



សមាគមសម្ព័ន្ធអ្នកសារព័ត៌មានកម្ពុជា
Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association



Journalism Situation in Cambodia

Quarterly Monitoring Report

October - December 2023 | Issue No. 10

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Introduction and Summary

Journalists in Cambodia continue to face harassment as they attempt to report on sensitive issues and events occurring in the country. Unfortunately, this quarter, a widespread pattern of verbal, legal, and physical intimidation continued to plague the media sector.

At CamboJA, we believe it is essential to report on these instances of harassment. CamboJA hopes to foster an environment where freedom of expression and freedom of speech are available to all journalists, who are able to openly report without fearing for their safety, or the safety of those around them.

The 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 October–December 2023.

Freedom of the 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 the press empowers citizens by providing them with accurate and reliable information.

This quarter, there was a significant increase in reports of legal intimidation. Journalists were arrested, jailed, and sued in increasing numbers compared to previous quarters. We have recorded at least four instances of this type of harassment.

Additionally, this quarter, we recorded one case of violent physical intimidation. A journalist was physically assaulted and tied up with ropes by timber traders in Kampong Cham Province. This is an egregious example of violence against journalists, and represents the serious dangers that journalists face when reporting in Cambodia. Assaults should never happen for any reason. However, this is the unfortunate reality for journalists here.

Significant developments we recorded this quarter include the shutdown of the country's oldest Khmer language newspaper, the sentencing of a journalist to two years in prison, and the government's intention to create a monitoring group along with the release of their recommendations to the media sphere.

This quarter, which covers the period of October to December 2023, CamboJA recorded eight cases of harassment against 9 journalists . Also, in this report, we have compiled updates on challenges faced by independent media and trends in freedom of expression and media development.

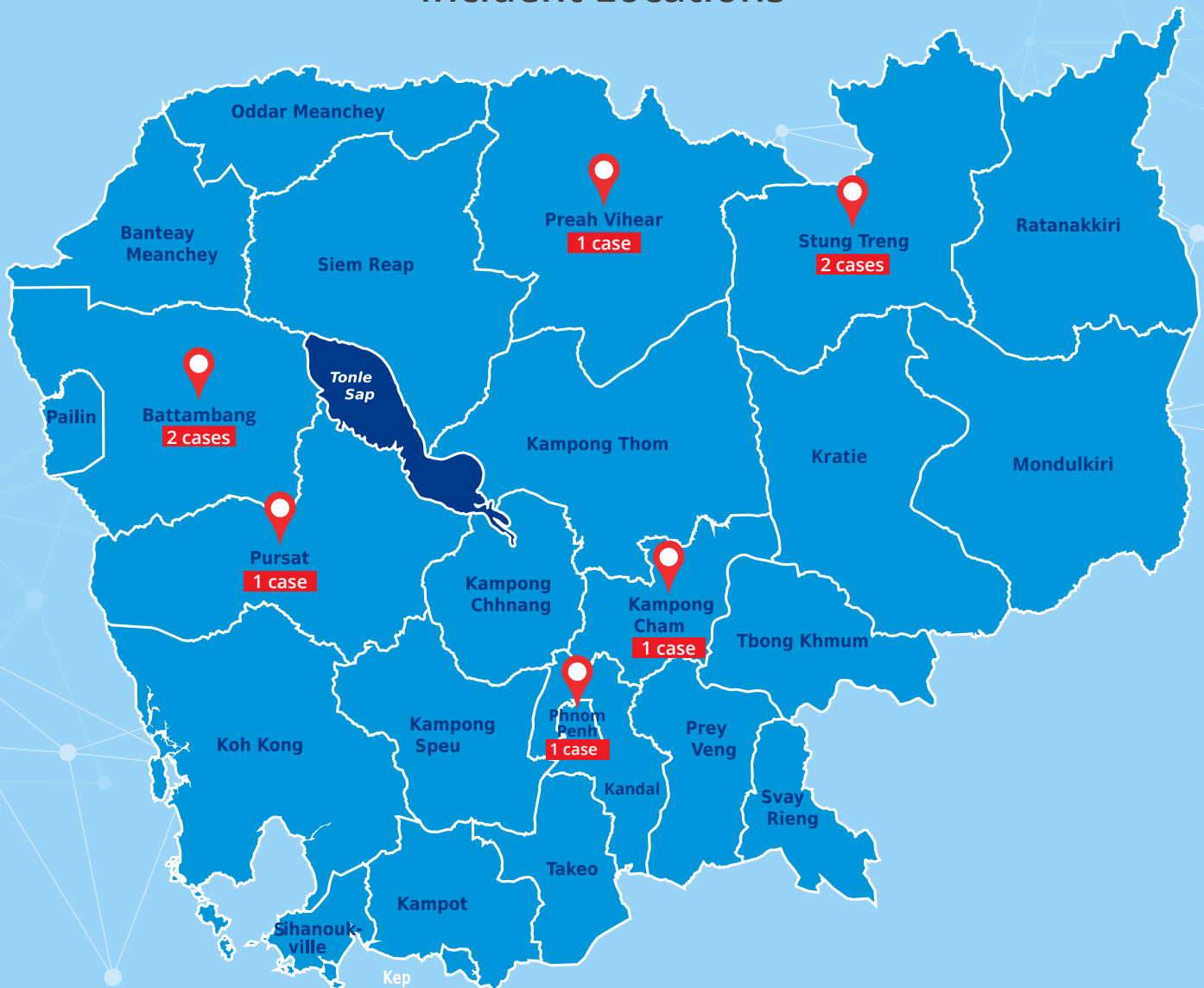
We aim to recognize, record, and address the dangers faced by journalists through this report. Journalists have the right to work without fear. As you read through the report, we encourage you to reflect on the journalism situation in Cambodia and the importance of freedom of the press.

This Quarter in Context

Summary of All Incidents of Harassment Against Journalists Recorded from October to December 2023



Incident Locations



**17
Dec**

**Stung Treng
Province**

Publisher of online media outlet jailed on charges of encroaching on state land

**4
Dec**

Phnom Penh

Publisher of online media outlet imprisoned over accessing fraudulent data

**2
Dec**

**Kampong Cham
Province**

Online reporter assaulted while reporting on wood trafficking

**15
Nov**

**Stung Treng
Province**

Journalist told not to report on issues that affect the image of authorities by director of provincial Environmental Department

**8
Nov**

**Battambang
Province**

Journalist threatened by district governor with legal action for reporting on illegal construction

**23
Oct**

**Battambang
Province**

Online journalist in Battambang intimidated by police officer while taking photos

**18
Oct**

Pursat Province

Two online media outlets receive threats of legal action

**10
Oct**

**Preah Vihear
Province**

Online journalist sued and accused of publishing fake news

Incidents Reported This Quarter

1. Publisher of online media outlet jailed on charges of encroaching on state land



Kim Den, Publisher for DN Peace News
(Picture: Facebook)

December 17, 2023, Stung Treng Province

On December 17, 2023, Kim Den, a publisher for online news media outlet DN Peace News in Stung Treng Province, was arrested by military police and jailed on charges of illegally encroaching on and clearing forest land in order to occupy state land, allegedly committed on April 29, 2015.

On September 23, 2020, Stung Treng's provincial court sentenced Den to five years in prison on charges of encroaching on state land in Stung Treng Province's Siempang District. The case was upheld by an appeals court in Tbong Khmom Province on April 19, 2023, according to the arrest warrant issued on December 12, 2023.

Den's wife said that on the day of his arrest, he received a phone call from provincial military police, inviting him to join an officer's promotion ceremony at Sok Sambath hotel that day. However, he was instead brought to a provincial military police office, and immediately sent to jail.

Both Den's wife and Mr. Sovandaravuth, the deputy publisher of DN Peace News, said Den had previously cleared forest land in 2015, before he worked as a journalist, but returned the land to the state later that year.

Sovandaravuth said Den had recently reported on illegal logging in the province.

Type of harassment: Legal intimidation

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/3h3k454y>

CamboJA interviewed with his wife and Mr. Sovandaravuth, the deputy publisher of DN Peace News

2. Publisher of online media outlet imprisoned over accessing fraudulent data

December 4, 2023, Phnom Penh

Noun Mesa, the publisher of CNM TV News, was arrested and imprisoned on charges of fraudulently accessing an automated data processing system.

He was released on bail on December 14, ten days later. The release came after the Ministry of Information assigned two lawyers to Mesa on December 12, who requested his release on bail.

Mesa was arrested by police on December 4, around 2:30pm, near a coffee shop in the capital city of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. He had traveled there to meet a representative of an unnamed company to verify documents allegedly originating from the company and linked to corruption. His brother Noun Nak reported this information to CamboJA two days later, on December 6.

Nak said after his brother obtained the documents, he called the company for verification. Instead, they requested to meet in person.

Three days later, the company called his brother back to meet with him face to face at a coffee shop in Boeng Keng Kang commune. When he arrived near the coffee shop, he was immediately arrested by police without explanation.

Nak said he visited his brother at the General Commissariat of National Police on the morning of December 6, 2023. Nak said he was informally told his brother was being sued for extortion.

Before the meeting, Mesa recorded a conversation, purportedly between himself and the man from the company he had agreed to meet at a coffee shop. In the four-minute-long voice message conversation, Mesa said he was on the road to meet the man he claimed to be the director of the company Ly Chhoung to verify the origin of the document he had obtained. In the recording, Mesa claimed he had no intention to extort the company. The voice message recording was shared on social media for a few days after Mesa was arrested, but was later deleted.

However, after his release, in a video posted to Facebook on December 14, Mesa said that documents linked to Ly Chhoung, the company he allegedly obtained documents from, were fake. He said he had obtained the fake documents from an anonymous source and

asked the public and journalists to stop sharing the voice message conversation between him and a man from Ly Chhoung.

Type of harassment: Legal intimidation

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/2bk288a9>

CamboJA interviewed with his brother.

3. Online reporter assaulted while reporting on wood trafficking



Video of Im Hach, was bound and lived on social media (screenshot from LSN facebook page)

**December 2, 2023,
Kampong Cham Province**

On December 2, 2023, 37-year-old Mr. Im Hach, an online reporter was assaulted and was bound with rope by a group of people in Kampong Cham Province, He was then sent to police for questioning.

In a video posted on Facebook, Hach was seen unclothed and laying on the ground as his hands and legs were tied with rope. Hach was then sent to the district police office and provincial court for questioning and released after he agreed to mediation with other four people who assaulted him and tied him up with rope.

Before he was assaulted, Hach had been on a live video feed on social media talking about wood transportation.

According to Kampong Cham provincial administration, Hach was arrested by four people in Pana village, Soutib commune, Cheng Prey district, after he entered a private place of business without permission to take pictures of wood.

Hach was reportedly working for CNM TV News, but then moved to San Prum News. However, according to a CNM TV notice, he was fired from CNM TV a day after the incident. According to the province authorities, Hach was not registered as a journalist at any outlet yet.

Prum San, publisher of the outlet told CamboJA that Hach was also fired from San Prum News before the incident. However, Hach said this happened after the incident. He showed CamboJA his press card, issued by San Prum News, which expires on June 14, 2024.

Hach said he has also been working for another online news, called ICD TV, and asked for a press card from the Ministry of Information.

Type of harassment: Physical assault

Source: CamboJA interviewed with Mr. Im Hach and Mr. Prum San, Publisher of San Prum News

4. Journalist told not to report on issues that affect the image of authorities by director of provincial Environmental Department

November 15, 2023, Stung Treng Province

On November 15, 2023, Ean Kimheoun, a reporter from Hang Meas TV in Stung Treng Province, was told by the director of the provincial Environmental Department not to further report about environmental issues that affect the image of authorities.

This occurred after Kimheoun reported on authorities' failure to arrest illegal loggers in Borey O'Svay Sen Chey District, and was asked to remove the article.

He reported the story on Hang Meas TV news program and later on posted on his own Facebook account. Kimheoun was asked by authorities to remove the article from his Facebook account, but he did not follow the order.

Type of harassment: Verbal intimidation

Source: CamboJA interviewed with Mr. Ean Kimheoun

5. Journalist threatened by district governor with legal action for reporting on illegal construction

November 8, 2023, Battambang Province

On November 8, a journalist from Koh Santepheap News, Chhom Pisamay, was verbally intimidated by Battambang Province, Ek Phnom District's governor, who threatened to take legal action against him after he reported on illegal construction polluting the Steung Sanke river.

The report criticized the governor's decision to allow individual businesses to fill parts of the river.

He was told by district authorities that the governor was seeking evidence to sue him for disseminating fake news. He said after his reporting, someone called him, offering money in exchange for removing the article, but he refused.

A statement from the district authority posted on Facebook denied the report, claiming that it was fake news.

Type of harassment: Verbal intimidation

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/2aav3hj5>

Interviewed by: CamboJA's trusted network

ព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជា
ជាតិ សាសនា ព្រះមហាក្សត្រ

ខេត្តបាត់ដំបង
រដ្ឋបាលស្រុកឯកភ្នំ
លេខ.....

ថ្ងៃអង្គារ ៩រោច ខែ អស្សុជ ឆ្នាំ ថោះបញ្ចស័ក ព.ស ២៥៦៧
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សេចក្តីបំភ្លឺព័ត៌មាន

រដ្ឋបាលស្រុកឯកភ្នំ ខេត្តបាត់ដំបង មានកិត្តិយសូមជម្រាបជូនដំណឹងដល់សាធារណៈជន ឱ្យបានជ្រាបថាៈ កាលពីថ្ងៃទី០៥ ខែវិច្ឆិកា ឆ្នាំ២០២៣ មានគណនីហ្វេសប៊ុកឈ្មោះ តោម ពិសម័យ បានធ្វើការផ្សព្វផ្សាយ នូវព័ត៌មានមិនពិត ពុំមានប្រភពច្បាស់លាស់ និងត្រឹមត្រូវមកលើ ថ្នាក់ដឹកនាំស្រុក ដែលមានខ្លឹមសារទាំងស្រុងថា - ឮគេថា លោកចៅហ្វាយស្រុកឯកភ្នំ បើកភ្លើងខ្សែវិទ្យុចៅកែលក់ម៉ូតូនៅផ្សារខ្ពប ឃុំខ្ពប សាងសង់សំណង់រំលោភយកដីចំណីណីស្ទឹងសង្កែជា ជូរនឹងប្រាក់សំណូកចំនួន ៣ ... ស្តែកចាំគិតគូរបន្ត- និងការផ្សាយព័ត៌មានរបស់ហ្វេសប៊ុកឈ្មោះ 60 Buzz ដែលមានខ្លឹមសារថា <យុត្តិធម៌ស្មើដូចម្រាមដៃ> ដោយចោទប្រកាន់មកលើថ្នាក់ដឹកនាំស្រុក ។ ករណីនេះរដ្ឋបាលស្រុកឯកភ្នំ សូមធ្វើការស្រាយបំភ្លឺជូនថ្នាក់ដឹកនាំខេត្ត និងសាធារណជនដូចតទៅ ៖ ករណីសាងសង់រោងដែក ប្រក់សង្កសី ទំហំ ១០ម៉ែត្រx ២៥ម៉ែត្ររំលោភលើដីចំណីស្ទឹងសង្កែនេះ គឺបិតនៅភូមិខ្ចិត ឃុំព្រែកខ្ពប ស្រុកឯកភ្នំ របស់ឈ្មោះ តាន់ ប៊ុនធុល ក្រោយមក តាន់ ប៊ុនធុល ក៏ប្រគល់ទីតាំងនេះឱ្យឈ្មោះ នៃ សុខង ត្រូវជាក្មួយគ្រប់គ្រងជំនួសវិញ ។ ក្រោយពីក្រុមការងារចុះត្រួតពិនិត្យសំណង់ដោយគ្មានច្បាប់អនុញ្ញាតរបស់រដ្ឋបាលស្រុក បានចុះទៅជួបជាមួយម្ចាស់សំណង់ និងបានធ្វើកំណត់ហេតុបញ្ឈប់ការសាងសង់លើកទី១ នៅថ្ងៃទី ១៩ ខែ កក្កដា ឆ្នាំ ២០២៣ ដោយបានឱ្យម្ចាស់សំណង់រុះរើ ឱ្យដួចសភាពដើមវិញ។ ប៉ុន្តែសាមីខ្លួននៅតែបន្តសាងសង់ ក្រុមការងារក៏ចុះទៅធ្វើកំណត់ហេតុបញ្ឈប់លើកទី ២ នៅថ្ងៃទី២៥ ខែសីហា ឆ្នាំ២០២៣ ប៉ុន្តែភាគីម្ចាស់សំណង់មិនព្រមបញ្ឈប់ទៀត នៅតែបន្តការសាងសង់ដដែល ។ ករណីមិនព្រមបញ្ឈប់ការសាងសង់នេះ នៅថ្ងៃទី ៣០ ខែ សីហា ឆ្នាំ២០២៣ រដ្ឋបាលស្រុកក៏បានចេញលិខិតបញ្ឈប់ការសាងសង់នេះភ្លាមៗ ដោយឱ្យម្ចាស់សំណង់ខាងលើរុះរើចេញជាបន្ទាន់ បើមិនគោរពតាមការណែនាំខាងលើ រដ្ឋបាលស្រុកនឹងចាត់វិធានការតាមផ្លូវច្បាប់ ។ បើទោះបីយ៉ាងនេះក្តី ក៏ភាគីសាងសង់នៅតែល្មើសនឹងបម្រាម ហើយនៅតែបន្តការសាងសង់ដដែល ដោយមិនខ្លាចចំពោះវិធានការរបស់រដ្ឋបាលស្រុកឡើយ ទើបនៅថ្ងៃទី ៣ ខែ កញ្ញា ឆ្នាំ២០២៣ ក្រុមការងារសហការជាមួយកងកម្លាំងអធិការនគរបាលស្រុក ចុះធ្វើការបញ្ឈប់ និងដកហូតសម្ភារៈរបស់ជាងមួយចំនួនមករក្សាទុកនៅអធិការដ្ឋាននគរបាលស្រុកផងដែរ ។

ដូចនេះ ដើម្បីជៀសវាងកុំឱ្យសាធារណជនមានការកាន់ច្រឡំនូវព័ត៌មានបំភ្លឺការពិត និងជាការបំផុសបំផុលបង្កឱ្យសាធារណជនមានការយល់ច្រឡំមកលើថ្នាក់ដឹកនាំស្រុក រដ្ឋបាលស្រុកសូមធ្វើការបដិសេធនូវរាល់សកម្មភាព និងខ្លឹមសារនៃការបង្ហោះរបស់ម្ចាស់គណនីហ្វេសប៊ុកឈ្មោះ តោម ពិសម័យ នេះចោលទាំងស្រុង។

អាស្រ័យដុចបានជម្រាបជូនខាងលើ សូមសាធារណជន មេត្តាទទួលយកជម្រាបជូនព័ត៌មាន


Clarification letter issued by Ek Phnom District administration dated November 7, 2023.

6. Online journalist in Battambang intimidated by police officer while taking photos

October 23, 2023, Battambang Province

On the night of October 23, 2023, Mr. Phy Visith, the deputy editor-in-chief of PCN news, an online media outlet in Battambang province, was verbally intimidated by a provincial police officer.

This happened while Visith was taking pictures and videos of an overweight truck that was causing road damage in the province.

Visith said that at about 9:30 pm, a truck carrying an overweight load damaged a road in Battambang city. He said that while he was taking photos, the owner of the overweight truck, a man known to be both a provincial police officer and a goods trader, got out of another car accompanying the truck and asked the journalist: "What role did you have in taking these pictures?"

Even though he knew Visith is a journalist, the officer asked him if he had permission to take the pictures.

Visith said: "I am taking the pictures on public roads, so I have the right to take them for publishing."

Visith said after taking the pictures and videos, he left the scene for home. However, later on, while he was having dinner with his family, the officer came and stood in front of Visith's house. The officer said: "You have many children in your family." Visith realized that the officer's manner was a form of threatening him and his family.

Type of harassment: Verbal intimidation

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/jppkwbhk>

Interviewed by: CamboJA's trusted network

7. Two online media outlets receive threats of legal action

October 18, 2023, Pursat Province

Pursat Provincial Environmental Department warned of legal action against two online media organizations in the province, UMA TV Online News and the Sleuk Rith Institute.

On September 29, 2023, UMA TV Online News and Sleuk Rith had reported on people protesting a land dispute in Pursat's Veal Veng district. The report was titled "Environmental Officials and District Police Arrest Minor to Question in Court Without Warrant or Clear Reasoning," which is rejected by the authorities in a clarification letter dated September 29, 2023.

The Department reported them to the Ministry of Information, in an attempt to force the media outlets to remove unfavorable content. The Department threatened to demand the two organizations pay 100 million riel each if the content was not removed. The Department further alleged that the two organizations had published fake news and had incited others to clear forest land.

On October 18, 2023, the Ministry of Information invited Mr. Hot Sam Oeun, Editor-in-chief of UMA TV Online News, and Mr. Sem Saroeun, director of the Sleuk Rith Institute to discuss the ethics of journalism. However, during the meeting, representatives from the Ministry of Information instead demanded that both organizations remove the reports, according to the report made by Pursat Provincial Department of the Environment .

After a meeting with a representative of the Ministry of Information, Sleuk Rith Institute agreed to delete the report, because they were afraid their license would be revoked by the Ministry if it remained up. UMA TV Online News denied the demands of the Ministry, maintaining that their report was true.

Type of harassment: Verbal intimidation

Interviewed by: CamboJA's trusted network

8. Online journalist sued and accused of publishing fake news

October 10, 2023, Preah Vihear Province

In October, Im Sameth, an online journalist at IPN Watch in Preah Vihear Province, was sued by Seng Dila and Preap Thoet, a military officer, for extortion, disseminating fake news, and defamation.

They demanded Sameth pay \$8,000 in exchange for dropping the complaint against him. The court had issued two warrants and ordered police to bring Sameth to court. The first warrant was issued on October 10, and second was issued on November 6.

Sameth told CamboJA News that he did not commit any of the crimes from the complaint. In a video posted on the IPN Watch Facebook page, Sameth interviewed a family who claimed they were forced by a military official in Preah Vihear province to pay money for transporting wood.

In another video, Sameth reported that a man called Seng Dila was the prominent timber trader in the province.

Poeun Bunthoeun, publisher of IPN Watch said his organization values professionalism and all content is checked through an editorial process before publishing. He denied that his colleague extorted any money.

Type of harassment: Legal intimidation

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/yc2uwcfz>

CamboJA interviewed with Mr. Im Sameth

Key Updates

1. Prime Minister Hun Manet releases recommendations for media sector

On December 21, 2023, in a letter sent to the 20th Editor Forum under the topic “Media professionalism and ethics,” Prime Minister Hun Manet expressed the important role of the media sector and journalists’ work, but stressed the poor professionalism and journalistic ethics in the country, especially among online journalists. Manet said there needs to be more attention drawn to public trust.

He said the government’s achievements and success so far have been due to the participation of the media and journalists, in the partnership with the government. He continued, saying the government always promotes freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and encouraged more capacity building in the media sector, as well as strengthening professionalism and ethics. Manet said that in the 7th mandate of the government, he pledged to follow his father, previous Prime Minister Hun Sen, to promote the media sector by providing an exemption on patent tax for small online media outlets for five years until 2028. The government will also provide a 50% reduction on license fees.

The Prime Minister’s recommendations to address violation of professionalism and ethics, and to fight fake news and incitement:

- ❑ Join together to keep the peace, increase development, and strengthen democracy based on the implementation of the law, ethics, and professionalism. Eliminate all who use media outlets for opportunism.
- ❑ Provide accurate national and international news for the public, and about the real situation in the country. Report on the government’s policies to the public and bring the issues of the public to the government so they can be solved in a timely and effective manner.
- ❑ Reflect on the reality and inactivity of society in order for the government to address the right direction effectively as part of the government’s reform strategy.
- ❑ Educate people on how to prevent traffic accidents, the risks of drug addiction, dangers of human trafficking, and safe village and commune policies. This will reduce the number of traffic accidents, prevalence of drug use, and increase the security of society.

- ❑ Continue to prevent fake news that pollutes society and may have an effect on political stability, social movements, and could cause social disorder.
- ❑ Always adhere to professional and ethical guidelines, publish accurate and balanced news, avoid news that makes the country lose face and lose trust from the public.
- ❑ Increase capacity development training for journalists both technically and professionally, to improve the quality of the media, the media sector, and the prestige of the media industry.

2. Kampong Thom Province online journalist sentenced to two years in prison.

On November 7, 2023, Kampong Thom provincial court sentenced Mr. Soeu Sochea, an online journalist who formerly worked at TNM News, to two years in prison on charges of extortion. However, the court decided to release him on bail.

Sochea, who now works for another online publication, ASEAN Daily News, said that the conviction was baseless and unjust as he had not committed those crimes.

“The complaint was written according to their own opinion and had no concrete evidence,” Sochea said. “I have evidence and proof, but they did not accept it. I do not understand why.”

Sochea was previously arrested on May 10 by the Kampong Thom military police and taken into custody on charges of extortion. He was released on June 1, 2023.

In the previous quarterly report, Sem Bora, the publisher of TNM News, told CamboJA that Sochea had only started working for the outlet in 2021, but the charges date back to 2020.

Bora said that the charges against Sochea stem from a series of reports he had written about illegal logging in Kampong Thom province.

Sochea was sued by two people, Sun Vichet, and a man only known as Hengny, two timber dealers in Kampong Thom province, for extortion. He was charged on the provisions of Article 363 and 364 of the country’s criminal code.

Sochea said that the complaint was based on four money transfers that the plaintiff sent him as evidence of extortion.

Sochea's lawyer, Un Chanthol, confirmed the conviction, saying that the decision to appeal will depend on his client's wishes. Chanthol added: "It is the right of Mr. Soeur Sochea to file an appeal."

Sochea confirmed that he will file an appeal in pursuit of justice.

Source:

1. <http://tinyurl.com/yah4sncb>
2. <http://tinyurl.com/ydyr7cn2>
3. <http://tinyurl.com/yc3h7nsu>
4. <http://tinyurl.com/mrwhb7wj>
5. <http://tinyurl.com/59ze7bay>
6. <http://tinyurl.com/yc74he2s>

3. Ministry to form working group to fight fake news

The Ministry of Information will set up a joint working group with members from all government ministries and institutions to combat fake news.

This statement was made in a meeting with 30 inter-ministry and institutions on October 9, 2023.

The working group will exchange information and widely disseminate the achievements and activities of ministries and institutions through national and private media, and fight back on fake news that intends to attack government ministries and institutions.

The working group will partner with Prime Minister Hun Manet's personal working group, led by Kouch Veng Srun, Secretary of State of the Council of Ministers, who handles Hun Manet's social media pages.

Neth Pheaktra, the Minister of Information, said the Ministry of Information must be the government's public relations body, and play the role of the government's voice.

Through this work, the Minister requested the relevant ministries, institutions, and units to provide articles, content, photos and videos to be used as tools to widely promote trust in the government, and the government's facts.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/2tuapmfc>


4. The oldest Khmer-language newspaper shuts down after three-decades in operation

After a three-year cessation of printing, Rasmei Kampuchea Daily, the oldest Khmer-language newspaper in the country, officially closed its website. Operations ended in late 2019, after publishing in Cambodia for 30 years. On December 1, 2023, Rasmei Kampuchea Daily announced the dismissal of more than 30 employees, including five female employees. The next day, the media outlet closed down its online platforms, including its news website and social media channels. Teav Sarakmony, editor-in-chief of Rasmei Kampuchea Daily, said that the main reasons for closing were related to financial challenges.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/29m34fm5>

Contact us

if you have information about harassment
or threats to journalists

 +855 10 882 311 (Telegram)

 communications@camboja.net

 #19, St. 388, Sangkat Tuol Svay Prey I,
Khan Boeng Keng Kang, Phnom Penh.



www.camboja.net