

Joint Statement

Government advances censorship of critical news sites in the lead-up to national elections.

Phnom Penh, July 18, 2023– We, the undersigned institutions, express serious concern over the government’s decision to block critical media websites and a public database ahead of the national election as a serious violation of the people’s right to information.

Last week, the Ministry of Information ordered the Telecommunications Regulator of Cambodia (TRC) to block the websites and social media pages of several independent media outlets and a public database. This decision is an attempt to prevent people from accessing news and information from websites and social media pages that publish reports holding the government accountable. The TRC’s order implies that the censorship is due to critical coverage, claiming that the media outlets and database publish information that “affect the government’s honor and prestige.”

The ministry’s blocking of sites has restricted access to websites and social media pages associated with the Cambodia Daily and Radio Free Asia, and the public database, Kamnotra, which is run by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM).

In the lead up to the national election, which will be held on Sunday, July 23, 2023, we have seen a concerted effort to suppress Cambodian citizens’ rights, especially the right to access information.

“Information is very crucial in democratic society for people to make informed decisions. Blocking those websites will affect people’s right to information which is guaranteed by laws. It also affects the works of journalists who are working hard to make everyone well-informed,” said CCIM Media Director Ith Sothoeuth.

While the government [claimed](#) that CCIM’s Kamnotra was operating as a news outlet without a media license, Sothoeuth says that Kamnotra is not a media outlet but a database compiling already published government documents, data and information.

“At this critical time before the election, access to information should be encouraged and information from all sides should be allowed. The goal of Kamnotra is to compile all the public records and put them in an easy format for everyone to access. It is a big loss to the public that it is blocked along with other sites,” he continued.

People have the right to access accurate information from different news sources, and governments have the responsibility to ensure access to them. These instances all point towards the government’s agenda to withhold information from people in the days leading up to the national election.

These actions also come in the wake of the government's decision to shut down the country's largest independent media outlet, Voice of Democracy (VOD), by revoking its license in February and [ordering](#) internet service providers to block VOD's Khmer and English websites.

"Critical information is more than important during and ahead of the coming election," remarked Nop Vy, Executive Director of CamboJA. "Banning access to diverse sources of information may have an impact on the integrity of the election and voter's right to access to information," he said.

For more information, please contact:

Nop Vy, Executive Director of Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)

Tell: (+855) 12 519 261 (Signal)

Email: ed@camboja.net

This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
2. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
3. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
4. National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP)
5. Overseas Press Club of Cambodia (OPCC)
6. Association Journalist Timor Leste
7. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (Indonesia)