

Joint Statement: Media and civil society groups deeply disturbed by government’s decision to revoke VOD’s media license and the sexual harassment of a female reporter

Phnom Penh, February 13, 2023 – We, the undersigned media and civil society organizations, are deeply disturbed by Prime Minister Hun Sen’s [order](#) to revoke the license of Voice of Democracy (VOD), one of the last remaining independent media outlets in Cambodia. We also condemn the recent sexual harassment and intimidation of a female VOD journalist.

The closure of VOD and the harassment of a female VOD journalist undermine the government’s own claims regarding respect for the free press in Cambodia and appear to reflect a failure to uphold the 1995 Law on the Press. The decision to revoke VOD’s media license ahead of the July 2023 national elections represents a fresh wave of intimidation tactics against the country’s dwindling independent media that mirrors the 2017 closure of the *Cambodia Daily* and the 2018 sale of the *Phnom Penh Post*.

On February 9, VOD published an [article](#) in Khmer quoting government spokesperson H.E. Phay Siphon as saying that, “it is not wrong for Hun Manet to play his father’s role in providing aid to Turkey.” H.E. Hun Manet later denied playing that role [on his social media](#), and requested an immediate correction and for VOD to provide evidence of his signature on the document authorizing aid.

On February 11, Prime Minister Hun Sen posted [on his Facebook page](#) demanding that VOD issue a public apology to the government and his son within 72 hours, or else he said he would order the Ministry of Information to revoke VOD’s media license. On February 12, Hun Sen [made another Facebook post](#) shortening the deadline to 10 a.m., February 13.

Prime Minister Hun Sen’s arbitrary deadline signals a serious threat to all independent media and journalists in Cambodia. Cambodia has existing laws for how to deal with an alleged misquote or factual error in a media report. Article 10 of Cambodia’s Press Law states that people have the right to demand a retraction and reply from a publisher when they believe a statement is false, and a publisher must reply within seven days. There is also a right to sue for defamation and libel.

Prime Minister Hun Sen’s apparent decision to not use this law, and instead revoke the license of VOD, as well as Minister of Information [Khieu Kanharith’s subsequent Facebook post](#) declaring it a “lesson” for other media, suggests that the move was made to silence one of the few remaining independent news publications in the country ahead of the national election.

Already, as of the morning of February 13, access to VOD's websites - both Khmer and English - appears to have been blocked by major internet service providers and mobile service providers within Cambodia.

We call on the government to resolve the issue in a calm, professional and respectful manner that is in line with Cambodian law and that does not do lasting damage to Cambodia's media landscape. We believe that the closure of VOD would represent a grave step backwards for both press freedoms and the rule of law in Cambodia.

Moreover, we rebuke the abusive and misogynistic language used by Mr. Pheng Vannak and others on social media against the female reporter who authored the VOD article in question. We hope the government, through relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, will join us in calling for Mr. Vannak and others to apologize to the reporter in question and to stop his blatant acts of sexual harassment directed towards female reporters.

No journalist should ever be attacked as a result of their work or identity.

The role of independent media is indispensable to democracy. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has stressed that a free media is essential to democratic processes and should be allowed to operate without restraint.

We hope the government acknowledges the essential role of VOD and its journalists, along with the remaining independent media outlets in the country, and their right to do their work in accordance with the law and without fear of intimidation and harassment.

This statement was endorsed by:

1. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
2. Cambodian Female Journalists (CFJ)
3. Overseas Press Club of Cambodia (OPCC)
4. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
5. The Alliance of Independent Journalists/AJI (Indonesia)
6. National Union of Journalists of the Philippines/NUJP (Philippines)
7. The Center for Independent Journalism (Malaysia)
8. Gerakan Media Merdeka/Geramm (Malaysia)
9. Freedom Film Network (Malaysia)
10. Journalist Association Timor Leste/AJTL (Timor Leste)
11. Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ)
12. Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club (TFCC)
13. The International Federation of Journalists (Asia-Pacific)

14. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
15. The Cambodian Youth Network Association (CYN)
16. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
17. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
18. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
19. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
20. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
21. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
22. Cambodian Informal Economy Workers Association (CIWA)
23. Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)
24. The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
25. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC)
26. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
27. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
28. Cambodian Institute for Democracy
29. Jakarta Foreign Correspondents Club (JFCC)
30. Kanopi hijau, Indonesia
31. MilkTeaAlliance Calendar Team, regional/ transnational
32. International Dialogue (IID)
33. ALTSEAN-Burma, Myanmar
34. Innovation for Change-East Asia, Bangkok, Thailand
35. MilkTeaAlliance Friends of Myanmar, Myanmar
36. Asia Democracy Network (ADN), South Korea
37. DAKILA, Philippines
38. Ruang MES 56, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
39. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
40. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
41. Solidarity House (SH)
42. EngageMedia, Asia-Pacific
43. Cambodia Labor Confederation (CLC)
44. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
45. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
46. Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUFI)
47. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
48. Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand, (FCCT) Professional Committee
49. Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines (FOCAP)
50. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
51. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
52. Areng Indigenous Community (Koh Kong)
53. BoeungPramCommunity (Battambang)

54. Bos Snor Community (Tbong Khmum)
55. Charay Indigenous Community (Ratanakkiri)
56. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
57. Chi Kha Leu Land Community (Koh Kong)
58. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
59. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
60. Khmer Thavrak
61. Klaing Toek 78 Community (Siem Reap)
62. Koh Sralao Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
63. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
64. Land Community (Pailin)
65. Lor Peang Community (Kampong Chhnang)
66. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
67. Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC)
68. Ou Vor Preng Community (Battambang)
69. Peam Ros Community (Kampong Speu)
70. Phnom Krom Community (Siem Reap)
71. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
72. Prek Ksach Land Community (Koh Kong)
73. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
74. Prey Peay Land Community (Kampot)
75. Samaki Chek Meas Community (Svay Rieng)
76. Samaki Romeas Haek Community (Svay Rieng)
77. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
78. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
79. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
80. Sre Prang Community (Tboung Khmum)
81. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
82. Thmar Da Community (Pursat)
83. Tonlung Community (Tboung Khmum)
84. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut Organization -STT
85. Federation of Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
86. NARA-Youth, the Philippines
87. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
88. Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP)
89. PDP Center
90. Transparency International Cambodia
91. Reporters Without Border (RSF)
92. Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, Africa
93. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)

94. Women Peace Makers (WPM)
95. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
96. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC)
97. The Pulitzer Center
98. Building Community Voices