

JOINT STATEMENT: END IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS IN CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh, 2 November 2023 — On this International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, we, the undersigned civil society organisations, call upon the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) to take immediate and concrete action to ensure the effective, independent, and transparent investigation of all crimes committed against journalists and human rights defenders (“HRDs”) in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

At least 15 journalists have been killed in Cambodia since 1994. Twelve of them were reporting on sensitive issues at the time of their deaths. Not a single perpetrator has been brought to justice in any of these cases.

This kind of impunity for crimes is not limited to attacks against journalists. The lack of an appropriate investigation or proper criminal proceedings regarding the killings of environmental activist *Chut Wutty*, trade unionists *Chea Vichea* and *Ros Sovannareth*, and political analyst *Kem Ley* exemplify the pervasive culture of impunity that prevails in Cambodia. These cases represent only a fraction of the thousands of instances of abuse against journalists, human rights defenders, political opposition members, trade unionists, and activists that remain unaddressed by the very institutions tasked with protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Cambodians.

Harassment and crimes against journalists remain a worrying practice in 2023. According to the Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA), 30 journalists were harassed in the last 10 months alone (from January to October 2023). Of these 30 journalists, 23 were subjected to violence and threats, four faced judicial harassment, and two were detained for questioning. Furthermore, the operating licences for five media outlets were revoked during this period. As a result of this, Cambodia has dropped five places in Reporters Without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index since 2022 and is currently ranking 147 out of 180 countries.

Targeting journalists – particularly those who are reporting on human rights topics – undermines freedoms of expression and the press, which threatens the public’s access to information. It also makes it harder to hold those in power accountable for their wrongdoing. When authorities fail to investigate and punish perpetrators of crimes against journalists, it sends the message that such offences are permissible.

We therefore call upon the RGC to conduct independent investigations into crimes committed against journalists and HRDs. These investigations should be expeditious and conducted in accordance with international human rights standards, including the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*, and the *United Nations Economic and Social Council’s updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights Through Action to Combat Impunity*.

We demand justice for all those whose rights have been cast aside. The RGC must condemn and end the impunity shown towards perpetrators of crimes against journalists and HRDs.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. Cambodian Alliance Journalist Association (CamboJa)
2. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
3. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
4. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
5. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
6. Cambodia Informal Workers Association (CIWA)
7. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
8. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
9. Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUFU)
10. Federation of Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
11. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFEE)
12. Labour Rights Supported Union Khmer Employees of Naga (L.R.S.U)
13. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut Organization (STT)
14. Association Journalists Timor Leste (AJTL)
15. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Indonesia
16. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)
17. Gerakan Media Merdeka (Geramm)- Malaysia
18. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
19. Prachatai, Thailand
20. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)