient evidence to convict them of extortion.

Phanith urged journalists to practice ethically and adhere to the national Law on the Press to avoid straying into potentially illegal territory. Source: <https://bit.ly/3fUypxl>

4. Regional appeals court hears incitement case against ex-Cambodia Daily reporters (CamboJA)

Former Cambodia Daily reporters Zsombor Peter and Aun Pheap have called for what they describe as “the bogus charge” of incitement leveled against them in connection to their reporting on the 2017 commune elections to be dismissed.

Their call came after Tboung Khmum province’s Regional Court of Appeal heard the case against the pair on December 16. The hearing followed the Ratanakkiri prosecutor’s office appeal against an earlier decision by the provincial judge to drop charges against the two reporters.

The appeals court on January 4 upheld a lower court’s decision to drop the incitement charges against the two journalists.

Regional appeals court spokesman Tum Sophorn said that unless the prosecutor filed an appeal against the decision, the case against the two reporters would end here.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3nXmLGL>

5. Two journalists charged over alleged extortion bid (Khmer Times)

Phnom Penh Municipal Court on December 23 charged and detained two journalists for allegedly attempting to extort \$600 from the owner of a coffee shop offering illegal online gambling services, in exchange for not reporting on the matter.

Investigating Judge Seng Leang identified the two accused as Un Chantha, 39, the publisher of Reaksmey Krong Takhmao News-Page; and Chhom Dany, 32, the publisher of Kang Meas News-Page.

Judge Leang said that both were charged with “blackmail” under Articles 372 and 373 of the Criminal Code. If convicted, they face from two to five years in prison each.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3KPLM0r>

6. Phnom Penh police ban journalists from broadcasting law enforcement activities live

Phnom Penh police have banned journalists from broadcasting live when the authorities enforce the law on the streets.

Capital police chief Lt. Gen. Sar Thet has instructed all units under the Phnom Penh Municipal Police to strictly forbid the media from recording live streams of law enforcement activities. This instruction was given on October 6, during an online meeting to review police work done last month and plans for this month.

Lt. Gen. Thet also said that if journalists do not comply with instructions from authorities, action must be taken against them because their broadcasts can result in suspects fleeing from being arrested. Source: <https://bit.ly/3rSCGXR>

Reporting in a Hostile Environment — Updates on Cambodia’s Media Situation

Among the many challenges facing Cambodian journalists, the fear of legal trouble continues to be a daily part of the job. Journalists often feel intimidated or threatened by government actions, whether it be police stopping journalists from filming or taking legal actions against them for simply doing their job.

Recorded Cases of Harassment (Jan-Dec 2021)



Total cases of harassment

51

against 93 journalists (5 female)



32 journalists were arrested



10 face other legal actions

18 experienced violence and harassment



7 media licenses were revoked

I. CSOs call on Cambodian authorities to step up the fight against impunity for crimes committed against journalists

CamboJA and eight civil society groups released the following statement on November 2:

On International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, the undersigned civil society organizations, express their 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), 18 were subject to violence, 16 were threatened, eight faced judicial harassment, five were detained for questioning and one female journalist experienced sexual harassment.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3KKdrjm>

II. Cambodia's Internet Gateway Ushers in Silence, Media Say (Voice of America)

Radio reporter Khut Sokun says he is doing less reporting this year. The reason: fear of Cambodia's national internet gateway, which he and others say allows the government to monitor all online activity.

Internet service providers in Cambodia have until February 2022 to redirect all their traffic through a regulatory body, or gateway, known as the NIG.

But since Prime Minister Hun Sen's government issued a regulation, known in Cambodia as a sub-decree, earlier this year, Sokun says he has adopted a "more cautious approach" to his reporting and comments posted online.

Sokun is not alone. Other journalists and rights groups who spoke with VOA say the regulation, which allows for punishment "in accordance with relevant laws," has increased the fear of arrest among media, critics and ordinary citizens.

In a country with limited media freedom, the broad powers outlined in the NIG, including the power to monitor activity and block or disconnect the internet, are seen by many as another tool to suppress voices and increase fear. Source: <https://bit.ly/3C4RS8j>;

III. Info ministry found nearly 2000 cases of fake news since January (Phnom Penh Post)

The Fake News Monitoring Committee at the Ministry of Information has recorded a total of 1,938 cases of fake news items in 2021 with messages allegedly aimed to incite criminal acts, cause social chaos or insult the country's leaders. This indicated a slight increase in activity compared to last year.

According to the committee's report released on December 17, among the 1,938 cases there were 1,023 fake news items intended to incite criticism of the government via disinformation, 809 cases of insults to the King and the nation's leaders and 106 cases of fake news with the potential to cause social chaos.

Ministry spokesman Meas Sophorn told The Post on December 19 that most of the fake news items were posted by a total of 383 social media accounts on platforms like Facebook, TikTok and Youtube or via websites.

The committee also found that 11 media institutions registered with the ministry had published 99 articles with exaggerated contents or without verification. All 99 cases have been forwarded to an inter-ministerial working group for further action.

It is also requesting cooperation from other partners, especially the tech corporations running the social media platforms, to identify all suspects who have spread fake news.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3AzrMKH>

IV. Media professionals call for collaboration to promote the safety of journalists (UNESCO)

In a workshop on November 16 with more than 200 participants from the media community, and the government, UNESCO highlighted the importance to step up collaboration in the establishment of national mechanisms and implementation of collaborative initiatives to ensure the protection of journalists and foster freedom of expression in Cambodia.

Information Minister Khieu Kanharith, described the meeting as “historic” during his opening remarks, referring to the fact that it was the first time that “journalists, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior came together to discuss ways to work hand in hand in the interest of Cambodia’s democracy”.

The workshop organized by the Ministry of Information with support from UNESCO, provided a unique opportunity for the media community and the authorities to discuss the most pressing issues that media workers are facing in the country. Representatives from the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior explained the national legislation related to media and its implementation; and they listened to the challenges and concerns raised by the journalists present at the event.

The discussions at the workshop kicked-off with the presentation about the challenges that Cambodian journalists are facing when performing their work. Mr. Nop Vy, Executive Director of the Cambodian Alliance of Independent Journalists (CamboJA), presented the findings of their monitoring report on the attacks and threats experienced by journalists in the country, and called on the authorities to strengthen collaboration with the media community to ensure a safe environment for media workers. Source: <https://bit.ly/3rK1t0k>

V. Gender-Sensitive Reporting Guideline for Cambodian News Media

CamboJA encourages Cambodian journalists and media professionals to follow the Gender-Sensitive Reporting Guideline, which is developed by fellows of International Training Programme on Media Development in a Democratic Framework (ITP Media) in their practices.

The guideline is to support the media in their efforts to depict the Cambodian news content in a more gender-sensitive and gender-responsive manner, thus contributing to more inclusive and equal reporting of the experiences and the needs of women, girls, boys, men and others in neglected groups.

With this Gender-Sensitive Reporting Guideline, we aim to see more positive and empowered women representation in all forms of news media in Cambodia. Therefore, this guideline can contribute to the reduction of inequality, women’s degradation and marginalization in Cambodia’s society. Source: <https://bit.ly/3nZ1xIG>

VI. Cambodia and China cooperate on media (Khmer Times)

More than 30 media leaders from Cambodia and China have come together to participate in the three-day high-level web seminar held under the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation framework which started October 20, hosted by Cambodian-Chinese Journalists Association (CJC) in collaboration with the China Foundation for Peace and Development.

Soy Sopheap, president of CJC, said within the framework of the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation, CJC has played an important role in disseminating information to the public besides having media engagement between the two countries for a better understanding of the two nations.

Deputy secretary-general of China Foundation for Peace and Development, Wang Hua, encouraged the Cambodian and Chinese media to further enhance cooperation to boost deeper understanding of each other and also the region.

“Understanding and trust are the main factors to build peace between Cambodia, China and the region and media holds a key role,” Wang said. Source: <https://bit.ly/3H52QNo>

VII. Asia-Europe anti-fake news cooperation urged to be strengthened (Khmer Times)

The 10th ASEF Editors’ Roundtable (ASEFERT10) wrapped up and placed a bold cooperation front on fighting against fake news between the two continents – Asia and Europe.

The agreement was made after a range of discussions between media practitioners of the two continents during the two-day event hosted by Cambodia in hybrid format.

Under the theme “Strengthening Cooperation between Journalists in Combating Fake News”, the ASEFERT10 is one of the major side events of the 13th Asia-Europe Summit (ASEM13) being organised by Cambodia on Nov. 25-26. The ASEFERT10 consisted of two plenary sessions and a public forum.

According to a press release of the Ministry of Information, during the first plenary session, editors from both continents shared information, experiences and current state of the spread of fake news in their respective countries.

They also discussed and shared lessons learned and best practices in their respective countries in combating fake news and highlighted the significant roles and responsibilities of journalists in disseminating facts and credible information to the public; encouraging the public to be educated on media literacy; and to train citizen journalists to understand ethics and professionalism. Source: <https://bit.ly/3G1ErXO>

VIII. Kingdom boasts over 2,000 prints, online and TV outlets

The Ministry of Information has updated the number of media institutions that are registered, noting that more than 2,000 outlets have undergone the mandatory process as of the end of 2021. However, the ministry also revoked the licenses of 15 media entities for violating the law or non-renewal by the owners.

Phos Sovann, head of the ministry's General Department of Information and Broadcasting, said most of the licenses that were revoked belonged to online media outlets.

Sovann told The Post on January 5 that there were a total of 2,017 outlets registered, including 706 websites and 81 video news outlets and 23 of those are under foreign-owned.

"We have revoked some licences due to their violations of the law. Some others just expired and some are revoked at the owners' request because they had gone out of business and were no longer broadcasting or publishing," he said.

He also noted that Cambodia has a total of 50 media associations, 193 magazines, 22 bulletin newsletters, 114 printing houses, 22 book publishers and 26 foreign news agencies with local representative offices. Source: <https://bit.ly/3HORkpz>;

IX. Envisioning Media Freedom and Independence: Narratives from Southeast Asia (New Naratif report)

Envisioning Media Freedom and Independence: Narratives from Southeast Asia started in the heart of a challenging year for media freedom in Southeast Asia. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) recorded at least 76 journalists imprisoned and one killed in the region this year, and their World Press Freedom Index ranks 10 out of 11 Southeast Asian countries among the worst 100, with Brunei, Laos, Singapore and Vietnam below 150 out of 180 countries, while only one country, Timor Leste, is ranked above 100.

These large-scale indices, however, only reveal to us a fragment of the challenges of media freedom in Southeast Asia, obscuring the diversity of the region as well as its rich terrain of activism by media workers and outlets. Just as Southeast Asians are not a monolith, different media workers encounter distinct problems. Independent media workers are regularly targeted in attacks by Southeast Asian governments, which prompted us to explore the challenges that they face further. Source: <https://bit.ly/3nZ9ZHK>

X. Human Rights Day: 45 Journalists killed in 2021 and 365 still in prison

To mark International Human Rights Day on December 10, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) published the lists of imprisoned and killed journalists in 2021. According to the Federation's statistics, 45 journalists have been killed since 1 January 2021 and 365 are still behind bars.

The two lists underscore the deepening crisis in journalism, with rights and freedom of journalists under sustained threat in many regions of the world.

According to the two IFJ lists - killed and imprisoned journalists -, 365 journalists are still in jail as of 10 December 2021, up from 235 last year. China (102), Turkey (34), Belarus (29), Eritrea (29), Egypt (27), Vietnam (21), Myanmar (18), Russia (12), Azerbaijan and Yemen (11), Cambodia (10) and Iran (9) are the biggest jailers of journalists.

The crackdown on media professionals in authoritarian regimes, including massive arrests of journalists in Myanmar, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Hong Kong account for the growing number of colleagues behind bars today. Source: <https://bit.ly/3u1hL7S>

XI. World trends in freedom of expression and media development (UNESCO)

Across the world, journalism is under fire. While more individuals have access to content than ever before, the combination of political polarization and technological change have facilitated the rapid spread of hate speech, misogyny, and unverified mis- and disinformation, often leading to disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression. In an ever-growing number of countries, journalists face physical and verbal attacks that threaten their ability to report news and information to the public.

In the face of such challenges, the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development series offers a critical analysis of the trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and the safety of journalists. The Global Report (released every five years) along with the Issue Briefs and other associated publications provide a macro-level perspective that serves as an essential resource for UNESCO Member States, international organizations, civil society groups, academia, and individuals seeking to understand the changing global media landscape. Source: <https://bit.ly/3g4MSa9>



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