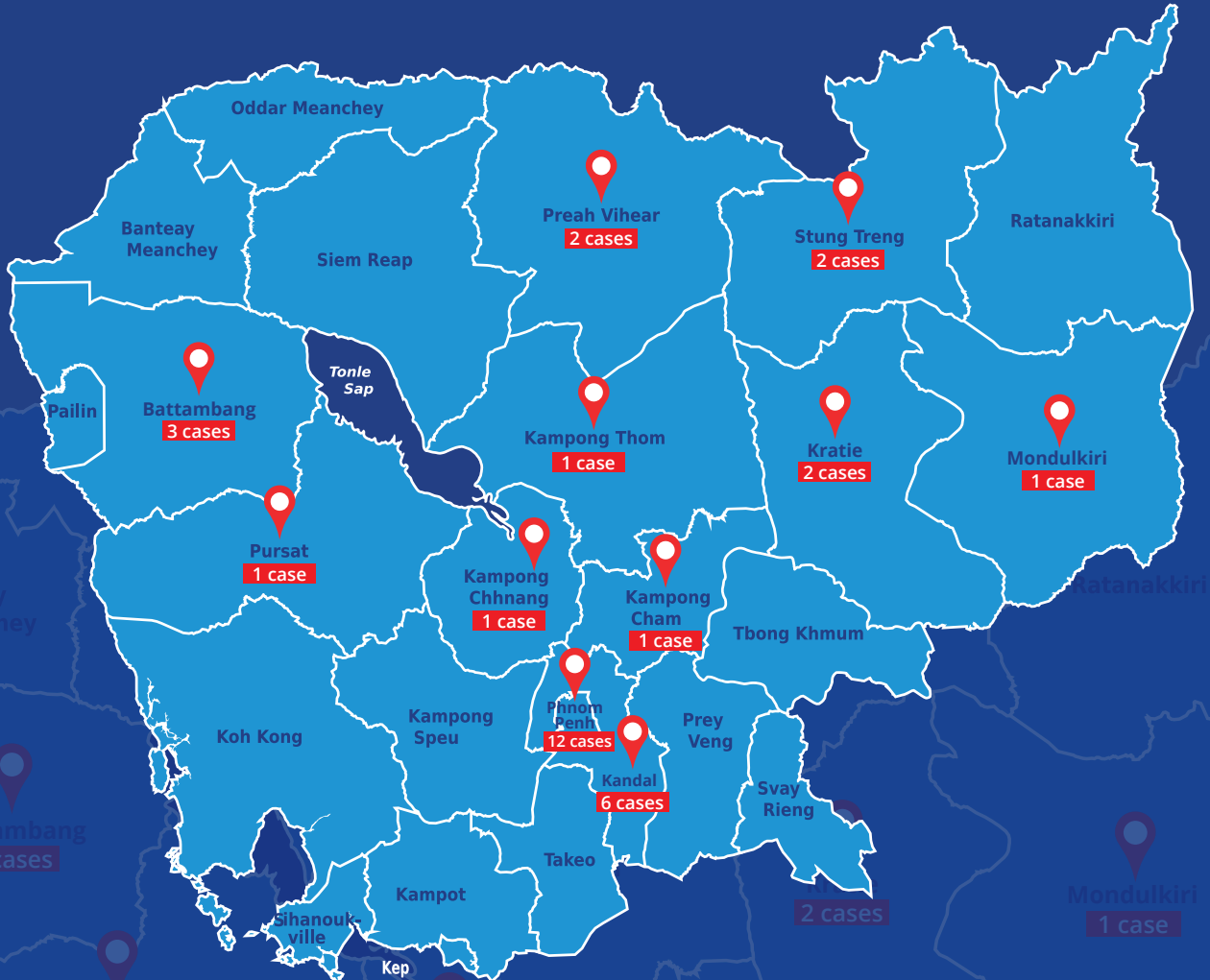




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Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association



Cambodian Journalism Situation Report 2023

An annual record of reported harassment cases
against journalists

Table of Contents

I. Executive summary	3
II. Introduction	7
III. Methodology	8
1. Method and Data Collection	9
2. Scope and Limitations	9
3. Key Terms	10
IV. Key Findings	11
1. Year-on-year trends in harassment of journalists	12
2. Location of harassment cases	13
3. Types of harassment	13
A. Legal harassment	
B. Digital harassment	
C. Physical harassment	
D. Other restrictions/discrimination	
V. Case Study	47
VI. General Media Landscape	52
VII. Key Updates	54
VIII. Conclusion and Recommendations	58

I. Executive Summary

CamboJA's annual report on the journalism situation in Cambodia is part of our ongoing efforts to monitor and advocate for press freedom in Cambodia.

Journalists should be free to do their jobs, informing voters and holding powerful to account without fear of physical threats or legal harassment.

In this report, we recognize journalists across Cambodia, including those in CamboJA's newsroom, willing to sacrifice their personal safety for the job, while urging stakeholders to create a safer media environment.

In 2023, we recorded at least 32 cases of harassment against at least 59 journalists, six were female (the closing of VOD affected 18 including four women journalists). This marks an 8.6% decrease in reported cases from last year, and a 9.3% increase in the number of journalists harassed.

In 2022, CamboJA recorded 35 cases of harassment against 54 journalists (eight were women journalists).

The legal action or threats against journalists increased from seven cases in 2022 to 15 cases in 2023, a troubling trend that we will watch closely into the future. We also note at least four journalists were imprisoned/detained in 2023 compared to seven in 2022.

We caution against drawing any firm conclusions from these numbers, as we note that this is almost surely not a comprehensive accounting of harassment against journalists. Some cases are brushed under the rug, and some journalists are understandably afraid to report for fear of further reprisal.

On the day of the national election, July 2023, CamboJA recorded the harassment of at least ten journalists, a shocking number of occurrences in a single day.

Another highly concerning development was the shutdown of Voice of Democracy in February. VOD was among the country's most trusted independent media outlets, and its closure had a profound effect on Cambodia's media sphere, and meant the loss of a rare source of independent news for the Cambodian audience.

There were a total of six media licenses revoked in 2023, compared to two cases in 2022. In September, even CamboJA was threatened with possible legal action and license revocation by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries after publishing an article covering the assault of a vocal critic of government policies.

In November, CamboJA released a report highlighting the widespread concerns about online safety. Many journalists and netizens fear the government will use legal tools, including the National Internet Gateway, to monitor online expression and intimidate citizens.

These fears have been further fueled by the formation of a government committee to monitor public opinion and promote a positive image of Cambodia. Advocates worry this will be another tool to monitor online activity and censor views seen as undesirable by those in power.

Finally, CamboJA applauds the release of an online journalist in Battambang province from prison in July, but believes he never should have been there. The online journalist from Battambang was arrested after publicly criticizing the government's use of Chinese-made vaccines to inoculate the population against COVID-19.

Criminal prosecution should be used rarely against journalists, and only if recourse within Cambodia's press law has been exhausted. Threats of imprisonment and detention are draconian tactics used to quiet journalists and encourage self-censorship and are inconsistent with a democratic state.

CamboJA produces our annual reports with the goal of promoting a media sphere uninhibited by fear, censorship, and danger. Journalists have the right to work freely, without putting their health and safety on the line.

CamboJA's recommendations to the government and other stakeholders are as follows:

- 1.** Refrain from bringing criminal charges against journalists in relation to their journalistic work, citizen journalists, human rights defenders, and social media users.
- 2.** End impunity by promptly investigating, prosecuting and redressing cases of violence against journalists and human rights defenders.
- 3.** Provide dedicated support, training and resources to units tasked with investigating crimes against journalists, including on investigating such crimes in a gender-sensitive manner.

4. Immediately drop pending charges and review criminal sentences against journalists and human rights defenders, and investigate cases of violence against these groups.
5. Immediately review prior decisions to revoke media licenses and reform the rules around media licensing so that media licenses can only be revoked by a court order.
6. Within the next two years, develop and implement training initiatives for law enforcement authorities on respecting the rights of journalists to report and record at protests and other public events.
7. Enact a broadcasting law that establishes an independent broadcasting authority and clear and neutral rules for the allocating broadcasting licenses, in line with international standard.
8. Enact an access to information law that aligns with international standards by the end of 2024.
9. Amend the Criminal Code to align with international freedom of expression standards, including to repeal or amend the incitement crimes (Art. 494, 495) and to repeal the lèse majesté offense (Art. 437-bis), public defamation (Art. 305) and public insult (Art. 307) Amend the Press Law to align with international standards, establish clear rules around press accreditation and press registration, and refrain from licensing online media.
10. Repeal Prakas of the Ministry of Information, which authorizes the government to revoke media licenses without judicial processes, violating press freedom principles and article 41 of Cambodian constitutional law.
11. Repeal the Inter-ministerial Prakas No. 170 used to revoke media licenses without court decision as well as grant the government power to order ISPs to block sites, and the sub-decrees on domain name registration, mandatory SIM card registration and the national internet gateway.
12. Place clear limits on the power of authorities to engage in surveillance and to block Internet sites without a court order and revise the Telecommunications Law to align with international standards.

- 13.** Hold meaningful consultations on draft laws which impact freedom of expression to allow civil society to provide inputs and to ensure alignment with the ICCPR, including the draft laws related to cybercrime, cybersecurity, and personal data protection.
- 14.** Increase internet access to its citizens to ensure all Cambodians can receive news online. This could be done by:
 - a.** Ensuring equal access by marginalised groups of people, including women, people with disabilities, and ethnolinguistic minorities.
 - b.** Incentivising the telecommunications sector to provide low-cost options in both urban and rural areas through tax breaks, subsidies, or similar schemes.
 - c.** Expanding mobile services in rural areas, accompanied by credits or subsidies to citizens who are unable to afford personal internet use or devices.
 - d.** Setting up community internet centres as places where the internet and computers are free for community members to use or come at a low cost.
- 15.** Increase digital literacy education both in formal education settings such as schools and universities as well as in informal education settings. The aim is for Cambodians to be able to discern good sources of information from the bad as well as to be able to evaluate the news they receive.

II. Introduction

For the fourth year running, this report notes a decrease in publicly reported cases of harassment against journalists.

Yet press freedom is arguably at its lowest point since Cambodia emerged from war in the early 1990s, largely due to the closure or neutering of leading independent outlets, and threats against journalists and publications that challenge authority.

CamboJA is hopeful that the new government and a new generation of leaders will take concrete steps to protect journalists and reverse this trend, like those recommended in this report.

Notably, Cambodia fell from the 142nd to 147th spot out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index in 2023.

Journalists are subject to harassment, intimidation, discrimination, legal actions, and detention simply for asking questions or being in the wrong place at the wrong time. And the perpetrators of this harassment are almost never held to account.

There is growing concern that the government's limited tolerance for dissent will lead to expanding censorship of the internet. The proliferation of mobile phones have given the vast majority of Cambodians access to a world of information. The government says the National Internet Gateway is a tool for economic development. Critics say it resembles China's "Great Firewall," a method of mass online censorship. CamboJA will join civil society in watching related developments closely.

Article 41 of Cambodia's Constitution says citizens are guaranteed "freedom of expression of their ideas, freedom of information, freedom of publication and freedom of assembly." CamboJA believes that defending these rights is essential to cultivating the country's full potential — as a place where citizens can think, speak, and express themselves without fear.



III. Methodology

1. Method & Data Collection

This report employed a qualitative method. Data on harassment cases against journalists was compiled using reported cases in various media outlets, social media posts and public announcements from courts.

Cases were verified through desk review, monitoring the trial process and interviews with lawyers, journalists and their family members. In cases involving journalists accused of committing crimes, CamboJA counted them as harassment if one or more of the journalists involved denied the accusations or charges. In cases involving journalists accused of extortion, CamboJA counted them as harassment after we conducted an investigation and found a threat or attempt to intimidate in order to impair freedom of the press.

As a member of the regional coalition launched in December 2022 to jointly monitor attacks on news media in Southeast Asia (mainly Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Timor Leste, and Thailand), our monitoring framework has been adapted in early 2023 for consistency with the regional indicators which track journalists' safety issues based on three main dimensions — physical, digital, and legal safety. We also document actions that may potentially harm, intimidate, obstruct, or silence media workers due to their journalistic roles without legal or legitimate justification, or prevent press institutions or media workers from carrying out their journalistic duties in a safe and independent manner, as well as any development with potential negative impacts on press freedom that warrants documentation.

Due to the safety and security concerns, names of affected journalists and other sources have been withheld from this report.

2. Scope and limitations

This report has some limitations and gaps. It does not necessarily include all harassment cases against journalists in 2023, but only reported cases from January-December 2023 that were identified during CamboJA's research. It is likely that many additional cases went unreported, as journalists often face harassment in the provinces, where incidents are more likely to remain hidden due to limited resources for monitoring and legal assistance. Another challenge faced is the lack of contact to the affected journalist/their family members.

3. For the purpose of this monitoring, some key terms used in this report are defined as follows:

The term 'journalists' covers media workers such as reporters, freelancers, photojournalists, support staff and fixers, those who hold press cards from the Ministry of Information or ID cards from their own outlets, those active in community media, and so-called citizen journalists. It does not include social media users without any of these professional credentials.

Legal harassment covers the legal or judicial actions/threats against journalists, including complaints, charges, imprisonment (placed in jail for pre-trial detention on specific charges or imprisoned after conviction), detention (detained for questioning for a few hours or overnight, but not charged and imprisoned), media license suspension/revocation (using executive power to suspend/revoke license from a specific media outlet without fair trial), interrogation, summons for questioning and arrest (may or may not lead to formal charges but involves being at least temporarily detained by authorities), and other actions involving using legal tools to silence journalists and media outlets.

Physical harassment covers incidents of physical assault, attack on equipment and personal belonging/other properties of media, detention without legal process, sexual harassment, physical intimidation, and other incidents involving action that is physical in nature or intended to cause physical harm.

Digital harassment covers the incidents of online bullying, trolling, online intimidation, online sexual harassment, internet shutdown, hacking, DDos attack, doxxing of journalists and disinformation/discredit.

Restriction/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. This also covers cases in which authorities have issued non-legal warnings or ordered journalists to leave an area in an attempt to prevent information from being published, or to block journalists from accessing information.



IV. Key Findings

1. Year-on-year trends in harassment of journalists

Journalists continued to face harassment at work in 2023. This year, reporting on controversial topics like deforestation, water pollution, and land disputes were most often linked to cases of harassment.

CamboJA recorded 32 cases of harassment against at least 59 journalists this year. The most frequent type of harassment experienced was legal, of which CamboJA counted 15 incidents, this included legal action, license revocation, arrest, or threats of legal action.

CamboJA also recorded three cases of physical harassment, including threats of violence and attacks on equipment and personal belongings. Additionally, nine cases of discrimination or intimidation were recorded, when reporters were intentionally made to feel endangered or unwelcome in places where they had a right to work. Another five cases of digital harassment and threat were also monitored, such as online bullying or shaming.

Compared to 2022, CamboJA recorded an 8.6% decrease in cases and a 9.3% increase in the number of journalists affected.

Number of harassment cases recorded by years

In a four-year period (2020-2023), CamboJA documented a total of 151 incidents of harassment of journalists, affecting at least 281 journalists and media workers (21 were women journalists).

Table 1: Number of harassment cases recorded by years

Year	No. of cases	No. of journalists Affected	No. of women journalists Affected
2020	35	72	3
2021	49	96	4
2022	35	54	8
2023	32	59	6

2. Location of harassment cases

Table 2: Location of harassment cases breakdown by city/province

City/Province	No. of cases
Phnom Penh	12
Kandal	6
Kampong Chhnang	1
Preah Viheart	2
Kampong Thom	1
Mondul Kiri	1
Battambang	3
Kratie	2
Pursat	1
Kampng Cham	1
Stung Treng	2
TOTAL	32

3. Types of harassment

The following table breaks down the 32 reported harassment cases into three major dimensions (legal, digital, physical) and other forms of restriction.

Table 3: Recorded Cases of Harassment in 2023 by Types of Harassment

Safety Dimension	No. of cases
Legal Safety	15
Digital Safety	5
Physical Safety	3
Other Restrictions	9
TOTAL	32

A. LEGAL HARASSMENT

At least 34 journalists from 17 different online media outlets were subject to often dubious legal accusations in 2023, including being summoned to court, having media licenses revoked, facing legal threats or being imprisoned.

These cases occurred in the provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear, Battambang, Kampong Thom, Pursat, Kandal, Kratie, Kampong Chhnang and Phnom Penh.

At least five online journalists are being sued, charged or imprisoned. One publisher of an online media outlet was detained for ten days on charges of fraudulently accessing data. An online journalist from ASEAN Daily News, was placed in pre-trial detention for 20 days before being sentenced for two years, but the sentence was suspended.

The publisher of Khmer Cheay Den news was detained for three months. He was charged with incitement and document fraud. Publisher for DN Peace News in Stung Treng province, has been jailed for five years.

Table 4: Type of legal harassment

Type of harassment	No. of cases	No. of media outlets
Revoked license	3	6
Imprisonment	4	4
Others legal threat	8	7
TOTAL	15	17

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



**December 17, 2023,
Steung Treng Province**

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

On September 23, 2020, Stung Treng's provincial court had sentenced the journalist to five years in prison on charges of encroaching on state land in Stung Treng's Siem Pang district. The case was later upheld by an appeals court in Tbong Khmum province on April 19, 2023, according to the arrest warrant issued on December 12, 2023.

The journalist'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 the provincial military police office, and immediately sent to jail, where he remains.

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

The deputy publisher of DN Peace News told CamboJA that before his publisher was arrested, that in April 2023, the investigating judge of Stung Treng provincial court asked the publisher to pay 50 millions riel (about \$12,200) in exchange for not being arrested. He believes that the charge against his publisher was a type of threat.

"Journalist's work always impacts authorities and people who commit wrongdoing. I believe that this case is vindictive rather than legal practice."

He said DN Peace News had recently reported on illegal logging¹ in the province.

Adhoc's Stung Treng Provincial coordinator, who investigated the case, told CamboJA that the journalist faced many complaints after he reported on sensitive issues².

¹ <http://tinyurl.com/2j3h7zde>

² CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

2. Publisher of online media outlet detained on charges of fraudulently accessing data



The Cambodia justice hall which houses the Court of Appeal and Phnom Penh Municipal Court. CamboJA/Pring Samrang

December 4, 2023, Phnom Penh

On December 4, 2023, the publisher of CNM TV News was arrested and briefly imprisoned on charges of fraudulently accessing an automated data processing system under Article 427 of the Criminal Code. He was released on bail on December 14, ten days later.

He was released after the Ministry of Information assigned two lawyers to Mesa on December 12, who requested his release on bail.

The journalist had allegedly obtained documents linking the Ly Chhoung company with corruption, but after his release he posted a video to Facebook saying the documents were fake.

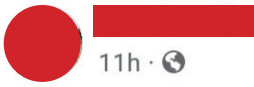
He was arrested by police on December 4, around 2:30pm, near a coffee shop in Phnom Penh, where he had arranged to meet a representative of Ly Chhoung company to verify the documents, his brother told CamboJA on December 6.

Before the meeting, the journalist recorded a conversation, purportedly between himself and the man from the company he planned to meet at the coffee shop. In the four-minute-long conversation, the man claimed to be the director of Ly Chhoung company. In the recording, the journalist said he had no intention to extort the company. The recording was shared on social media for a few days after he was arrested, but was later deleted. In the video posted after his release, he asked others to stop sharing it.

In the investigation process, Plang Sophal, spokesman for the Phnom Penh Municipal Court, said the prosecutor had completed an investigation on December 9, 2023. On December 10, 2023, the court issued the pre-trial detention order³. The case has not been dropped.

³ <http://tinyurl.com/4ht8jkht>

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



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... November 8, 2023, Battambang Province

រឿងធំបាត់! គេមិនបំភ្លឺជាមួយកោះសន្តិភាព បែរជាមកបំភ្លឺជាមួយ ខ្លះបុក [REDACTED] ទៅវិញ.? មិនត្រឹមតែប៉ុណ្ណឹង ឮគេថា គេកំពុងរៀបគំនិតទុច្ចរិតស្វែងរកស្តុតាងប្តឹង សមមិត្ត ឆោម ពិសម័យ ទៀត.! ឆ្នាំនេះសំបូរលោកធំចង់ប្តឹងណាស់ អរគុណសន្តិភាព..!

On November 8, 2023, a journalist from Koh Santepeap News, was verbally intimidated by a district governor in Battambang province, who threatened to take legal action against him after he reported on illegal construction on public property that was polluting the Steung Sanke river.



👍🤔 27 18 comments • 3 shares

Screenshot of Koh Santepeap news publishing about illegal construction

The report⁴ criticized the Ek Phnom district 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 page denied the report, claiming that it was false.

⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/2c485ek3>

4. Online journalist sentenced to 2 years in prison on charges of extortion

November 7, 2023, Kampong Thom Province

On November 7, 2023, Kampong Thom provincial court sentenced an online journalist who formerly worked at TNM News, to two years in prison on charges of extortion. He was released on bail.

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

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

He 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, the publisher of TNM News said that the charges against his reporter stem from a series of reports he wrote about illegal logging in Kampong Thom province.

The journalist was sued for extortion by two timber traders in Kampong Thom province, Sun Vichet, and a man only known as Hengny. He was charged under Article 363 and 364 of the Criminal Code.

The reporter said that the complaint was based on four money transfers that the plaintiff sent him, which were used as evidence of extortion. He said the payments were for gasoline, and that he did not ask for the money. He said he has filed an appeal against the conviction.

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5. Two online media outlets threatened with of legal action after reporting on land dispute



**October 18, 2023,
Pursat Province**

Pursat Provincial Department of the Environment threatened legal action against two online media organizations in the province, UMA TV Online News and the Sleuk Rirth Institute.

On September 29, 2023, the provincial Department of the Environment issued a clarification letter, rejecting reports from UMA TV Online News and Sleuk Rith about a protest over a land dispute in Pursat's Veal Veng district.

⁵ CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

The report titled “Environmental Officials and District Police Arrest Minor to Question in Court Without Warrant or Clear Reasoning,” was published on September 29 by the media outlets.

The department reported them to the Ministry of Information, in an attempt to force the media outlets to remove unfavorable content, also threatening to force the two organizations pay 100 million riel (about \$25,000) if they did not comply. The department further alleged that the two organizations had incited others to clear forest land.

On October 18, 2023, the Ministry of Information invited the editor-in-chief of UMA TV Online News, and the 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 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. However, UMA TV Online News refused to comply, maintaining that its report was true. He has not faced legal consequences as of January⁶.

⁶ CabmoJA interviewed with UMA TV online

6. Online journalist sued and accused of disseminating fake news

October 10, 2023, Preah Vihear Province

In October, an online journalist at IPN Watch in Preah Vihear province, was sued by Seng Dila, who was claimed by reporter as a timber dealer, and Preap Thoeut, a military officer, for alleged extortion, disseminating fake news, and defamation.

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

He told CamboJA that he did not commit any of the charges from the complaint. In a video, posted on the IPN Watch Facebook page on October 9, 2023, he interviewed a family who claimed they were forced by a military official in Preah Vihear province to pay bribes in order to transport wood through the area⁷.

In another video, he reported that Seng Dila was a prominent timber dealer involved in illegal logging in the province. The 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 money⁸.

However, the journalist confirmed that the charges were dropped since he agreed to mediation with plaintiffs. He declined to provide more information on the agreement⁹.

⁷ <http://tinyurl.com/3r5sapaf>

⁸ <http://tinyurl.com/3bx95cbd>

⁹ CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

7. 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 alleging the outlet had breached journalistic ethics by publishing unsubstantiated claims and speculation.

The letter¹⁰ was written in response to an article CamboJA had published the previous day, on September 14th, 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 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, which had lost its media license earlier in the year.

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 correcting a source’s name and the name of the associate editor to avoid legal action that could result in having its license revoked¹¹.

¹⁰ MAFF’s letter

¹¹ <http://tinyurl.com/4te58pk7>



ក្រសួងកសិកម្ម រុក្ខាប្រមាញ់ និងនេសាទ
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

ព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជា
KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA
ជាតិ សាសនា ព្រះមហាក្សត្រ
NATION RELIGION KING

Letter to the Editor of CambojaNews

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) wishes to express its concerns regarding a recent article published by CambojaNews titled “Family of Violently Beaten Government Critic Seeks Justice dated: 14th September 2023”. Specifically, MAFF notes that:

1. The article is credited to an author named Khuon Narim, while it was Jack Brook who contacted the MAFF spokesperson and presented himself as a CambojaNews’s journalist. Jack Brook’s name is no where to be found in the article, not even as a co-author. Why is Jack Brook not credited to this article?
2. The article depicted Ny Nak as a credible critic of Government policies without examining the substances of his posts which are mostly baseless claims/accusations against Government officials followed by his online sale advertisement.
3. The article speculates that the attack on Ny Nak was politically motivated solely based on his recent baseless posts criticizing Government officials and institutions, and speculations from so-called rights groups. However, there is no evidence to support this claim. A significant portion of the article is dedicated to create connections between Ny Nak’s criticism on social media and the assault, raising a question why CambojaNews Jack Brook and Khuon Narim ignored any other possibilities.
4. The article directly inserts the minister's name in the story, even though the minister has never been mentioned by name in any of Ny Nak's recent Facebook posts.
5. Despite receiving comments and explanations from both MAFF and Government spokespersons, Jack Brook failed to substantially include them in the article; instead, he reached out to busy MAFF minister for comment - when everything has been said by the spokespersons - only to highlight in the article that the minister “could not be reached for comment”. This is another attempt to link minister’s name to the incident.
6. The article quotes Adhoc NGO’s employee and includes speculative and defamatory comments with misspelled names: “Soeng Senkarun” and “Senkaruan”. MAFF is considering taking legal action against the author of the defamatory comments if found out to be his/hers.

Following notes above, MAFF believes that the article contains unsubstantiated claims and allegations, which raises questions about the professionalism and intentions of CambojaNews especially its authors either Jack Brook or Khuon Narim. MAFF has consistently upheld press freedom and individual rights of expression but maintains a strong stance against media outlets that fail to adhere to professional ethics by disseminating false information or intentionally misleading public opinion based on individuals false claims and speculations.

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

August 30, 2023, Kratie Province

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

The directors of RSE-News and 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 ordered them to appear at the court on August 30, 2023.

Both RSE-News and Newnetwork news repeatedly reported that Yan Sovann, a military official in Snuol district, has polluted the public lake by filling it to develop a resort and KTV club. The lake was built during the Pol Pot regime, and has long been utilized by indigenous people in the area.

They said he published a report on the case July 27, 2023, based on interviews with local residents. 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.

The director of RSE-News said he continued reporting 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.

He said that Yan Sovann asked the journalists to either remove the article or face legal consequences. He said the complaint was withdrawn after they agreed to remove the article¹².

¹² CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

9. Koh Santepheap news agency threatened with legal action while reporting on river pollution

August 9, 2023, Battambang Province

A reporter for the Koh Santepheap newspaper in Battambang province was harassed by Battambang provincial authorities, who threatened to file a complaint against him after he repeatedly reported on a Chinese factory that polluted the Sangke river and surrounding areas.

He said that on August 9, 2023, a provincial police officer called to tell him that Battambang Gov. Sok Loo had ordered the police to investigate his background. The officer said officials were preparing an incitement complaint regarding his reports about the factory pollution.

The journalist 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 Rattanak Mondul district, really was causing water pollution in the river¹³.

After the media reported on the problem, and resulting impact to the river's biodiversity and surrounding communities, the Ministry fined the factory \$400,000 and ordered it to move at least 10 km from the mouth of the river¹⁴.

¹³ <http://tinyurl.com/34v7mejm>

¹⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/5ejdenbt>

10. Interior Ministry spokesperson warned CamboJA reporter over report on opposition Candlelight Party

May 29, 2023, Phnom Penh

A CamboJA reporter received a verbal threat from Ministry of Interior spokesperson Khieu Sopheak during a phone interview on May 29. Sopheak warned the journalist that he could go to jail for asking questions about the opposition Candlelight Party.

“Such nonsense talk, does a journalist want to go to jail?” Sopheak said.

This is not the first time that a CamboJA reporter has received a warning or threat from an Interior Ministry official. In May alone, he received three warnings from Sopheak while reporting on the opposition Candlelight Party.

On May 12, the reporter called Sopheak to ask why the Ministry of Interior had not provided a copy of the Candlelight Party’s original registration letter, but instead had only issued a clarification letter.

“Are you with the Candlelight Party?” Sopheak replied. “Is CamboJA taking sides with Candlelight? You must ask in the name of a journalist, not as a spokesperson for Candlelight.”

“Please be a professional journalist, and don’t be a mercenary journalist working for foreigners. Who is giving CamboJA money?” he continued.

The missing registration letter was ultimately used to bar the opposition party from participating in the national election.

On May 9, after a meeting between the Ministry of Interior and the leadership of the Candlelight Party, the reporter called Sopheak to ask about the results of the meeting¹⁵.

However, Sopheak instead questioned the reporter about where CamboJA had been getting its funding. “Where do you get your salary from? You must know the funding source. I would ask who supports CamboJA? Where does CamboJA get funding to do that work?” Sopheak said.

“I will not give you the information, you yourself don’t know who you are. I don’t know where CamboJA is from, so how can I give you the information? As a journalist, you must show your identity,” he added.

¹⁵ CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

11. Information Ministry revoked three media licenses following reports on senior official's role in land fraud

March 16, 2023, Phnom Penh

The Information Ministry revoked the licenses of three media outlets in March after they published reports on a senior government official's alleged role in land fraud.

The Ministry stated that online Khmer language media outlets Federation of Cambodia-ASEAN Journalists, Raksmeay Kampong Cham and Dumnong Knong Srok had "committed serious violations of journalistic ethics" and "not followed the instruction of the ministry."

The president and publisher of the Federation of Cambodia-ASEAN Journalists expressed disappointment that the Ministry revoked his outlet's license without clear explanation.

"We regret this, please show the exact issue and what mistake we have made," he told CamboJA. He said the Information Ministry had called him for a meeting in February and requested that he remove articles alleging that government officials had forged documents in a land dispute and, in another case, was involved in the extortion of poor families.

One report, published in all three outlets, alleged that senior ruling CPP National Assembly member Sar Chamrong, former deputy governor of Banteay Meanchey, forged documents to gain more than 60 hectares of land in Banteay Meanchey.

The publisher said Sar Chamrong complained to the Information Ministry about the report.

Chamrong heads the National Assembly's Commission on Human Rights, Complaints and Investigations. He could not be reached for comment by CamboJA. The Information Ministry claimed the articles damaged the honor of the officials named in the report, according to the publisher of Federation of Cambodia-ASEAN.

"I replied that I cannot remove the information because it is real information, especially a lie to Prime Minister Hun Sen," he said.

Another article published in the three outlets reported that a Takeo provincial deputy prosecutor had seized property from three families in Ratanakiri province and demanded they pay him money to get it back.

Dumnong Knong Srok published the same reports, including in a video segment receiving more than 169,000 views on Facebook. The outlet's publisher said the Information Ministry requested he remove the articles, which he refused to do.

"We have published the real information of villagers, which might have impacted other people's interests," he said.

Information Ministry spokesperson denied asking the media outlets to remove articles. He said the outlets had broadcast "disinformation" and accused them of acting at the behest of outside parties for personal gain.

Following the loss of its license, outlet Dumnong Knong Srok posted a goodbye to followers on its Facebook page.

"Farewell to the professional journalists all over the Kingdom of Cambodia who are in love with the field of journalism," Dumnong Knong Srok said in the post. "Wish them good health and continue to spread true information to the society for the motherland¹⁶."

12. Prime Minister Hun Sen shuts down independent media outlet VOD

February 13, 2023, Phnom Penh

Then-prime Minister Hun Sen announced the government was revoking the license for media outlet VOD in a Facebook post in February, effectively closing the outlet after he previously demanded an apology for an article he claimed was inaccurate.

"I decided to finish this issue and allow the Ministry of Information to revoke VOD's license now and finish all broadcasting by 10 a.m. on February 13, 2023," he wrote in Khmer. "We shut down all forms of broadcasting..."

Hun Sen had ordered VOD Khmer to apologize for and retract a Khmer-language article published on February 9. The article had reported that the former prime minister's son, then-Lt. Gen. Hun Manet, now the prime minister, had signed off on an order to send \$100,000 in aid to earthquake-stricken Turkey in his father's absence.

¹⁶ <https://bit.ly/40nhlpl>

Government spokesperson Phay Siphon was quoted in the article saying in Khmer “it is not wrong for Hun Manet to play his father’s role in providing aid to Turkey.”

But Hun Manet, who in August succeeded his father to become prime minister, denied in a subsequent social media post that he had signed off on the document. Hun Manet demanded an immediate correction and for VOD to provide evidence of his signature on the document authorizing aid.

On February 11, Hun Sen posted on his Facebook page demanding VOD issue a public apology to the government and his son within 72 hours, or face the loss of their media license. He shortened the deadline in a subsequent post to 10 a.m. February 13.

While staff from Cambodian Center for Independent Media — the NGO that created and runs VOD — met with the Ministry of Information Sunday morning, the situation was not resolved.

VOD Khmer published a follow-up article to note Hun Manet denied signing the document and CCIM sent a letter to Hun Sen earlier on Sunday stating it had “regret” for “confusion” caused by the article.

By around 7 p.m. on Sunday, Hun Sen issued his Facebook post ordering the Ministry of Information to revoke VOD’s license. He said he had been unsatisfied with VOD’s response to his ultimatum, noting the outlet had declined to apologize and use the words he wanted. Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith posted on his Facebook page that other media sites should take notice.

“It is a lesson learned for other media institutions,” he said. “The media institutions that do not agree to publish clarifications, [they] will face the revocation of their licenses.”

A senior VOD reporter said he was very disappointed that a resolution was not reached.

“Normally, the role of reporters when they hear anything news, they report to the public,” he said. “We don’t have any bad intentions towards anyone. It is just to provide information to the public¹⁷.”

¹⁷ <http://tinyurl.com/4a5u7jn3>

13. Online journalist arrested after taking pictures of cigarette smuggling

January 28, 2023, Kandal Province

On 28th January 2023, a journalist from online media outlet Sangkom Pachabon was arrested by a group of ten police after he reported about cigarette smuggling in Kandal province.

The reporter said he accidentally saw a man smuggling cigarettes across Cambodia's border Vietnam through K'am Samnor border checkpoint while he was visiting his relative there.

He told CamboJA via a phone interview that he had captured photos of the smuggling activity and went to K'am Samnor immigration police station to report the case, but the police referred him to their boss. He said he did not follow their instructions and left the police station.

On the way back from the police station, he said over 10 policemen on motorbikes followed him and ordered him to stop. The journalist was brought to the police station and accused of "reporting without a mission letter and failure to inform police before carrying out his journalistic work."

He told CamboJA he was forced to admit in writing that he was wrong and delete the pictures he had taken in exchange for being released¹⁸.

14. A citizen journalist was arrested and forced to delete photos

January 18, 2023, Kampong Chhnang Province

A citizen journalist, who is also a land rights activist, was arrested when he was taking photos of around 50 Lor Peang community members gathering in front of Kampong Chhnang provincial court on January 18, 2023.

He said that he was pushed into a police car by four provincial policemen following an order from a prosecutor accusing him of taking photos without permission and sent to the provincial police headquarters, where he was ordered to delete all the photos.

¹⁸ <https://bit.ly/3RulMva>

He said the police confiscated three phones — one from him and two others from the protestors.

He was released about two hours later after the photos were deleted from his phone¹⁹.

15. Website’s license revoked after ‘serious ethical violations’

January 16, 2023

The Ministry of Information revoked the license of news website Khmer Cover TV (KCTV) on January 16, 2023, after finding that the news institution had committed “serious ethical violations.”

According to the Information Ministry’s statement, signed by then-Minister Khieu Kanharith, KCTV committed serious ethical violations of the journalism profession and has twice refused to follow the ministry’s instructions. However, the statement did not specify the ethical violation.

The digital news outlet was among the three media outlets which had their licenses canceled on March 15, 2022, by the Information Ministry for “publishing information that violated journalistic professional ethics and corporate contracts.” The Ministry revised its decision on July 18, 2022, allowing the three media outlets to resume its operation.

On December 23, 2022, KCTV media published an article and video clip reportedly showing Leng Navatra Group workers pumping sand to fill in a lake to install a concrete access road to the tycoon’s development project in L’vea Em district, Kandal province. The destruction of wetlands surrounding Phnom Penh has long been criticized for worsening flooding in the capital.

Navatra’s company Galaxy Navatra sent a letter demanding that KCTV take down the video clip and article, claiming the media outlet had committed defamation²⁰.

KCTV refused to remove the report from its Facebook page. Its publisher told CamboJA that the article and video were factual and KCTV had the right to publish the information. He said he had not extorted or defamed Navatra²¹.

¹⁹ <https://bit.ly/3H4cwZT>

²⁰ <http://tinyurl.com/nhkyudu3>

²¹ <http://tinyurl.com/c6tsdnc5>

B. DIGITAL HARASSMENT

In the lead up to the 2023 general elections, as in the same period in 2018, there was a surge in blocking of online media outlets. This pre-election censorship undermines Cambodia's nascent democracy.

A former VOD reporter, including a woman reporter who authored the article that drew the ire of Hun Manet and Hun Sen, began to face misogynistic vitriol and sexual harassment on social media while the chief correspondent and anchor for The Cambodia Daily received a death threat from Pheng Vannak, a pro-government social media personality.

1. Critical news sites censored 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 2 websites and social media pages of media outlets and a public database ahead of July's national election.

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."

Access was restricted 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), which also operated VOD before it was closed²².

²² <http://tinyurl.com/c6tsdnc5>

2. Cambodia Daily correspondent received death threat after criticizing Ex-Prime Minister Hun Sen

June 19, 2023, Phnom Penh

On June 19th, the chief correspondent and anchor for The Cambodia Daily, claimed he received a death threat from Pheng Vannak, a pro-government social media personality, after he criticized then- prime Minister Hun Sen and his family on the Idea Talk news program.

The journalist shared voice messages apparently from Vannak saying he “would chop [his] head with an ax if [he] entered Cambodia.” The journalist, who lives in the U.S., also accused Vannak of threatening his family, including his parents who still live in Cambodia, and suggesting CPP agents in the U.S. could hurt him.

“After I received these threats, last Wednesday at around 1 pm, a stranger knocked loudly on our door, but we dare not open it,” he said “My parents in law and my eight-years old son were so scared. At 4 pm, the same day, I saw a strange black car, which looked like a surveillance car, stop and park in front of my house while the passengers remained inside the vehicle for several hours²³.”

On June 22, in another Facebook livestream, Pheng Vannak said he would not hesitate to destroy anyone who destroyed peace and stability in Cambodia²⁴.

3. Former Prime Minister Hun Sen lashed out at Radio Free Asia reporter

June 4, 2023, Phnom Penh

On June 4, former Prime Minister Hun Sen criticized Radio Free Asia’s (RFA) Khmer service, calling one of its reporters a “silly person.” Hun Sen warned that if RFA Khmer wanted its office to be reopened in Phnom Penh, it would need to remove the reporter he called “silly.”

Hun Sen said during conversation with workers at Wing Star Shoe Factory in Kampong Speu province.

²³ <http://tinyurl.com/bdeybb5u>

²⁴ <http://tinyurl.com/36hmurzj>

Although the prime minister did not name the reporter specifically, he did refer to the manager of RFA Khmer.

In 2017, RFA Khmer closed its Phnom Penh office after two of its staffers were arrested and imprisoned on spying charges. At the time, RFA said it was “impossible” to continue operating in Cambodia. The manager of RFA Khmer usually works out of RFA’s office in Washington D.C.²⁵.

4. Journalist harassed by Information Minister over SEA Games report

May 6, 2023, Phnom Penh

Cambodian Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith hit back at a report by Nikkei Asia on the Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games), and personally attacked the Cambodian freelance journalist who wrote it.

The report, titled “SEA Games in Cambodia: Workers and athletes call buildup ‘a mess,’” was published on May 4. It described the challenges facing Cambodia in hosting the SEA Games, including traffic jams, poor living conditions for workers, and a lack of preparation for some events.

In a Facebook post on May 6, 2023, Kanharith called the report “discredited” and accused the reporter of being a “cheap journalist” who serves the interests of foreigners²⁶.

“We recognize that Cambodia is not yet a paradise,” Kanharith wrote. “But Cambodia’s efforts to host the SEA Games have only been met with three photos and a discredited article written by [the reporter] and his foreign faction published in international media.”

The reporter, previously worked for VOD, as well as the Phnom Penh Post and Cambodia Daily.

The SEA Games is a major sporting event held every two years in Southeast Asia. The 2023 SEA Games were hosted by Cambodia from May 5 to 16²⁷.

²⁵ <https://pressocm.gov.kh/archives/82631> and <http://tinyurl.com/bdcw96h3>

²⁶ Screenshot of the minister’s Facebook post

²⁷ <http://tinyurl.com/29ht7524>

5. After VOD shutdown, hostility against reporters

February 11, 2023, Phnom Penh

Following the government-ordered shutdown of VOD, the outlet was the subject of vulgar social media memes and its reporters faced personal attacks online and in government-aligned media.

The female VOD Khmer reporter who authored the article that drew the ire of Hun Manet and Hun Sen began to face misogynistic vitriol and sexual harassment on social media.

Pheng Vannak, a prominent pro-CPP Facebook personality and former military official, wrote in Khmer on his Facebook page, “As a young girl, but with a wild character...with such a cheap character, whoever marries you would be finished...”

Other VOD staff also came under attack on social media and in government-aligned news outlets. The day VOD’s license was revoked on February 13, a series of Twitter users — many appearing to be fake accounts — began posting identical cartoons and messages applauding VOD’s closure with the hashtag #VODshithead.

The Twitter accounts shared cartoons which portrayed VOD as a tool of foreign agents such as foreign embassies and NGOs.

The attacks on VOD reporters extended to government-aligned media.

Following a BBC profile of a prominent VOD reporter titled “Cambodia: ‘Every newsroom I worked in gets silenced’”, the reporter’s former employer, The Phnom Penh Post, sought to undermine his credibility by negatively portraying his mental health.

In a February 17 editorial titled “The Post: ‘Shut down’ and ‘silenced’?” The Post disputed the characterization that the reporter had left because the paper had changed ownership to a PR firm with close ties to the government in 2018.

But they also included a section about his personality, where the unsigned editorial described him as a “coward”, “mentally impacted” with “prominent personality flaws.”

Many of the reporter’s colleagues and sources spoke out in his defense after the article was published and criticized the newspaper for attacking its former employee²⁸.

²⁸ <http://tinyurl.com/43s3rxej>

C. PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

This year, we recorded three cases of physical violence. In the most egregious case, a journalist was physically assaulted and tied up with ropes by a group of alleged timber traders in Kampong Cham province. This case highlights the serious danger that journalists face when reporting in Cambodia.

1. Online reporter assaulted while reporting on timber trading

December 2, 2023, Kampong Cham Province

On December 2, 2023, an online reporter was assaulted and tied up with rope by a group of alleged timber dealers in Kampong Cham province. He was then sent to police for questioning.

In a video posted on Facebook, the reporter was seen unclothed and laying on the ground with his arms and legs bound with rope. He was then sent to the district police office and provincial court for questioning and released after he agreed to mediation with people who assaulted him.

Before he was assaulted, he appeared on a live video feed on social media talking about allegedly illegal wood trafficking.

According to Kampong Cham provincial officials, the journalist was arrested by four people in Cheng Prey district after he entered a private place of business without permission to take pictures of wood.

He was reportedly working for CNM TV News, but then moved to San Prum News. According to a CNM TV notice, he was fired from CNM TV a day after the incident.

San Prum, publisher of the eponymous outlet, told CamboJA that the journalist was also fired from his outlet before the incident.

According to the provincial authorities, the journalist was not registered as a journalist at any outlet. However, the reporter showed CamboJA his press card issued by San Prum News²⁹, which he said was issued after the incident and expires on June 14, 2024.

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

²⁹ CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

2. Online journalist physically harassed by sand-dredging business owner

January 26, 2023, Kandal Province

The editor-in-chief of BTN media said he had his press card snatched by sand dredging business owner Lay Ra while he was covering impacts of sand dredging on a rice field on January 26, 2023, in Kandal province's Kandal Steung district.

He said that he was also pushed into a canal, causing damage to his mobile phone.

He told CamboJA the case was resolved after he agreed to accept compensation from Lay Ra at the police station³⁰.

3. Two online journalists had their phones snatched by an alleged gambler

January 23, 2023, Phnom Penh

An online reporter and publisher of Raksmei Krong Takhmao media said he got his mobile phone smashed by an unidentified alleged gambler on January 23 while he was filming a cock fighting ring in Phnom Penh.

Another journalist from Penh Chet Media, who was also on-site, told CamboJA the gambler also tried to snatch his phone but was unsuccessful.

The journalists filed a complaint at the Prek Pra commune police station after the incident occurred³¹.

³⁰ <https://bit.ly/3Rgyj5r>

³¹ <https://bit.ly/3DbdUZH>

D. Other restrictions/Discrimination

22 journalists, including two women journalists, faced restriction or discrimination while doing their work. At least 10 journalists were restricted and blocked from accessing information from the national election in July 2023. One reporter from the US-backed radio, VOA was kicked out of a press conference when Cambodia's national assembly was voting to elect Hun Manet as the country's next prime minister. Three journalists forced to leave forest community while reporting on deforestation in Preah Vihear and three journalists were threatened by Mondulkiri authorities while reporting on indigenous community.

Table 5: Number of harassed journalists by type of media institutions

Type of media outlets	No. of media outlets
Newspaper	1
Online News Media	18
Websites	3
TV	1
Radio	2

1. Journalist told not to report on issues that affect the image of authorities

November 15, 2023, Stung Treng Province

On November 15, 2023, 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 he reported on authorities' failure to arrest illegal loggers in Borey O'Svay Sen Chey District, and was asked to remove the article.

He told CamboJA that he reported the story on Hang Meas TV news program and later on posted on his own Facebook account. He was asked by authorities to remove the article from his Facebook account, but he did not follow the order³².

³² CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

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



Overloaded truck stuck in mud on the road in the center of Battambang city on Oct 23, 2023. Supplied

**October 23, 2023,
Battambang Province**

On the night of October 23, 2023, the deputy editor-in-chief of PCN news, an online media outlet in Battambang province, said he was verbally intimidated by a man who is known to be a provincial police officer.

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

He said that at about 9:30 pm, a truck carrying an overweight load damaged the 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 the editor was a journalist, the officer asked him if he had permission to take the pictures.

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

He said after taking the pictures and videos, he left the scene for home. However, later on, while he was having dinner with his family, he said the officer came and stood in front of his house. The officer said: "You have many children in your family." The journalist understood this as a form of threatening him and his family.

3. Local police question journalist 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 journalism 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.

However, 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 organizers explained the UNESCO representative's absence³³.

³³ In-house interviewed by CamboJA

4. 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.

A reporter³⁴ 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., the reporter said National Assembly officials kicked him out of the event. They did not give a reason, even when reporter asked them why he was not allowed.

He 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. As the only reporter present from the US-backed media outlet VOA, he was the only reporter that was forced out of the conference space.

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

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Information said at the time that reporters from the two news outlets "cut only a few points" from the conference speeches to publish.

³⁴ CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

5. 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.

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, despite having media passes issued by the NEC.

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 video producer, who denied the allegation³⁵.

³⁵ In-house interviewed by CamboJA

6. Reporters questioned by election officials while interviewing vice president of 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.

A CamboJA reporter said she and two other reporters from VOA went to cover news at 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' presence 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 head of the polling station took pictures of her and the others for a report.

Another 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 the polling station took pictures of the reporters³⁶.

³⁶ CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

7. Three reporters from CamboJA questioned by authorities while covering news in Mondulakiri

July 14, 2023, Mondulakiri Province

Around 10:00 a.m., mixed authorities from Koh Nhek District, Mondulakiri province, questioned three 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?"

CamboJA's reporters were covering a ceremony held by the indigenous community to pray that the authorities do not take away their community's forest land.

"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," the journalist said³⁷.

³⁵ In-house interviewed by CamboJA

8. CamboJA photographer harassed by authorities while covering protest at new airport

June 8, 2023, Kandal Province

On June 8, CamboJA's photo editor was questioned and had his press pass photographed by local authorities while covering a story about villagers protesting the filling in of land near their homes at the \$1.5 billion airport development project in Kandal province.

About 30 villagers from Kandal Stung district's Kandork commune, located about 5 kilometers from the airport development site, protested against the filling in of land near their homes. Dozens of local authorities and police were deployed at the protest site.

The journalist said that while he was taking pictures of the protesters, a man in civilian clothes approached him and took a picture of him and his press card. The man left, but later returned and asked the photographer to accompany him to meet his superior. He refused and left the site immediately after being advised by villagers to leave in order to avoid being arrested.

9. Three journalists forced to leave forest community while reporting on deforestation

April 21, 2023, Preah Vihear Province

On April 21, 2023, a foreign reporter from Mongabay and two freelance journalists, one British and one Cambodian, were forced to leave the Preah Roka forest community in Preah Vihear province by Environmental Ministry rangers while reporting on deforestation.

The journalists were escorted out of the forest and released without being detained. “We were told we weren’t allowed to be in the forest as we hadn’t asked for permission from the authorities,” the Mongabay reporter said.

The journalists had gone to film the community’s patrol as part of Mongabay’s “Chasing Deforestation” video series. They chose Preah Roka because it was a safer forest to embed in a patrol through the nearby Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Mongabay reporter said he had informed the rights group Licadho of his mission in advance. He told CamboJA that Licadho then spoke with a network of civil society organizations (CSOs). This led to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) country office speaking directly with the Preah Vihear provincial administration. The administration agreed not to detain the three journalists.

“If we hadn’t managed to alert NGOs, we might have faced the police or even the courts,” he said³⁸.

³⁸ CamboJA interviewed with affected journalist

V. Case Studies

Closure of VOD a warning shot to independent media in Cambodia



Journalists taking picture of police in front of VOD's office on Feb 13, 2023 as the media outlet was closed down. (Cambodia Pring Samrang)

On February, 13, 2023 the government decided to shut down Voice of Democracy (VOD), after then-Prime Minister Hun Sen demanded an apology and retraction of a report stating that his son, Hun Manet, had signed off on aid to Turkey.

This move silenced the voices of everyday Cambodians and further eroded press freedom in the country.

VOD was characterized by its professionalism over its 20-year history, and its mission to bring vital Cambodian stories and current issues of public interest to light. The outlet published countless articles on the news, politics, and human rights.

Civil society groups have noted the government's sustained assaults on free press have created a pervasive culture of "self-censorship" and fear among journalists.

A Former VOD reporter told Camboja of his disappointment over the shutdown of VOD and the worsening restrictions on freedom of expression.

"There isn't a full implementation of press freedom and it is especially narrowed for [independent] journalists. With regards to freedom of expression on social media, we can't fully exercise the rights of citizens."

"When we see an inactive issue or another thing happen, we want to exercise our opinion but we can't because they have used laws against us, and we are worried about accusations," he said. "It is unsafe."

On February 14, VOD officially stopped broadcasting, then-Prime Minister Hun Sen offered government jobs to the 59 VOD journalists and staffers who had lost theirs due to the closure; 25 individuals applied, but many did not.

The reporter, who decided not to take the government job, expressed concern for his

security and safety, worried authorities had been monitoring his movement.

He said some people tried to lobby him to take a government job, but he rejected the idea because he likes reporting and working independently.

“For myself, I received threats from competent authorities who dressed in civilian clothes to monitor me. Sometimes they were standing in front of my house, and even now those authorities are still monitoring me, so it is a threat to my spirit.”

“Indeed, we are worried, but because we know we have done nothing wrong, we will keep carrying out our daily work,” he continued.

He highlighted the Kamnotra database as a successor to VOD.

Another reporter joined as a trainee reporter at VOD in 2014, and now works to train citizen journalists. He shared the same perception of declining press freedom.

“It is very restricted, because nowadays, anyone who dares to write something critical of officials or something that has an impact on officials will receive threats. It doesn’t matter if it affects low-level officials, but if they go near high-level officials, they will definitely be harassed and receive threats,” he said.

He has observed that after the closing of VOD, despite the high number of media outlets in the country, there are not enough independent media outlets left to report on social issues, and issues related to human rights, land conflicts, and natural resources.

VOD started broadcasting again — online only from abroad — in October 2023. He said he became concerned for his safety when his friend, a police officer, started asking questions about VOD’s renewed operations.

“My friend asked me again: ‘Where do you work now? And what is your job?’ Or, ‘Have you reported information?’”



Ith Sothoeuth, director of the Media Department of the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM), gives an interview to the media in front of VOD's office in Phnom Penh on February 13, 2023. (Cambodia/ Pring Samrang)

Another former reporter for VOD, decided to flee from Cambodia after receiving text messages threatening her for deciding not to work at a state institution.

"I suffered threats, and discrimination, and officials urged me to work with the government," she told CamboJA via social media from the United States.

She read from a text message: "They said in [SMS] if I did not join the government, I would be in trouble."

She added that the government still restricts independent media and launches accusations when independent reporters disseminate their news.

Two weeks after the closing of VOD, she fled to Thailand. She came back to Cambodia in April to work at CCIM. In July, she resigned from the media institution and departed to Europe. Now, she works as a reporter for Radio Free Asia based in the United States.

"They [authorities] have asked my parents about me, and I told them don't be worried," she said.

A man who is editor-in-chief of VOD, and broadcasts from the U.S. He said Cambodia's press freedom in the aftermath of the closure of VOD "Is almost zero and in decline."

He said independent media has played an important role in urging the government to have transparency and good governance.

Due to personal security and threats, he fled to Thailand about a month and a half after the closure of VOD, and later came back to work as a trainer at CCIM for a few months before departing to the United States.

After the shutdown of VOD, he experienced an unsettling incident near his house in Phnom Penh. He said unidentified, masked individuals took photos of his motorbike license plate. After this, he went to stay in his hometown in Kampong Cham province. During this time, two strange people came to inquire about buying his land.

After these two incidents, his management granted his request to leave Cambodia. He said he felt coerced into work as a trainer under unjust circumstances: "We know power rests with just a few rulers," he said, citing the ruling CPP's control over courts and legislative institutions.

In 2003, VOD began broadcasting under the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR). It was founded by former opposition Kem Sokha, and then split in 2007 to become its own NGO, the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM), managed by Pa Nguon Teang. He is now the publisher of VOD abroad.

A CamboJA reporter tried to contact former VOD staff who have applied and are now working at government jobs, but they declined to give comment.

CCIM tried to establish a new public access information database called Kamnotra. The database has information about government decisions, and analysis of land conflict across the nation. It was blocked in July, however, as of now, this platform is still active.

Chhan Sokhuntea, CCIM's executive director, said VOD is no longer affiliated with the CCIM and Pa Nguon Teang had also resigned from his role at the organization.

She has observed sensitive issues such as land conflicts and deforestation have not been reported on by other media outlets.

With the closure of VOD, she said, “we saw less reporters who dared to disseminate information on sensitive issues.”

“We have also seen that those who published sensitive issues were getting direct threats from the Information Ministry and other relevant ministries, so it made reporters and media outlets scared. They have to be cautious to verify contents before publishing articles,” she said.

“I think the number of [independent] journalists will decline in the future,” Sokuntea added.

However, **government spokesperson Pen Bona** said the shutdown of VOD does not impact press freedom in Cambodia.

“It is not right to take tens of thousands of journalists as the hostages of a few journalists [VOD] who didn't respect Cambodian law,” he said.

“Please give a voice to the majority of the press,” Bona said. He said Cambodia has more than 2,000 registered media outlets, and there are tens of thousands of journalists working freely, including at CamboJA.

“Why bring up a single media outlet and make a conclusion about the state of press freedom across the country?” he asked.

Interior Minister spokesperson Touch Sokhak denied allegations by former VOD reporters that accused authorities of monitoring their activity and violating their sense of security.

“There is no evidence showing authorities have threatened their safety and security, and I think the authorities have clearly known duties and they understand individual rights and freedom,” he said.

“They [authorities] can’t do such a thing, but I am concerned that those [VOD reporters] expressed their own feelings and make this subject more controversial in order to have a voice to achieve their goal in achieving a political agenda,” Sokhak said.

He urged them to show solid evidence and file a complaint to police, who can carry out the procedures according to the law. And he suggested the journalists were mistaking law enforcement conducting normal patrols with acts of targeted harassment.

CCHR executive director Chak Sopheap called the closure of VOD part of “a larger crackdown” on the free press since 2017, which has seen most of Cambodia’s independent media outlets shut down or silenced.

“Revoking VOD’s license hampered not only press freedom but also the right to freedom of expression,” she said via email, adding that it is a right for all Cambodian citizens to be informed about critical events occurring nationally and abroad.

Information Ministry spokesperson Tep Asnarith said in December 2023 the ministry has no further comment related to the decision to shut down VOD.

VI. General Media Landscape

1. Journalism Situation During the 2023 General Election

The lead up to the 2023 elections saw journalists encounter a disturbing surge in harassment, intensifying the previously observed patterns. Instances of harassment escalated, and the government ordered internet service providers (ISPs) to censor certain outlets.

On election day — Sunday, July 23, 2023 — at least ten journalists were targeted and harassed by authorities. Three journalists from VOA and CamboJA were surveilled and intimidated when they attempted to interview political party leaders. Other CamboJA reporters were harassed while attempting to take pictures and conduct interviews at polling stations. The journalists described experiencing confrontations by polling station officials and attempts to prevent them from making reports. 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.

Additionally, the Telecommunications Regulator of Cambodia (TRC) was ordered by the Ministry of Information to block access to various websites and social media pages of independent online media outlets in the lead-up to and during the elections. Access was prevented to numerous independent English and Khmer-language outlets, as well as a public information database. Those affected include the Cambodia Daily, Radio Free Asia, and the Kamnotra database, which is run by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM). The TRC order suggested the censorship is due to coverage that was critical of the government, claiming that the media outlets and database published information that “affect the government’s honor and prestige.” This was a clear violation of Cambodian citizens’ right to freely access information, a crucial component of making informed electoral decisions.

These events surrounding the election not only curtailed freedom of the press in Cambodia, but also the principles of democracy. Authorities and other actors sought to prevent and impede journalists from properly covering the events of the election day, raising serious concerns about the integrity of the electoral process and overall state of press freedom and democracy in Cambodia.

These incidents stress the need to safeguard freedom of press, freedom of expression, and independent journalists and media outlets in Cambodia. Impartial reporting should be valued always, not only when it is convenient for the government.

2. 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 facts³⁹.

3. The Oldest Khmer-language newspaper shuts down after three decades in operation

After a three-year cessation on printing, Rasmei Kampuchea Daily, the oldest Khmer-language newspaper in the country, officially closed its website.

Print 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 challenges⁴⁰.

³⁹ <https://www.information.gov.kh/articles/115353> and <http://tinyurl.com/ymjeppaj>

⁴⁰ <https://kiripost.com/stories/rasmei-kampuchea-daily-shuts-down-operations>

VII. Key Updates

1. Prime Minister Hun Manet releases recommendations for media sector



Prime Minister Hun Manet. (STPM facebook page)

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 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 with 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. Journalist released after two years in prison

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.

He was among four journalists arrested in 2021 for reporting about the government's response to the pandemic. He had been working as a journalist for more than eight years when he was arrested and charged with incitement to commit a felony in 2021.

The journalist told CamboJA⁴¹ 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.

He 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.

The journalist 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>

⁴¹ <https://tinyurl.com/be47jyy7>

3. Online TV producer released after one year in prison

A TCN TV producer who was arrested on May 26, 2022, was released after one year in prison, he told CamboJA.

He told CamboJA that he was released on May 27, 2023. He said he is now still working for TCN TV and seeking to have his media license renewed.

The journalist was sued by the Kandal provincial police. He had aired news claiming that Kandal provincial authorities had received bribes from illegal gambling owners to turn a blind eye. Kandal Provincial Court Investigating Judge Ath Chandara said the journalist was charged with “Inciting to Discriminate and Public Defamation” under Articles 494, 496, and 305 of the Criminal Code. He was ultimately convicted and sentenced to a year in prison.

Kandal Provincial Police officer Leang Sameth said Bunrith’s broadcast claimed that police and military police officers were complicit with illegal online gambling, lottery, and cock fighting in Kandal province.

4. Publisher released on bail after three months in pre-trial detention

The publisher of Khmer Cheay Den news, was released from prison on May 10, after being arrested on February 12 and sent to prison two days later in Banteay Meanchey province.

He was charged with incitement and document fraud. His son and a Licadho official confirmed his release. However, he remains under court supervision.

The regional coordinator of human rights for Licadho, told CamboJA that the journalist had published a series of reports about corruption in the provincial health department and the taxation office.

He was sued by officials from these departments for incitement and defamation. He was also charged with forging documents to obtain a property title in Poipet⁴².

⁴² CamboJA interviewed journalist’ son and Licadho official.

5. Cambodia falls down 2023 press freedom index

Cambodia's press freedom ranking in 2023 dropped as the government continues to target independent media outlets, according to the World Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders⁴³, released on May 3, 2023.

Cambodia ranked 147 out of 180 countries, down from 142 in 2022. The country's overall score was down one point from 43 in 2022 to 42 in 2023. In Asia Pacific, RSF noted Cambodia placed higher than Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos.

"The democratic transition that started at the end of the 1980s allowed the emergence of a press that flourished until the long-serving Prime Minister Hun Sen launched a ruthless war against independent journalism before the 2018 elections," the report said of Cambodia.

"Radio stations and newspapers were silenced, newsrooms purged, journalists prosecuted – leaving the independent media sector devastated," said RSF, adding that Hun Sen has used similar tactics ahead of elections this year.

⁴³ <https://rsf.org/en/country/cambodia>

VIII. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the limitations of this report, the combined cases offer a worrying and inspiring window into the state of journalism in Cambodia today. Journalists continue to tell the stories about abuse of power, corruption, official misbehavior, and injustice — despite the personal and professional risks of doing so.

The new government has brought some optimism of a new approach to critical voices, but the early signs are not good. Hun Manet has issued veiled warnings that appear inconsistent with protections outlined in Cambodian law, telling reporters to “avoid news that makes the country lose face and lose trust from the public.” Journalists should be protected to report the truth, and let the public decide.

This report bolsters the findings of other organizations that have described the disconcerting state of media today. The severity of the issue is reflected in Cambodia’s falling position in the World Press Freedom Index.

Even though we recorded a slight decrease in reported cases compared to last year, the overall situation remains alarming. This year, we saw a rise in cases of legal harassment against journalists, including media license revocations and threats of jailing. While the government points to the number of media outlets as evidence of a healthy media sector, the space for fearless journalism that demands accountability from political leaders is shrinking.

A government that is truly committed to a free press would reverse the closure of Voice of Democracy, stop threatening journalists for doing their job, and punish or prosecute officials and individuals who continue to harass journalists.

Elections are not an excuse to ignore the constitutional protections afforded to the media. Censorship of particular outlets and intimidation of reporters on election day shatters the principles of democracy, and undermines public trust in both the media and elections.

The introduction of the cyber-related draft laws is a dangerous tool, while the government, CSOs and public should be well consulted in terms of the provisions in the draft laws.

For three years this report has served as an urgent reminder of the threats facing journalists, and the need for laws, policies and actions that ensure their protection. But that won’t change without political will, which requires public participation.

It is Camboja’s hope that journalists will soon be able to freely work in Cambodia without fear of reprisal.

Recommendations

The government and relevant authorities should promote press freedom and respect for journalists' professional obligations, such as the privacy of sources, as well as showing a commitment to ending the harassment of journalists.

1. Refrain from bringing criminal charges against journalists in relation to their journalistic work, citizen journalists, human rights defenders, and social media users.
2. End impunity by promptly investigating, prosecuting and redressing cases of violence against journalists and human rights defenders.
3. Provide dedicated support, training and resources to units tasked with investigating crimes against journalists, including on investigating such crimes in a gender-sensitive manner.
4. Immediately drop pending charges and review criminal sentences against journalists and human rights defenders, and investigate cases of violence against these groups.
5. Immediately review prior decisions to revoke media licenses and reform the rules around media licensing so that media licenses can only be revoked by a court order.
6. Within the next two years, develop and implement training initiatives for law enforcement authorities on respecting the rights of journalists to report and record at protests and other public events.
7. Enact a broadcasting law that establishes an independent broadcasting authority and clear and neutral rules for the allocating broadcasting licenses, in line with international standard.
8. Enact an access to information law that aligns with international standards by the end of 2024.
9. Amend the Criminal Code to align with international freedom of expression standards, including to repeal or amend the incitement crimes (Art. 494, 495) and to repeal the lèse majesté offense (Art. 437-bis), public defamation (Art. 305) and public insult (Art. 307) Amend the Press Law to align with international standards, establish clear rules around press accreditation and press registration, and refrain from licensing online media.
10. Repeal Prakas of the Ministry of Information, which authorizes the government to revoke media licenses without judicial processes, violating press freedom principles and article 41 of Cambodian constitutional law.

- 11.** Repeal the Inter-ministerial Prakas No. 170 used to revoke media licenses without court decision as well as grant the government power to order ISPs to block sites, and the sub-decrees on domain name registration, mandatory SIM card registration and the national internet gateway.
- 12.** Place clear limits on the power of authorities to engage in surveillance and to block Internet sites without a court order and revise the Telecommunications Law to align with international standards.
- 13.** Hold meaningful consultations on draft laws which impact freedom of expression to allow civil society to provide inputs and to ensure alignment with the ICCPR, including the draft laws related to cybercrime, cybersecurity, and personal data protection.
- 14.** Increase internet access to its citizens to ensure all Cambodians can receive news online. This could be done by:
 - Ensuring equal access by marginalised groups of people, including women, people with disabilities, and ethnolinguistic minorities.
 - Incentivising the telecommunications sector to provide low-cost options in both urban and rural areas through tax breaks, subsidies, or similar schemes.
 - Expanding mobile services in rural areas, accompanied by credits or subsidies to citizens who are unable to afford personal internet use or devices.
 - Setting up community internet centres as places where the internet and computers are free for community members to use or come at a low cost.
- 15.** Increase digital literacy education both in formal education settings such as schools and universities as well as in informal education settings. The aim is for Cambodians to be able to discern good sources of information from the bad as well as to be able to evaluate the news they receive.

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