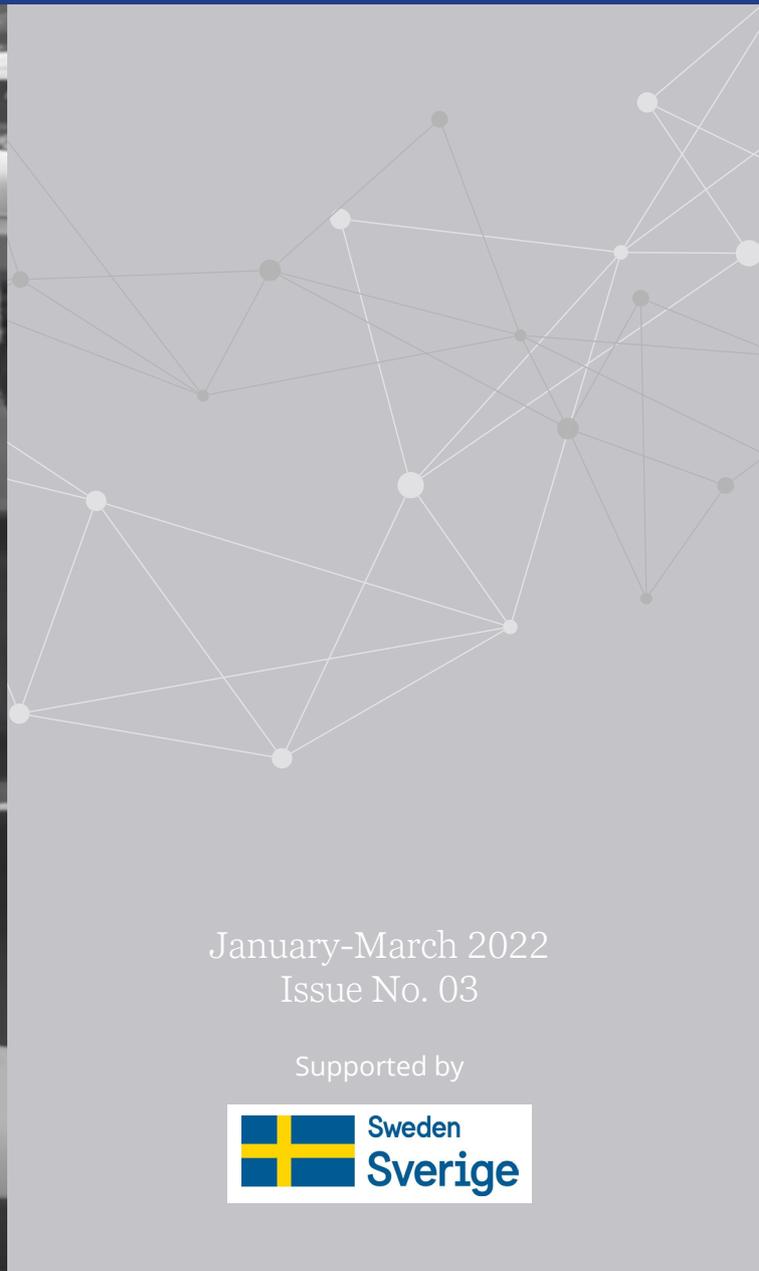




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Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association

Quarterly Monitoring Report

Journalism Situation in Cambodia



January-March 2022
Issue No. 03

Supported by





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 January-March 2022.

One significant development we have monitored this quarter is the arrest of five online journalists broadcasts about a land dispute. Several journalists were also blocked from covering the strike of NagaWorld union members and employees, with authorities forcing them to stop filming and delete photos and videos. And the Information Ministry withdrew licenses from three online media outlets for alleged ethical violations after they reported on corruption cases.

CamboJA observed 5 incidents related to the violation of journalists' right to free expression during this quarter. Also in this report, we have compiled updates on challenges facing independent media and trends in freedom of expression and media development.

Together for Free Press

Incidents reported in this quarter

Incidents

- 1 Five journalists arrested over land dispute broadcast
- 2 News publisher put under court supervision over land dispute broadcast
- 3 Three journalists harassed while covering the resumption strike of Naga World's employees
- 4 Regional Court of Appeal upholds dropping of incitement charges against Ex-Daily reporters
- 5 Information ministry revokes licenses for three digital publications

Updates

- I Groups decry journalists being blocked from covering harassment of union members
- II Independent journalists continue to face challenges in their work
- III Media workers: government failing to follow through on access to information law
- IV CSOs and political parties call on the government to guarantee press freedom for election
- V CamboJA asks court to drop charges against a journalist
- VI Independent journalist criticizes Hun Sen's discipline message
- VII Reporters can apply for ID cards online: Ministry of Information
- VIII Awards aimed to improve journalists' professionalism
- IX Global Report tracks trends in freedom of expression and media development
- X Time to end media inaction over online abuse

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	4	4
Administrative action	1	3
Violence/threats	6	11
Detained for questioning	0	0
Imprisonment	2	5
TOTAL	13	23

Summaries of Incidents of Harassment Against Journalists

1. Five journalists arrested over land dispute broadcast

Five online journalists were arrested by the Kampong Chhnang police on 06 and 07 January 2022 for allegedly inciting people to conduct a protest against the authorities.

Those five journalists included Keo Hour of SBT news, Prak Songha, Chhon Kongdara, Sang Chanthon, and Ouk Parady of MCTV. All five were charged with incitement to commit a felony.

Chan Kunthy, 51, the wife of Sang Chanthon, said the arrests were made after her husband and his colleagues covered a land dispute in Kampong Leng district.

2. News publisher put under court supervision over land dispute broadcast

Los Seng, the publisher of Los Seng News, has been placed under court supervision for six months over a live video report by two staff members in Kampot province.

The two reporters were arrested for covering a protest outside the Kampot provincial hall against the arrests of residents involved in a land dispute.

Information Minister Khieu Kanharith also spoke in November against the arrests, saying, “If [journalists] take pictures in front of the provincial hall, why not let them take pictures?” “Arresting them is wrong, it is arbitrary. So our administration is also abusive,” he added.

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

3. Three journalists harassed while covering the resumption strike of Naga World’s employees

On Friday 11th, March 2022 at 2:30 pm, two VOD journalists and one citizen journalist were harassed by the Phnom Penh authorities while they were covering the resumption strike of Naga World’s employees.

A female journalist of VOD who asked to be anonymous told CamboJA, “The authorities banned me and my ex-pat colleague from taking pictures, asking for our mission letters and forcing us to delete pictures and videos, otherwise, the authorities would bring us to the police station”.

At the same time, there was also pushing and arresting a female citizen journalist, Chray Nim, who is also a member of CamboJA. But she was released after repeatedly arguing that she was not a protester.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3q1IcYl>

4. Regional Court of Appeal upholds dropping of incitement charges against Ex-Daily reporters

Tboung Khmum province’s regional court of appeal on Tuesday upheld a lower court’s decision to drop the incitement charges against former Cambodia Daily journalists Aun Pheap and Zsombor Peter.

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

Pheap, who now lives in the US awaiting the processing of his asylum application, said the court had made the right decision.

“Yes, that is right because I have done nothing wrong,” he told CamboJA via social media on Tuesday evening. “Nomatterwhichcountrywantstotry[mycase],theycannotfindmeguiltybecauseIdidnothing.”

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

5. Information ministry revokes licenses for three digital publications

The Ministry of Information on Tuesday revoked business licenses for three digital media outlets, alleging the publications violated journalistic professional ethics and contracts.

The Information Ministry released a letter dated March 15 stating its legislative committee had decided the three outlets disseminated information that violated journalistic ethics and the outlets’ contracts with the ministry. The media outlets are Bayong Times, KCTV and Cambodia Today.

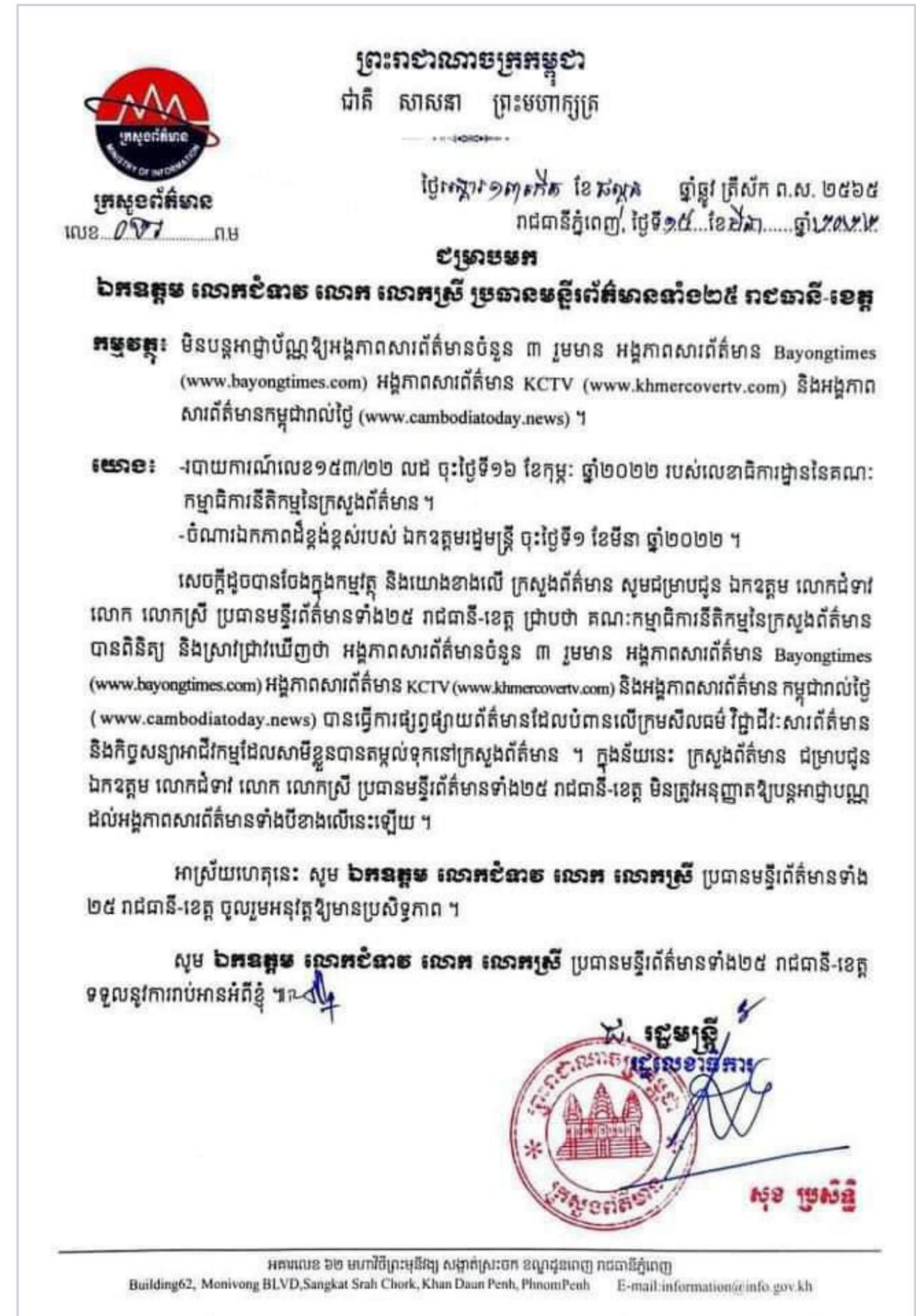
Touch Yuthea, editor-in-chief of Cambodia Today, said the Information Ministry canceled his outlet’s license because he had published an article in early February about civil servants requesting authorities investigate procurement fraud at the Labor Ministry.

According to the civil servants included in the article, a corrupt bidding process involving two outside companies was costing the government millions of dollars per year.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls on Cambodia’s information ministry to immediately restore the licenses it withdrew.

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

RSF: <https://bit.ly/3NxkyNu>



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.

From January to March 2022, CamboJA recorded 13 cases of harassment against 23 journalists (3 female). Five of those journalists were arrested, four faced legal actions, eleven experienced violence and harassment, and three media licenses were stripped.

Recorded Cases of Harassment (Jan-Mar 2022)



I. Groups decry journalists being blocked from covering harassment of union members

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) released a statement condemning the continued impediment and harassment of independent journalists in Cambodia.

“The authorities’ move to block journalists from reporting on the alleged harassment, detainment and sexual assault of peaceful LSRU strikers is a deliberate attempt to further stifle press freedom in the country,” the group said.

Several journalists have been blocked from covering the alleged sexual harassment and detainment of members of the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees of NagaWorld (LRSU) by Cambodian police in Phnom Penh.

Nop Vy, executive director of CamboJA, said: “We call Cambodian government to pay more attention and respecting to press freedom, especially provide full of protection and stop barring journalists from exercising their rights and freedom”.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3tW9y4e>

II. Independent journalists continue to face challenges in their work

Media organizations found that independent journalists are facing hardship in the course of their work to provide true information to the public. However, a government official said that the report does not reflect the press freedom in Cambodia.

The Cambodia Center for Independent Media (CCIM) found that the challenges include political oppression, government pressure, and legal issues. According to CCIM’s Annual Report 2021 on Challenges for Independence Media, released on 10th March 2022, the press freedom situation in Cambodia in 2021 was worse than in 2020.

The media experts and relevant stakeholders do not expect that the media situation would be better in 2022 due to the ongoing political oppression and other laws which give more power to the state to control media outlets in Cambodia.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3q172aF>

III. Media workers: government failing to follow through on access to information law

Media workers in Cambodia say the government has failed to move forward with a law on access to information in line with its stated commitments, despite years of deliberations.

In January 2020, Prime Minister Hun Sen vowed in front of 6,000 journalists that he would push for the draft law on access to information by the end of 2020, while Information Minister Khieu Kanharith vowed to have done by the end of 2021.

The spokesman from the Ministry of Information, Meas Sophorn, said the ministry has already concluded the deliberation on the law with the Ministry of Justice and is waiting for the formal written response regarding the section on prosecution.

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

IV. CSOs and political parties call on the government to guarantee press freedom for election

Civil society groups and political parties urge the government to fully open space for press freedom for the upcoming commune council elections.

Nop Vy, the executive director of the Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA), observed that as the election approaches, independent journalists continue to be discriminated against and intimidated by authorities.

He worried that if such cases continue, journalists will likely not be able to provide accurate and comprehensive information to the voters and relevant stakeholders, who “can never know what the truth is unless the media are fully independent to cover all of what the political parties have raised and their political trends.”

Authorities denied any intimidation of independent media outlets or restrictions on political reporting.

Source: <https://bit.ly/35LWuon>

V. CamboJA asks court to drop charges against a journalist

Cambodian Journalists Alliance (CamboJA) called on the court to drop charges against a journalist who was ordered to pay more than a thousand dollars to military officers involved in a land dispute he reported on.

The statement came after a journalist Pen Noun asked the Ministry of Justice to intervene in a case related to his coverage of land disputes between the two senior military officers and four families in Oddar Meanchey province.

Mr. Pen Noun said that the municipal court of Phnom Penh held a hearing on 06 January without his presence and issued a verdict ordering him to pay 6 million riel (1,450 USD) to the military officers. The Oddar Meanchey provincial court also ordered him to pay compensation to the two plaintiffs.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3hCBkf3>

VI. Independent journalists criticize Hun Sen’s discipline message

Independent media groups criticized Prime Minister Hun Sen after he issued a letter urging state and private media outlets to unite against criticism of the government, which he called fake news.

The message was delivered during an annual meeting between the prime minister and journalists, which was cancelled for the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Independent journalists say the message contradicted principles of press freedom and was intended to deploy the press to serve his political interests.

Journalists and civil society organizations for the promotion of press freedom say the government needs to guarantee full freedom and security for journalists, rather than disciplining or harassing them for doing their work.

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

VII. Reporters can apply for ID cards online: Ministry of Information

The Ministry of Information has set up an online portal (<https://media.inb.gov.kh>) to help reporters apply for press ID cards.

Ministry of Information spokesman Phos Sovann said yesterday that reporters across Cambodia can now get press cards from the ministry in the wake of complaints that local authorities were not cooperating with journalists without the MOI-issued credentials.

Media companies will have to register for press ID cards for their staff or reporters, making it easier for local authorities to recognize reporters.

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



VIII. Awards aimed to improve journalists’ professionalism

Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith said the establishment of the Gratitude Awards for journalists of five generations – from the 1970s to today – is intended to link veteran journalists with the younger generation, to encourage them to befriend one another, share experiences and develop their professionalism.

He made the remarks while presiding over the handover ceremony of the awards held at the ministry on March 24.

“We want journalists to help each other and adhere to professional ethics. Ethics are like a bullet-proof vest in this industry. Provided their moral integrity is up to the task, they play a crucial role in society,” Kanharith said.

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

IX. Global Report tracks trends in freedom of expression and media development

Over the past five years, approximately 85 percent of the world’s population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country.

That was the takeaway from the latest Global Report, published every four years since 2014, providing a macro-level perspective on the world’s changing global media landscape.

Even in countries with long traditions of safeguarding free and independent journalism, financial and technological transformations have forced news outlets, especially those serving local communities, to close.

With readership and advertising markets moving online, advertising revenue for newspapers plummeted by nearly half in the ten-year period ending in 2019.

The subsequent COVID-19 pandemic and its global economic impact have exacerbated this trend, now threatening to create an “extinction-level” event for independent journalism outlets.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3DxwUk5>

X. Time to end media inaction over online abuse

Urgent action is needed to tackle the widespread online abuse and harassment faced by women journalists around the world, according to the International Federation of Journalists.

The call comes after the results of two global surveys, launched on 7 March, exposed a serious lack of action among media companies.

On the eve of International Women's Day, the IFJ launched the results of two surveys conducted in early 2022 to assess the work of trade unions and media organizations in tackling online abuse.

The findings show that :

- Two-thirds of the respondents claimed online harassment was not a priority for their media company, and 44% said the issue was not even discussed.
- Only a fifth of respondents said their media adopted a protocol or mechanism that allows women journalists and media workers to report online abuse and be supported and protected in such cases.

“Too many women journalists, in particular freelancers, are affected by online abuse and leave social media to avoid further harassment,” IFJ Gender Council chair Maria Angeles Samperio said. “It is time to introduce clear mechanisms in the media to show a zero-tolerance against media abuse”.

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



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