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*Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association*



# Journalism Situation in Cambodia

## Quarterly Monitoring Report

July - September 2023 | Issue No. 09



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# Introduction and Summary

As the government of Cambodia moves to control and censor media outlets, both in print and online, the prevalence of harassment and intimidation of journalists places substantial constraints on journalistic freedom and safety, curbing their ability to report freely and without fear of reprisal.

Journalists in Cambodia experience harassment and threats against both themselves and the media outlets they work for. It is essential to document these instances to bring attention to this critical issue.

This quarterly report from CamboJA serves as a crucial tool in recording and evaluating trends and developments in the state of press freedom in Cambodia. It 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, freedom of expression, and freedom from harassment over the period of July–September 2023.

Freedom of press is the cornerstone of every democracy. Independent media outlets and journalists act as watchdogs- holding those in power accountable, promoting transparency, and encouraging the free flow of information from diverse perspectives. Freedom of press empowers citizens by providing them with accurate and reliable information.

This quarter, ahead of the July 2023 elections, journalists in Cambodia faced a new wave of harassment, compounding on the trends observed in previous quarters. We have documented at least six journalists who were targeted by authorities on the day of the election, in addition to many other incidents affecting press freedom that occurred throughout the quarter.

Significant developments we have recorded and monitored during this quarter are an increase in harassment and continued government orders to internet service providers to block access to several online media outlets in the time period leading up to and during the election. Additionally, CamboJA reported the release of a journalist in Battambang province after two years in prison, and the establishment of the National Committee for Information and Public Opinion Coordination.

This quarter, which covers the period of July to September 2023, CamboJA recorded nine cases of harassment against 14 journalists (two of whom are female) and three media outlets had their website blocked.

This quarter saw an increase in online censorship of independent media outlets, especially note-worthy in the wake of the closure of Voice of Democracy (VOD). The period leading up to the election, as well as the day of the election, also saw a sharp uptick in cases of harassment against journalists, as authorities and others attempted to prevent journalists from covering the news.

We aim to recognize, record, and address the dangers faced by journalists through this report. Journalists have the right to work without fear. As you read through the report, we encourage you to reflect on the journalism situation in Cambodia and the importance of freedom of press.

# SUMMARY GRAPHICS OF ALL INCIDENTS OF HARASSMENT AGAINST JOURNALISTS RECORDED FROM JULY TO SEPTEMBER



## PHYSICAL SAFETY

**0 cases**  
Attack on equipment & personal belongings



Attack on equipment & personal belongings

**0 cases**  
Physical assault



Physical assault

**6 cases**  
10 journalists



Verbal intimidation



## DIGITAL SAFETY

**1 case**  
3 websites



Website blocked

**0 cases**  
Online sexual harassment



Online sexual harassment

**0 cases**  
Online bullying



Online bullying



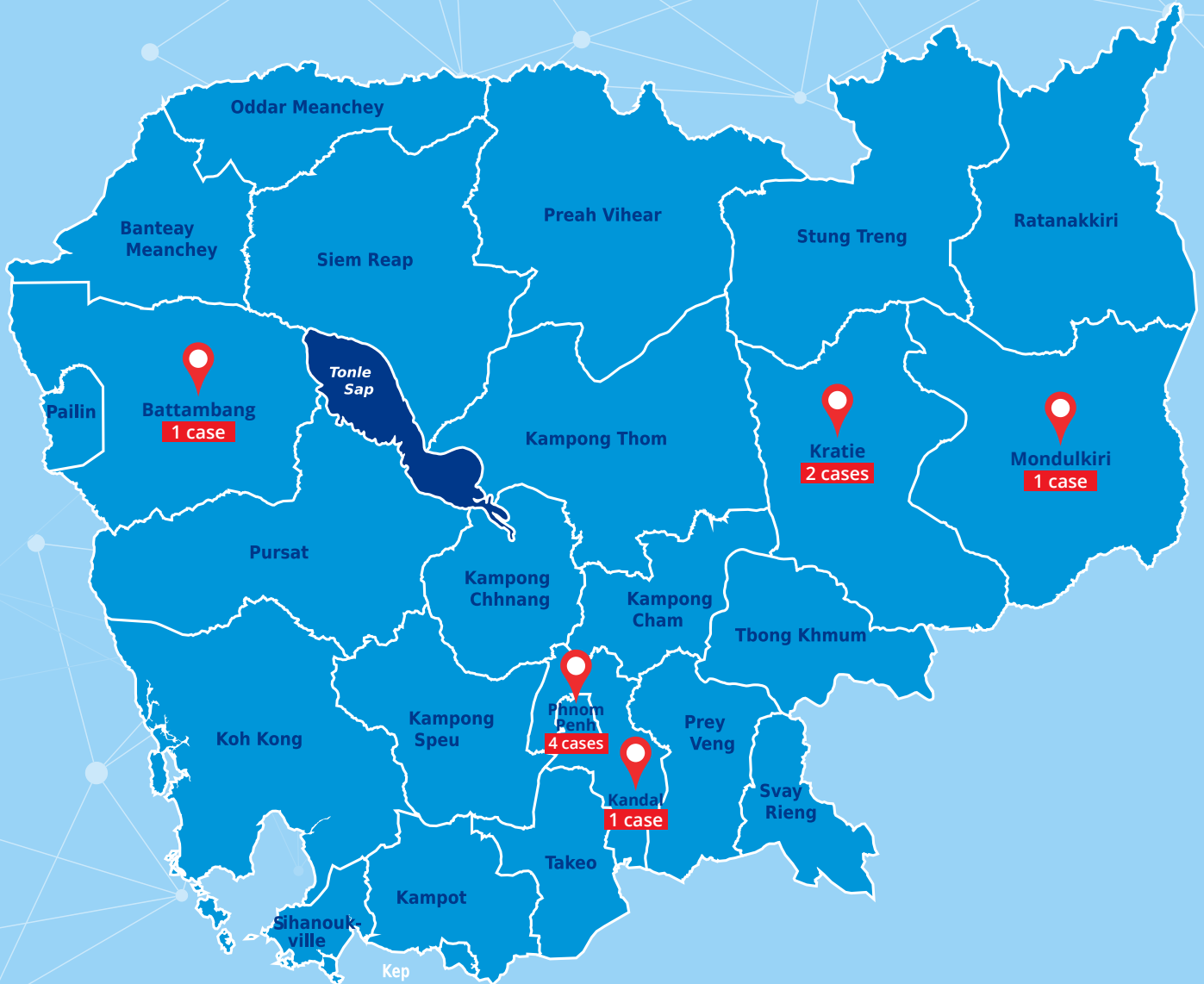
## LEGAL SAFETY

**2 cases**  
affected 4 journalists



Legal intimidation

# Incident Locations



## Definitions of Key Terms

Some key terms used in this report are defined as follows:

**Journalists** includes media workers such as reporters, freelancers, photojournalists, citizen journalists, support staff and fixers, and others with press cards from the Ministry of Information or ID cards from their own outlets. It does not include social media users without any of these professional credentials.

**Harassment** cases cover all types of attacks, from violence to threats, arrest, jailing, legal actions, and revoked licenses. **Legal action** means legal or judicial actions against journalists, including complaints and summons for questioning.

**Revoked license** means the Ministry of Information has officially withdrew the license of a specific media outlet.

**Violence** covers physical violence and threats of physical violence.

**Intimidation** covers cases in which authorities have threatened arrest, legal action or other measures in an attempt to prevent information from being published, or to block journalists from accessing information.

**Discrimination** covers cases in which officials or organizations have singled out independent media outlets for different treatment or barred access to information to journalists seen as critical of the government.

**Detention** means detained for questioning for a period from a few hours to overnight, but not charged and imprisoned.

**Imprisonment** means placed in jail for pre-trial detention on specific charges or imprisoned after conviction.





## This Quarter in Context

In this quarter, which covers the period of July to September 2023, CamboJA recorded nine cases of harassment against 14 journalists (two of whom are female).

## Timeline of all incidents that occurred during this quarter

21  
Sept

### Kratie Province

Local authorities questioned the organizers of a Cambodia Journalism Association (CamboJA) training course on journalistic ethics.

15  
Sept

### Phnom Penh

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) threatened legal action against CamboJA.

22  
Aug

### Phnom Penh

VOA reporter kicked out of national assembly press conference.

30  
Aug

### Kratie Province

Two media outlets forced to take down an article accusing a military official of polluting a public lake in Kratie.

9  
Aug

### Battambang Province

Koh Santepheap News Agency faced harassment while reporting on Stung Sangke water pollution.

23  
Jul

### Phnom Penh

Six journalists restricted from covering the news during the 2023 election, some questioned by election officials while interviewing vice-president of the Candlelight Party.

14  
Jul

### Mondulkiri Province

Three reporters from CamboJA questioned by authorities while covering the social land concessions that affect indigenous people.

12  
Jul

### Phnom Penh

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

# Incidents Reported This Quarter

## 1. Local police question journalistic ethics training course leaders

**September 21, 2023, Kratie Province**

Commune police in Kratie Province questioned the organizers of a Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA) training course on journalist ethics. Two commune police officers requested the training agenda, took pictures of the training, and asked for the participant list.

The police also asked for the trainer's name, the number of participants, where the participants were from, and the purpose of the training.

The police said that it is normal procedure in the province to know about all gatherings, meetings, and workshops conducted by political parties, NGOs and associations.

The organizers refused to provide the participant list, but agreed to give the police the meeting agenda and pictures of the training.

"This is an order from the provincial police chief," said a police officer in civilian clothes who was taking notes.

The police left the venue after the questioning.

However, since the agenda mentioned the representative from UNESCO, the police officers came back again asking to see the UNESCO's representative.

The police left the venue after an explanation about the absence of UNESCO's representative.

CamboJA provided the training to 30 journalists (2 female) who are from Kratie, Preah Vihea, Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, and Mondul Kiri Provinces. In the two days of training, journalists are expected to learn basic news writing and journalistic ethics. This training is part of CamboJA's project to provide capacity building to a local chapter based in Kratie Province.

CamboJA finished the same training for 28 journalists in Siem Reap Province from 30 to 31 August. Attendants were part of the local chapter network base in Battambang.



**Type of harassment:** Verbal intimidation

**Source:** Interviewed by CamboJA

## 2. Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries threatens CamboJA with possible legal action

September 15, 2023, Phnom Penh

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) sent a letter to the editor of CamboJA news. In the letter, MAFF alleged that CamboJA News had breached journalistic ethics by making unsubstantiated claims and speculating in a recently-published article.

The letter was written in response to an article CamboJA had published the previous day, on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The article, titled “Family of Violently Beaten Government Critic Seeks Justice,” covered the assault of a vocal critic of government policies and the aftermath of the attack.

The letter requested CamboJA’s editorial team remove the name of the MAFF Minister, Dith Tina, as well as other “unsubstantiated claims and speculation” from the article. MAFF asserted that these claims could negatively affect the reputation of MAFF and the minister, and that the article was written deliberately to portray MAFF in a negative light.

MAFF threatened to take legal action against CamboJA, if the request was denied or if CamboJA acted on “malicious intentions and defamatory speculations” again. MAFF warned that this could lead CamboJA to the same outcome as VOD, meaning revoking CamboJA’s license.

After consulting with a lawyer and the editorial team, CamboJA made the decision to remove the name Dith Tina from the article, as well as corrected a source’s name and the name of the Associate Editor to avoid legal action that would result in its license being revoked.

**Type of harassment:** legal intimidation

**Source:**

1. MAFF’s letter
2. <https://tinyurl.com/2p9e9s7j>

### 3. VOA reporter kicked out of national assembly press conference

August 22, 2023, Phnom Penh

On August 22, 2023, Cambodia's national assembly was voting to elect Hun Manet, the son of outgoing premier Hun Sen, as the country's next prime minister.

Lib Lib, a reporter for VOA, was at the national assembly to attend the press conference and report on the vote. He was able to enter the conference space before the press conference began.

Around 8:10 a.m., Lib Lib said national assembly officials kicked him out of the event. They did not give a reason, even when Lib Lib asked them why he was not allowed.

Lib Lib was permitted to stay in the press room but was not allowed access to the conference space where the press conference was taking place.

The other reporters and videographers were allowed to stay. Lib Lib, the only reporter there from the US-backed media outlet Voice of America (VOA), was the only reporter that was forced out of the conference space.

VOA and reporters were previously denied access to the press conference held by Prime Minister Hun Sen in November 2022, following the ASEAN summit in Cambodia.

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Information, Meas Sophorn, said that reporters from the two news outlets "never attended" the press conferences, and they allegedly "cut only a few points" from the conference speeches to publish.

the following picture was taken by Lib Lib, a VOA reporter, before he was kicked out of the conference room.



**Type of harassment:** Verbal intimidation, physical intimidation

**Source:** Interviewed by CamboJA

## 4. Two media outlets forced to take down an article accusing a military official of polluting a public lake

August 30, 2023, Ratanakiri Province

Two journalists from online news sites, RSE-News and Newnetwork, in Ratanakiri Province were sued by Kratie provincial military authorities, on charges of incitement and defamation. This occurred after the media outlets repeatedly reported about land filling in some parts of the public lake in the Snuol district of Kratie Province.

Mr. Song Kimheng, director of Reachsey Isan news and Mr. Thy Mou, director of Newnetwork-news confirmed that they received a summons letter from the commune police chief on August 15, 2023. The letter was issued by Kratie provincial court, and had an order to appear at the court on August 30, 2023.

Both RSE News and Newnetwork News repeatedly reported that Mr. Yan Sovann, who was identified as a military official in Snuol District, had polluted the public lake by filling it to develop a resort and KTV club. The lake is known for being built during the Pol Pot regime, and mostly is used in service of the interest of indigenous people in the area.

Mr. Song Kimheng said that he reported on the case on July 27, 2023, by interviewing with people involved. He said that after the report, the provincial governor instructed Kratie Provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology to investigate the case, but it remains unsolved.

Kimheng said he continued to report on the case through July 30, 2023. Two weeks later, he received a summons from Kratie provincial court to appear at the court on August 30, 2023.

According to Kimheng, Yan Sovann asked them to either remove the article or face legal consequences. Kimheng said the complaint was withdrawn after they agreed to remove the article.

**Type of harassment:** Legal intimidation

**Source:** Interviewed by CamboJA



## 5. Koh Santepheap News Agency in Battambang Province faces harassment while reporting on Stung Sangke water pollution

**August 9, 2023, Battambang Province**

Chhom Pisamay, a 52-year-old agent for the Koh Santepheap newspaper in Battambang province, was the subject of harassment from Battambang provincial authorities who threatened to file a complaint against him after he repeatedly reported on a Chinese factory in Stung Sangke that caused water pollution in surrounding areas.

Mr. Pisamay said that on August 9, 2023, a police officer from the Battambang Provincial Police called to tell him that the governor of Battambang Province, Mr. Sok Loo, had ordered the police to investigate his background. They said it was done to prepare an incitement complaint regarding his reports about the pollution of the Sangkae River by a Chinese factory. The police officer said that it impacted the authorities.

Mr. Pisamay made a series of reports, both on the Koh Santepheap news website and on his own Facebook page, criticizing the authorities for failing to deal with the river pollution.

On August 10, 2023, the Ministry of Environment was shown evidence that the Chinese factory, Phoenix Industry Co., Ltd, located in Phcheav village, Treng commune, Rattanak Mondul District, Battambang Province, really was causing water pollution in the Stung Sangkae river. After the media reported on the problem, they revealed a loss to the river's water biodiversity, as well as the fact that it had affected many people's livelihood. The Ministry fined the factory \$ 400,000 and ordered it to move at least 10 kilometers from the mouth of the Stung Sangkae River.

**Type of harassment:** Verbal intimidation, legal intimidation

**Source:**

1. Interviewed by CamboJA
2. <https://tinyurl.com/5h5j6s4y>
3. <https://tinyurl.com/yv84mdhe>

## 6. Journalists restricted from covering news during 2023 election

July 23, 2023, Phnom Penh

During the election, at least ten journalists faced restrictions while covering the news. Polling station officials confronted them, often preventing them from taking photos and conducting interviews inside the polling station. Some journalists were allowed to continue working after refusing to stop, but many were still barred from entering the polling stations altogether. In some cases, polling officials even took pictures of the journalists for a report.

At about 9 a.m. in the morning, FUNCINPEC party president Prince Norodom Chakravuth went to vote at Veal Sbov pagoda, Veal Sbov commune, Chbar Ampov district. A group of photographers and videographers were banned from entering the voting room to take pictures of him as he went to vote, despite having media passes issued by the the National Election Committee (NEC).

Photographers were required to stay outside where it was hard to take pictures, a photographer who asked not to be named told *CamboJA*. He said that photographers were told only to stand far from the room to take pictures. "I told [NEC official] that we could take pictures of Hun Sen and Hun Manet and why could we not do that here?" He continued: "I have a media pass issued by NEC, why couldn't I get inside to take pictures?"

Uon Chhin, *CamboJA*'s video producer, said that at 11:25 a.m., he was also at Veal Sbov polling station. While taking a video, a bodyguard for FUNCINPEC president Prince Chakravuth repeatedly threatened to throw away his mobile phone, accusing him of approaching and touching the prince while taking photos of him.

"I'm gonna slap your phone down if you touch him [Prince Norodom Chakravuth] once again," a bodyguard warned, as quoted by Chhin.

Chhin quickly denied the allegation, saying that he did not touch the prince. He replied "No, I didn't touch anyone." Then, the bodyguard said, "Three times already!"

Sun Narnin, a reporter from VOA, said he was banned by an election official from taking pictures and interviewing people at a polling station. Narnin said at the polling station Phsar Thmey<sup>2</sup>, the NEC officials first told him not take pictures, but after advocating for himself, he was allowed to take pictures but not to interview people in the polling station.

He said he showed those officials his media pass issue by NEC. “We did not enter the room to take photos, we stood outside, but they did not allow it. The station where I went to cover the news is located on the street and they did not allow me to interview voters there,” he said.

Similarly, CamboJA’s news association editor, Leila Goldstein, was banned by election workers from taking pictures in the Toul Sleng Primary School polling station in Phnom Penh’s Tuol Svay Prey I Commune.

“I was told in two different rooms/polling stations by election workers that I was not allowed to be in the room or take pictures,” she said.

Leila said the election workers asked her to leave the station, but she refused.

“I refused to leave and then they went and talked to the people in charge and then stopped bothering me,” she added.

**Type of harassment:** Verbal intimidation, physical intimidation

**Source:** Interviewed by CamboJA

## 7. Reporters questioned by election officials while interviewing vice-president of of the Candlelight Party

July 23, 2023, Kandal Province

Three reporters from VOA and CamboJA were questioned by the head of a polling station in Kandal Province, while they were interviewing the vice president of the Candlelight Party, Rong Chun.

Sovan Sreypech, a CamboJA reporter, said she and two other reporters from VOA went to cover news at the Talon Secondary School polling station in Sa Ang district, Kandal Province, where the vice president of the Candlelight Party, Rong Chun, went to vote.

She said that while interviewing, police asked the head of the polling station about the journalists present at the polling station.

She said the head of the polling station then approached the journalists, and asked where the journalists were from. After questioning the journalists, the head of the polling station took pictures of her and the others for a report.

Lib Lib, a reporter from VOA, said he also went to the polling station at Talon Secondary School. He said the reporters asked permission from the head of the polling station to take pictures and interview in the polling station.

He said while interviewing, the head of polling station took pictures of the reporters.

**Type of harassment:** Verbal intimidation, legal intimidation

**Source:** Interviewed by CamboJA

## 8. Three reporters from CamboJA questioned by authorities while covering news in Modulkiri

July 14, 2023, Modulkiri Province

Around 10:00 a.m., a mix of authorities from Koh Nhek District, Modulkiri Province questioned CamboJA reporters who were covering the social land concessions. The authorities planned to cut off 6,000 hectares of Koh Nhek district in the Yor Leu village area, affecting the indigenous people living there.

Authorities asked the reporters, “Why did you come to this area? Why did you come here on the same day that the authorities did? Who informed you? Which institution are you from?”

A man who was identified as an official from Koh Nhek District Hall approached the reporters and shouted out loudly, “Why was a foreigner in the forest? Why didn’t you inform the authorities first?” The officer continued, “If you have a problem, who is responsible?”

Next, the authorities took pictures of the reporters. Another officer came and asked, “Why did you [reporters] come here without an invitation? And who provided you with the information?”

The indigenous people celebrated their religious ceremony to pray that the authorities do not take away their community’s forest land, and CamboJA’s reporters covered the events.

“This program is for the community and the ministry, why did the journalists come too?” authorities said.

“We told the story without any controversy, just telling the facts of what happened, we came to follow up and get the news.” one journalist replied.

**Type of harassment:** Verbal intimidation

**Source:** Interviewed by CamboJA

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

July 12, 2023, Phnom Penh

The Telecommunications Regulator of Cambodia (TRC) was ordered by the Ministry of Information to block the websites and social media pages of several independent media outlets and a public database.

The TRC's order implies that the censorship is due to coverage that was critical of the government, claiming that the media outlets and database publish information that "affects the government's honor and prestige."

Blocking these 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 was held on Sunday, July 23, 2023, the government moved to suppress Cambodian citizens' rights, particularly the right to access information.

**Type of harassment:** Digital intimidation

**Source:** <https://tinyurl.com/yc73e8kc>

## Key Updates

### 1. Government forms committee to monitor public opinion and promote positive image of Cambodia

The government formed a committee to strengthen public opinion and monitor information in the country, and advocates are concerned the government body will hinder freedom of expression and the press.

The new sub-decree made public on Tuesday established the National Committee for Information and Public Opinion Coordination. They are charged with “monitoring and tracking” all situations, as well as explaining and protecting the “positive image of the Kingdom of Cambodia.” Additional responsibilities include promoting “the prestige” of Cambodia inside and outside the country, disseminating information about the country’s achievements, defending national sovereignty, and collaborating with the media to share content.

The sub-decree specifically stipulates that the government body will set up a mechanism to respond to “false information” more efficiently.

The creation of this committee has led some activists to worry that it will increase monitoring of information, leading to issues regarding freedom of press and freedom of expression.

**Source:** <https://tinyurl.com/2s9wtw8w>

## 2. Journalist released after two years in prison

Koa Piseth, an online journalist from Battambang Province, was released on July 14, 2023, after two years in prison.

He was arrested after publicly criticizing the government's use of Chinese-made vaccines to inoculate the population against COVID-19.

This arrest brings the number of journalists arrested in 2021 for reporting about the government's response to the pandemic up to four.

Piseth, who has been working as a journalist for more than eight years, was arrested and charged with incitement to commit a felony in 2021.

Piseth told CamboJA on August 2, 2023, that the accusation against him was unfair: "There is no point accusing me of incitement to commit a crime because no one followed me," he said.

Piseth said he continues to work as a journalist and continues to report on sensitive issues that other media outlets cannot.

"I am still working as a journalist. I am now applying for the press card from the Ministry of Information, but I am not sure if I will be granted one," he said.

Piseth has been working for many media outlets such as Siem Reap News Agency, National Market Newspaper, and National Social Promotion News.

**Source:** <https://tinyurl.com/be47jyy7>



## Case Study: The Government Orders Internet Providers to Block Media Outlets, Kamnotra Database

On July 12, 2023, the Cambodian government issued an order to internet service providers (ISPs) to block access to the websites and social media pages of three prominent media outlets within the country.

The affected outlets were the Cambodia Daily, Radio Free Asia (RFA), and the newly launched public database Kamnotra, which was operated by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM).

The order has led to further restrictions on Cambodia's online space, affecting voter's access to information from a variety sources, while Cambodia is adopting the democracy principle.

The prevalence of online censorship poses significant challenges to journalistic freedom and safety in Cambodia. Journalists face harassment, and media outlets are subjected to government actions, leading to self-censorship out of fear of reprisals.

This restricts their ability to report freely and hinders their capacity to provide the public with unbiased information.

"Banning internet access to the independent media outlets which have been producing critical content has impacted the freedom of information and access to information for Cambodian people," said Nop Vy, Executive Director of CamboJA. "People should have guaranteed access to diversified content, then they can exercise their rights properly. The limitation to the platforms has created an impact on the freedom of the press, media pluralism should be a guarantee as well."

Since the run-up to the 2018 election, Cambodia's online media landscape has undergone significant change. In 2017, needs spaces in between words existence of several independent news outlets. However, throughout the period of 2017-2023, those outlets, faced by forced closures and government censorship, were slowly whittled away until only a few remain.

Cambodia's online media landscape is now dominated by a small group of government-connected individuals, limiting political views expressed in the media to a generally pro-government stance. This also places constraints on independent journalists and their ability to accurately report the news.

As it stands, there are very few independent media outlets left in Cambodia.

As threats against independent media outlets continue, press freedom continues to decline. This creates a situation where the public is not well-informed or empowered in their electoral decision-making.

On the 2023 [World Press Freedom Index](#), a monitoring index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) that measures the degree of freedom available to journalists, Cambodia ranks 147 out of 180, falling five spots from its rank of 142 out of 180 in the [2022 Index](#).

The implications of government censorship on Cambodia's democratic process and civic engagement should be a major cause for concern. Given the disproportionate impact of the internet, online media freedom is essential in the struggle to safeguard democracy, human rights, and the public's right to access reliable information in Cambodia.

According to an official document obtained by CamboJA on the same day, the government accused these media outlets and the Kamnotra database of broadcasting information that aimed to create confusion, undermine the government's honor and prestige, and non-compliance with the operating conditions set by the Information Ministry. This action was taken in the context of Cambodia's upcoming national elections, which were scheduled for July 23, 2023.

In response to the government's order, Radio Free Asia's Chief Communications Officer, Rohit Mahajan, [strongly condemned the move](#), stating that it was a clear violation of Cambodian law and an attempt to censor the free flow of information leading up to the elections.

On Kamnotra's website, the organization [expressed its commitment](#) to providing the Cambodian people with the information they need to make informed decisions. In a statement on [Twitter](#) dated July 17, 2023, Kamnotra assured the public that they were working on resolving the issue and finding alternative ways for users to access data and insights from their database.

The Interior Ministry disputed Kamnotra's status as a database, claiming that it was functioning more as a newspaper and lacked the necessary media license to operate.

Kamnotra was established in response to the shutdown of VOD in February, indicating an ongoing pattern of targeted restrictions on media freedom in Cambodia.

This is not the first instance of website restrictions before an election in Cambodia. Similar actions were taken in the lead-up to the 2018 elections when the Ministry of Information ordered ISPs to block access to several independent media outlets and news websites, including Voice of America (VOA), Voice of Democracy (VOD), Radio Free Asia (RFA), the Phnom Penh Post, and the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

The government alleged that these outlets were using foreign sources to disrupt the election, which violated election laws. Overall, seventeen independent media outlets had their websites blocked.

The freedom of access to news media is crucial for any functioning democracy. Independent media outlets play a vital role in providing voters with accurate and reliable information, enabling them to make well-informed decisions during elections.

Threats against independent media and press freedom continue to rise, leading to a decline in the overall press freedom in Cambodia. This lack of access to reliable information negatively impacts the public's ability to participate effectively in the electoral process. During the lead-up to elections, censorship is especially at issue and must be closely monitored.

## Case Study: The Challenges Faced by Independent Media Outlets and Journalists in Cambodia

Independent media outlets and journalists find the current environment especially difficult to work in, as most news media operations are shut down or bought out by pro-government actors.

Harassment is an all-too-common occurrence for journalists. “I have noticed independent journalists are not valued by the authorities and government officials,” said Lib Lib, a reporter with the US-backed Voice of America.

“Requesting information is difficult, and sometimes, reporters are shouted at,” he continued. Government officials have accused independent journalists of serving political affiliations or foreigners. When covering news in public places, authorities monitor journalists, take pictures, and even impose bans on reporting in some cases.

“It’s not easy to get the information people want to know.”

Additionally, incitement is now a popular charge to throw at journalists, social and political activists, and those who make negative comments about Cambodian society and the government in general.

Compounding Compounding on these factors is the shrinking number of independent media outlets, and the number of journalists working there.

Sovann Sreypich, a reporter with CamboJA, one of the last remaining independent news outlets in Cambodia, commented on her experience: “Sometimes, the authorities will question [journalists] while wearing a mask and a hat, so it is not clear they are the authorities. They will take videos and zoom in on [journalists’] faces.”

“They ask who you are, where you are from, where do you work,” continued Sreypich. If you are from a media outlet that does in-depth and investigative reporting, they will question

you more, she continued.

Sreyepich added female journalists encounter more challenges than their male counterparts, often facing gender-based harassment while reporting. One group, Cambodian Female Journalists (CFJ), a network of women journalists, meets every month to talk about their experiences and support one another.

A few journalistic and free speech advocacy groups have established NGOs and other advocacy groups. Chhan Sokunthea, who works with the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM), says one of the ways to improve the situation is through increasing the number of media platforms available to make more space for working and aspiring journalists. She also suggests the new government formed after the 2023 election should also be an open space for civil society and independent media, so Cambodians can exercise their rights freely, without fear of harassment.

When asked to comment, Meas Sophorn, who was spokesperson for the Ministry of Information at the time, said “Freedom of the press in Cambodia is guaranteed by the Law on the Press in accordance with the Kingdom of Cambodia. In this spirit, journalists or those working in journalism have the full right to perform their duties and reporting freely in all regions, without restrictions, censorship, and intimidation, as stated.” Sophorn is now the spokesperson for Prime Minister Hun Manet.

Press freedom in Cambodia remains a critical issue. Overcoming this critical juncture will require creating a climate of open dialogue and reform, as well as cooperation between both experienced and new journalists, and the government.

# The History of Online Censorship in Cambodia

Cambodia's online media landscape has undergone significant changes in recent years due to government actions.

In 2017, The Cambodia Daily, an independent media outlet, was forced to [stop print operations due to a tax issue](#). Soon after, the government ordered internet service providers (ISPs) in the country to block access to their website.

In 2018, in anticipation of the upcoming election, the government [shut down access](#) to 15 other independent media outlets, including the websites for the court-dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), Voice of America (VOA), Voice of Democracy (VOD), and Radio Free Asia (RFA). RFA was also [forced to close](#) its Phnom Penh office.

Additionally, in 2018, the Phnom Penh Post lost its independence as it was [bought](#) by a new owner with ties to a government official.


In 2023, Voice of Democracy, one of the country's last remaining independent media outlets was [shut down](#) by the government.

Further, in the lead up to the 2023 election, the Telecommunications Regulator of Cambodia told ISPs to [cut off access](#) inside the country to the Cambodia Daily, Radio Free Asia, and the newly launched public database Kamnotra, which is run by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM). The government also [revoked the licenses](#) of three Khmer-language media outlets: [Federation of Cambodia-ASEAN Journalists](#), [Raksmei Kampong Cham](#), and [Dumnong Knong Srok](#). They were accused of "committing serious violations of journalistic ethics" and "not followed the instructions of the ministry."

Facebook is currently the country's [main online platform](#), and the primary source of information and news. Users receive content from the Facebook algorithm, which generally favors officially sponsored content.

## Contact us

if you have information about harassment  
or threats to journalists

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