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Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association



Journalism Situation in Cambodia

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Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary 4

II. Introduction 6

III. Methodology..... 8

IV. Key Findings 12

V. Update on Previously Documented Case..... 18

VI. Conclusion 20

VII. Annex 21

I. Executive summary

In the first quarter of 2026 (January-March), CamboJA's monitoring report on the violations against journalists, highlights ongoing challenges to media freedom and fundamental human rights in the country as legal intimidation and legal action against journalist continue to be used as tools to restrict independent reporting. In this period, CamboJA documented 11 instances of violations against journalists, all directly related to journalistic activities. Most violations were legal in nature, including cases of summons, pre-trial detention on incitement charges and short-term detention by police.

The affected journalists include reporters, photographers, publishers, freelance journalists, and province-based citizen journalists. Most affected journalists reported being required to admit their alleged 'wrongdoing', submit apology letters, and agreed to delete the content to avoid legal action. Other journalists were formally charged and placed in pre-trial detention. Journalists released on bail remain under the legal supervision.

Authorities continued the previously documented practice of accusing journalists of violating professional ethics in their reporting and using criminal charges as a tool of punishment rather than the country's press law, which affords journalists certain legal protections by requiring inaccuracies in published reporting to be addressed through corrections or clarifications rather than initiating punitive criminal proceedings. State actors, mostly local-level authorities, continue to be the primary actors allegedly responsible for the violations documented this quarter as the violations perpetrated by state actors often remain unpunished. The violations documented have resulted in severe consequences for individual journalists, resulting in restrictions on movement, psychological impact, and enforced admission of wrongdoing and signing of apology letter.

The findings in this quarter reveal a pattern similar to those observed during the previous year of 2025 in which legal measures were frequently used to intimidate or silence journalists who report on sensitive issues or topics involving politically or economically powerful individuals. The most prominent type of reporting leading to violations concerned criminal activity, particularly online scams, with journalists being arrested and accused by authorities of incitements or spreading "fake news" deemed harmful to the reputation of state authorities. Notably, on 26 March 2026, the Court of Appeal in Battambang Province upheld the verdict of the Siem Reap Provincial Court sentencing journalists Phon Sopheap and Pheap Phara to 14 years in prison on charges of supplying a foreign state with information prejudicial to national defence.

The charges stemmed from a photograph the journalists posted with soldiers at the Ta Krabei Temple, in which landmines were visible in the background. This marked the first time journalists in the country had received such a punishment.

As previously documented by CamboJA, authorities are resorting to criminal charges, including incitement charges, against journalists covering sensitive issues instead of utilizing the civil remedies outlined in the Cambodian Press Law. This approach runs counter to international standards that protect freedom of expression. Such restrictions on journalistic work hinder public access to information and undermine meaningful participation in public discourse.



II. Introduction

The lack of protection for journalists' safety and independent reporting has undermined the public's access to reliable information. A genuinely enabling environment for public-interest journalism cannot exist without the assurance of safety and legal protection for those carrying out this crucial work.

CamboJA's monitoring reports on violations against journalists play a critical role in documenting and assessing Cambodia's media environment. By providing evidence-based insights, these reports are intended to strengthen advocacy, highlight ongoing concerns, and push for meaningful policy reforms to protect journalists and uphold a free and safe media space. The findings presented in this report paint a picture of the state of media freedom in Cambodia which is marked by persistent patterns of restrictions on independent reporting.

The Ministry of Information's third report on the State of Press Freedom in Cambodia, published on 29 April portrayed media freedom in the country as improving.¹ According to the ministry's report²² nearly 81% of respondents believed that Cambodia enjoys media freedom. However, this assessment stands in stark contrast to findings reported by civil society, independent media outlets, and international observers.

In the 2026 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Cambodia ranked 151st out of 180 countries, compared with 161st out of 180 in 2025.³ Despite the improvement in ranking, Cambodia remains within the category of countries facing a very serious situation, particularly in a global context where more than half of all countries fall into the difficult or serious categories. Despite constitutional guarantees for press and media freedom alongside Cambodia's obligations under international human rights law, the findings in CamboJA's monitoring report, highlight a persistent gap between formal legal protections and their implementation in practice.

The violations, documented by CamboJA, not only infringe Cambodia's constitutional protections of press and media freedom - particularly Article 41 which states that Khmer citizens shall have freedom of expression, press, publication and assembly and Article 38 which guarantees fundamental civil liberties, physical safety, and rights for the accused in the legal system.

1 <https://www.information.gov.kh/articles/191757>

2 https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1G4sMri4u0qEo31qG5XQjU_748dMWTGi8

3 <https://rsf.org/en/index?year=2026>

The violations also contravene international standards under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including basic rights to freedom of expression, physical security, justice and due process and liberty.

Without action to end the misuse of laws, repeal restrictive regulations, and protect journalists from retaliation, the space for independent media in Cambodia will continue to shrink, often in ways that escape public attention, with serious consequences for accountability, and democratic governance.

III. Methodology

For the purpose of this report, monitoring is understood as the systematic process of observing, documenting, and analyzing the range of threats and attacks targeting journalists in the course of their professional activities. These violations encompass a broad spectrum of aggressions, including killings, imprisonment, physical violence, verbal abuse, intimidation, harassment, and gender-based violence, directed at journalists specifically because of their work. Such violations can occur in both online and offline environments and may also take the form of hybrid threats, combining elements from both digital and physical spaces.

These actions are not only harmful to individual journalists but are intended to intimidate, obstruct, or silence them, ultimately threatening the ability of media professionals and institutions to operate safely, freely, and independently. The methodology underpinning this report recognizes that any such actions, whether direct or systemic, can have a chilling effect on press freedom and represent serious violations of journalists' fundamental human rights.

A human right-based monitoring methodology

The methodology and data collection in this report is grounded in a human rights-based approach to documenting threats and attacks against the safety of journalists. This approach recognizes that such acts are not only assaults on individual journalists but also violations of fundamental rights that underpin inclusive and democratic societies.

Accordingly, the methodology aligns with international human rights standards, including the protection of freedom of expression, access to information, and other core rights such as the rights to life, security, and dignity, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Central to this approach is the understanding of the responsibility of the state to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights in line with international human rights law.

Threats and attacks targeting journalists and media organizations for their professional activities are understood as violations of the right to freedom of expression, which also implicates the public's right to receive information. A central feature of this monitoring

framework is therefore its focus on documenting violations of the right to freedom of expression, and related violations of other civil and political rights essential to journalists' ability to work freely and safely. Such other rights include:

- The right to life
- Protection from torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment
- The right to liberty and security of the person, including protection from arbitrary detention
- The right to an effective remedy
- The right to a fair trial
- Protection from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy
- The right to equality and non-discrimination

The methodology of this report therefore documents threats and attacks against journalists as violations of both the fundamental right to freedom of expression and a broader set of civil and political rights, as exemplified above.

The methodology also follows UNESCO's Journalists' Safety Indicators (JSIs) and the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (UNAP), which are key international frameworks for assessing journalist safety across its interconnected legal, physical, psychological, online, and gender-based dimensions. Drawing on these frameworks, the monitoring approach adopts a gender- and context-sensitive lens to document threats and attacks on journalists as human rights violations.

Who/what is included in the data?

An inclusive definitional approach of a journalist/journalism as described in international human rights provisions is adopted to cover:

1. Individuals engaged in journalistic activities to inform society of matters in the public interest
2. Acts targeting such individuals as a result of these journalistic activities that constitute breaches of fundamental human rights

Classification of human rights violations

The methodology covers seven types of human rights violations including violations against the rights to: life, physical security, physical liberty, psychological integrity, justice, and due process and liberty, as well as other types of violations against freedom of expression.

These human rights violations are furthermore classified into types of acts corresponding to human rights violations. Controlled vocabulary developed for the purpose of systematically categorizing and sub-categorizing violation types is grounded in human rights standards and draws on a combination of sources including the UN International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS),⁴ Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 16.10.1⁵ and key human rights provisions.⁶

It can be noted that a violation-event targeting a journalist may involve several types of human rights violations (e.g., detention and physical abuse). For the purpose of statistically classifying a violation-case CamboJA documents what is understood to be the most serious type of human rights violation (primary violation). Information about secondary or interrelated violations suffered by the same journalist are captured in qualitative records.

Data collection and verification

Data on violations against journalists for this report was collected using a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered through interviews with victims, their family members, and eyewitnesses, and verified through desk-based reviews. Secondary sources included media coverage, social media content, and official court announcements.

To ensure accuracy, all data underwent a verification process involving cross-checking with multiple sources and consistency reviews. In cases where journalists were accused of extortion, CamboJA categorized these as instances of human rights violations only after conducting independent investigations that revealed evidence of threats, intimidation, or other actions aimed at undermining press freedom.

4 The International Crime Classifications is a framework to systematically classify and categorise different types of crime for the purpose of data collection, analysis, and international comparison. It provides a standardized methodology for classifying crimes which supports data comparability. The cases included in this report fall within international crime classifications including censorship (ICCS 08031), arbitrary detention (ICCS 020222), legal harassment (ICCS 0806), discrimination (ICCS 0210), and assault (ICCS 02011).

5 Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 16.10.1 measures enjoyment of fundamental rights covering: 'Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights defenders in the previous 12 months.' See: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/SDG_Indicator_16_10_1_Guidance_Note.pdf

6 These human rights provisions include: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)

Due to the safety and security concerns, names of affected journalists and other sources have been withheld from this report if not published widely elsewhere.

Scope and limitations

This report includes only those cases of violations against journalists that were identified through CamboJA's documentation and monitoring efforts. It may therefore be the case that this report does not capture all violation incidents that occurred in Cambodia during the reporting period of January to March 2026. It is likely that many additional cases went unreported, particularly in provincial areas where journalists often face harassment without access to adequate monitoring, legal support, or protection mechanisms. As a result, the findings presented here should be understood as a partial but indicative reflection of broader trends and risks facing journalists in Cambodia.

Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democratic society. It ensures individuals can share opinions, access information, and hold power to account without fear of censorship or retaliation. When journalism is censored or restricted, it constitutes a direct violation of this fundamental right, as guaranteed under Article 19 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. (UDHR, Article 19, ICCPR, Article 19(1);19(2))

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
 - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
 - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (order public), or of public health or morals.

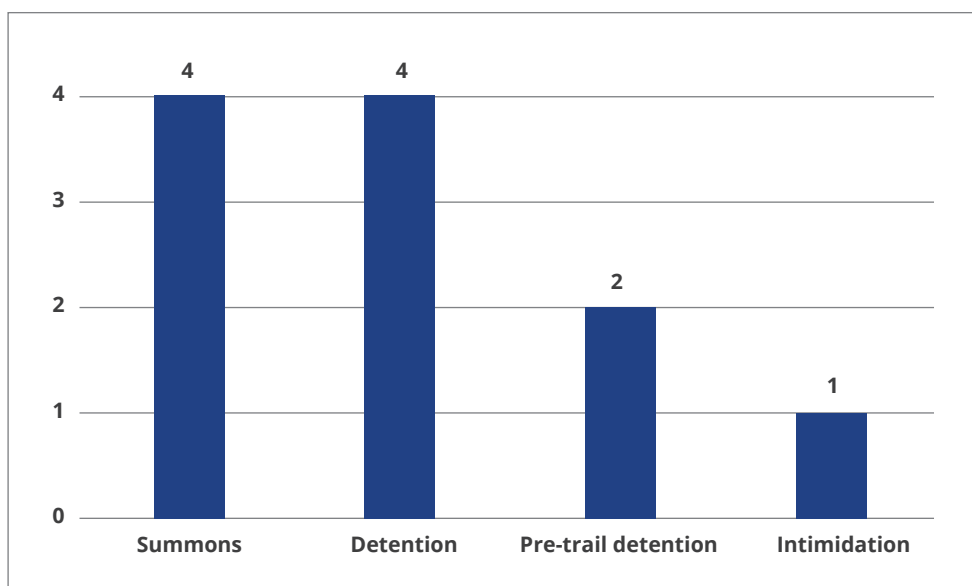
IV. Key Findings

From January to March 2026, CamboJA documented 11 instances of human rights violations targeting journalists. The 11 recorded violations occurred in 10 separate incidents, meaning that two journalists were exposed to human rights violations in connection with the same incident.

The cases documented this quarter represent a 21% decline compared to the previous quarter (October-December 2025), during which 14 violations were documented. Even though the overall number declined compared to the previous quarter, the legal intimidation and legal action against journalists remain a concern.

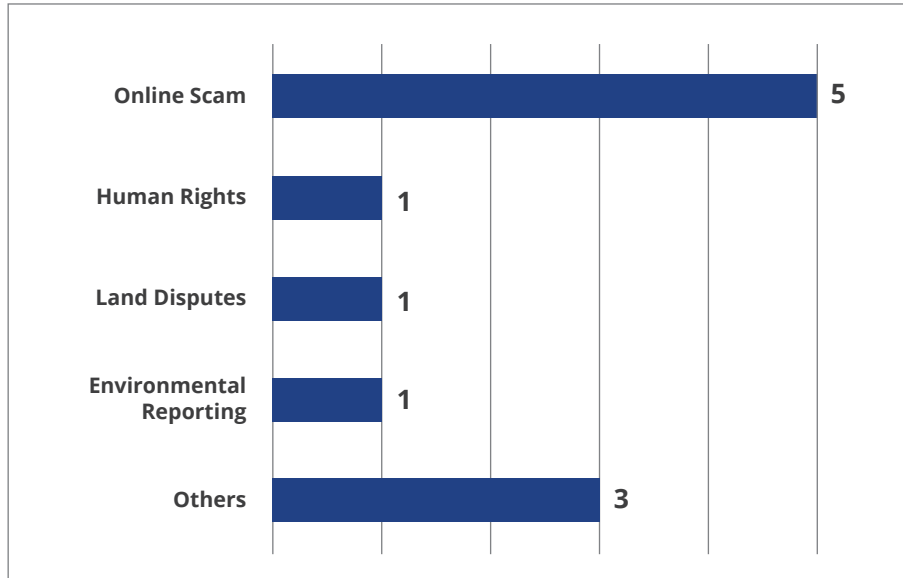
Of the total violations (11) documented this quarter, ten directly impacted journalists' legal safety (see Table 1). These include four instances of brief detention with journalists being arrested for questioning, four were summoned by authorities, and two other journalists were charged and placed in pre-trial detention after reporting on online scams and water shortage faced by soldiers on the frontline of the Cambodia-Thailand conflict.

One violation of psychological security was documented, involving a journalist who was threatened with arrest while reporting on a land dispute between local villagers and a well-connected Oknha (A title granted to a wealthy businessperson/tycoon who has made significant financial contributions to the state or society.)

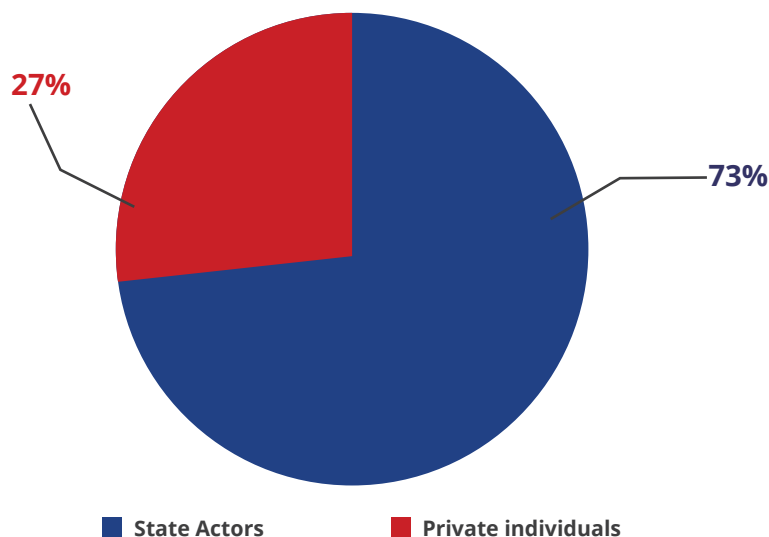


Findings in this quarter show that those journalists working for online media outlets are most often exposed to violations, as in the previous quarter. These figures coincide with a broader trend of increasing online surveillance and escalating risks associated with utilizing digital platforms for independent reporting.

Five of the 11 recorded violations (45%) were connected to reporting on online scams. In these cases, journalists were briefly detained by police, charged, and placed in pre-trial detention. Other topics linked to violations include environmental issues, land disputes, and human rights.



Of the 11 recorded violations, eight involved state actors as perpetrators. These actors operated at both the local and provincial levels. - Three cases involved private individuals, with some incidents involving multiple perpetrators. Three of the journalists affected had previously experienced violations in connection with their journalistic work, indicating a pattern of repeated targeting.



The violations had a range of impacts on individual journalists, ranging from enforced admissions of wrongdoing and the signing of apology letters to restrictions on movement, psychological harm, and the removal of published content. In five cases journalists were compelled to delete content related to their reporting.

Of the total cases of violations recorded, seven were resolved, with no further actions against the journalists after they admitted wrongdoing and issued public apologies. Four cases remain active at the time of reporting, with journalists having been charged, held in pre-trial detention, or placed under legal supervision.

As shown in Table 1, the violations documented in the period cover two key safety dimensions: legal, and psychological safety.

TABLE 1: BREAKDOWN OF VIOLATIONS BY SAFETY DIMENSIONS

Safety dimension	# of violations	# of incidents
Legal safety	10	9
Psychological safety	1	1
Total	11	10

Table 2 breaks down the types and frequency of human rights violations and acts recorded during the period. As shown, one violation of the right to psychological integrity was recorded while 10 instances documented were violations of the rights to due process and liberty.

TABLE 2. TYPES AND FREQUENCY OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (JANUARY-MARCH)

Type of human rights violation	Acts included	Type of acts	# of violations
Right to psychologist integrity	Acts connected to journalistic activity intended to induce fear or emotional distress	Intimidation	1
Right to due process and liberty	Arbitrary legal acts against liberty intended to discourage, restrict or control journalistic expression.	Pre-trial detention	2
		Detention	4
		Summons/interrogation	4
Total			11

Case of intimidation

A violation against psychological security was documented involving a journalist from the Khmer Independent news outlet, who was warned by police that he could be arrested if he continued live reporting on a villagers' protest related to a land dispute. According to the journalist, the incident happened on 2 January as he was covering a protest by villagers in Kien Svay district, Kandal province. The protest concerned allegations of land grabbing involving a company reportedly owned by Okhna Khun Sear.⁷

Cases of summons/interrogation

In relation to violations against the right to due process and liberty, four journalists were summoned by authorities in connection with their reporting.

On January 12, a journalist in Kratie Province was sued by an individual seeking 10 million riels in compensation and alleging that the journalist had violated his privacy by publishing a report on suspected illegal mining activities in a local community. Following the complaint, the journalist was summoned for questioning by local police.⁸ In another case, a journalist in Stung Treng province was sued for extortion by an individual. The journalist stated that the complaint was filed in retaliation for his documentation of suspected illegal fishing activities. Following the complaint, the journalist was summoned twice by the provincial court for questioning.⁹ In Ratanakiri Province, a citizen journalist (CJ) was summoned to the Rattanakiri Provincial Police on 23 March for questioning following a complaint filed by two private individuals. The complaint arose after the journalist posted a video on his Facebook page alleging that a private individual had encroached on community land.¹⁰

On March 31, another journalist from Koh Kong Hot News was summoned for questioning by Pursat Provincial Police following his reporting on authorities' crackdown on alleged illegal immigration in the province. Authorities accused the journalist of public insult.¹¹

Cases of detention

Arbitrary detention continues to constitute a key violation against the liberty of journalists. On 9 February, an online video and photojournalist from Buddhist News was arrested and held for six hours before being transferred to local police for questioning. The detention followed the publication of an article reporting that individuals without identification cards were not permitted to participate in a Buddhist ceremony at Wat Phutthamonkol pagoda in Kandal province.¹²

⁷ See the detail in annex case #10

⁸ See the detail in annex case #9

⁹ See the detail in annex case #8

¹⁰ See the detail in annex case #2

¹¹ See the detail in annex case #1

¹² See the detail in annex case #6

In a separate incident, an investigative journalist was arrested by military police in Koh Kong on 11 February and detained for nearly one hour after photographing a large-scale raid of a scam compound in the Dara Sakor area.¹³ In another case related to reporting on online scams, two journalists from different media outlets were arrested and detained for one day by Takeo provincial police after publishing articles about an alleged online scam compound in Takeo province. The journalists were arrested separately, at different locations and times. Both journalists were released after publishing video apologies.¹⁴

Cases of pre-trial detention

Two journalists were placed in pre-trial detention on charges of incitement. On 3 February, a journalist from HVNN TV Online in Banteay Meanchey province was arrested by Poipet military police after reporting on a suspected online scam compound. He was subsequently charged with incitement and placed in pre-trial detention.¹⁵ On 13 February, an online journalist from Srotop Yuvakvey Online News was arrested and placed in pre-trial detention following his reporting on a water shortages faced by soldiers on the front line of the Cambodia-Thailand conflict. He was subsequently charged with incitement and demoralisation of the armed forces.¹⁶

13 See the detail in annex case #5

14 See the detail in annex case #4

15 See the detail in annex case #7

16 See the detail in annex case #3

Locations of violations

Violations were documented across several provinces, with incidents recorded on Kandal, Takeo, Oddar Meanchey, Banteay Meanchey, Rattanakiri, Pursat, Koh Kong, Kratie and Stung Treng (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: FREQUENCY OF REPORTED INCIDENTS AND VIOLATIONS BY LOCATION

City/Province	# of violations	# of incidents
Kandal (Province)	2	2
Takeo (Province)	2	1
Banteay Meanchey (Province)	1	1
Oddar Meanchey (Province)	1	1
Rattanakiri (Province)	1	1
Pursat (Province)	1	1
Kratie (Province)	1	1
Koh Kong (Province)	1	1
Stung Treng (Province)	1	1
Total	11	10

V. Update on Previously Documented Case

Appeal Court Upholds 14-Year Prison Sentences for Two Journalists in Treason Case



Phon Sopheap, reporter for Battambang Post media, and reporter Pheap Pheara with TSP68 TV Online, are escorted out of the courtroom by police after the conclusion of the hearing at the Battambang Court of Appeal on the morning of March 13, 2026. (CambouJA / Meas Phearun)

On 26 March 2026, the Court of Appeal in Battambang Province upheld the verdict of the Siem Reap Provincial Court, sentencing journalists Phon Sopheap and Pheap Phara to 14 years in prison.

Earlier, on 13 March 2026, the Court of Appeal held a hearing on the case of the two journalists, who had been convicted by the Siem Reap Provincial Court on 17 December 2025 and sentenced on charges of supplying a foreign state with information prejudicial to national defence.

During the appeal hearing, both journalists asked the court to drop the charges, stating that they had no intention of providing information to a foreign state that could undermine national defence. Their lawyer requested that the court reclassify the charge from Article 445 (supplying a foreign state with information prejudicial to national defence) to Article 479 (intentional or unintentional disclosure of national defence secrets).

Article 479 of the Criminal Code provides that “a violation of a national defence secret resulting from recklessness, carelessness, negligence, or disobedience is punishable by imprisonment from six months to two years and a fine of one million to four million riels.”

Despite these arguments, the Court of Appeal upheld the original ruling, maintaining the 14-year prison sentences.

On 29 July 2025, the two journalists travelled to the Cambodia-Thailand border area to report on local conditions related to the ongoing conflict and to deliver humanitarian aid to soldiers stationed there. During the visit, they posted a photograph of themselves and the soldiers taken at Ta Krabei Temple, which showed landmines in the background. The image was later widely circulated by Thai media outlets.

On 10 September 2025, the Siem Reap Provincial Court stated that the journalists had been arrested on suspicion of gathering information and taking photographs in a prohibited military zone near a battlefield, actions the court claimed could undermine national defence.

VI. Conclusion

Despite the Ministry of Information's third State of Press Freedom in Cambodia report portraying media freedom conditions as improving, and Cambodia's ranking in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2026 World Press Freedom Index rising from 161st to 151st place, CamboJA's monitoring report for the first quarter of 2026 demonstrates that journalists in Cambodia continue to face significant pressure, intimidation, and legal risks in the course of their work. At the same time, new regulations introduced by the Ministry last year continue to pose an obstacles to the exercise of independent journalism.¹⁷ The 11 documented cases of violations against journalists reveal an ongoing pattern in which criminal law and legal intimidation are used to suppress independent reporting, particularly on sensitive issues involving authorities and online scam operations.

The findings further show that local authorities remain the primary actors responsible for these violations, while accountability for such actions remains limited. Journalists affected during this period experienced a range of consequences, including police summons, detention, criminal charges, pre-trial detention, legal supervision, restrictions on movement, and psychological distress. In many cases, journalists were compelled to admit wrongdoing, sign apology letters, and remove their reports in order to avoid further legal action.

Although concerns regarding professional ethics may arise in some reporting, such matters should be addressed through the mechanisms provided under the Cambodian Press Law rather than through criminal prosecution. The continued use of incitement and other criminal charges against journalists is inconsistent with international standards on freedom of expression and media freedom.

The persistence of these practices risks creating a chilling effect on independent journalism, discouraging reporters from covering matters of public interest and limiting the public's access to accurate and timely information. Without stronger protections for journalists and greater respect for press freedom, the space for independent media and public participation in democratic discourse in Cambodia will continue to shrink.

¹⁷ <https://cambojanews.com/journalists-flag-stricter-media-rules-at-press-freedom-event/>

VII. Annex

1. March 31 2026, Pursat province

A journalist from Koh Kong Hot News was summoned for questioning by Pursat Provincial Police after reporting on authorities' crackdown on alleged illegal immigration in the province. Authorities accused the journalist of public insult.

The journalist told CamboJA on 2 April 2026 that he was questioned by Pursat provincial police for three hours on 31 March in connection with a report published on 11 March. The report alleged that Pursat provincial authorities had arbitrarily detained a group of Chinese nationals despite them possessing legal documents.

He said that before receiving the summons, he had been contacted by Pursat provincial police and asked to appear at the provincial police office without a clear explanation, which he initially refused to do. A formal summons was later issued ordering him to appear on 31 March.

The summons, reviewed by CamboJA, accused the journalist of public insult under Article 307 of the Criminal Code, allegedly committed through Facebook.

The journalist said that during the questioning, authorities instructed him to delete the report or face legal consequences. He said he agreed to comply with the request in order to avoid legal action. According to the journalist, no formal charges were subsequently filed. *(Type of act: Summons/Interrogation)*

2. March 23, 2026, Rattanakiri province

On 23 March 2026, a citizen journalist in Rattanakiri was summoned to the Rattanakiri Provincial Police for questioning following a complaint filed by two individuals.

The citizen journalist told CamboJA on 30 March 2026 that he posted a video on his Facebook page, alleging that a private individual had encroached on community land. According to the citizen journalist, the land in dispute had been purchased from two private individuals who filed the complaint, and the new owner was allegedly attempting to expand beyond the agreed boundaries into community land. However, in the video, which was later removed, the citizen journalist only mentioned the names of the two former owners as the original sellers of the land.

A few days after the post, on 23 March, the citizen journalist was summoned by provincial police for questioning. He was informed that the former owners had filed a complaint against him, accusing him of defamation and incitement in connection with the video.

The citizen journalist stated that during the questioning, police asked who had instructed him to produce and publish the video. He was later asked to delete the video and record a public apology in exchange for his release. *(Type of act: Summons/interrogation)*

3. February 13, 2026, Oddar Meanchey province

Luot Sophal, an online journalist from Srotop Yuvakvey Online News, has been charged with incitement and demoralization of the armed forces following his reporting on a water shortage faced by soldiers on the front line.

Sophal was arrested by military police on 13 February 2026. The following day, 14 February, the Oddar Meanchey Provincial Court charged him with “incitement to commit a felony” under Article 495 and “demoralization of the armed forces” under Article 472 of the Criminal Code. The charges were linked to his reporting on conditions affecting frontline soldiers. He has been placed in pre-trial detention, despite having already published an apology and a video acknowledging wrongdoing.

According to the publisher of Sroteob Yukvekvey, Sophal received a phone call from the Oddar Meanchey Provincial Governor between 8:30 and 9:00 p.m. on 13 February, requesting that he attend a meeting at the provincial hall without being given a reason. The meeting location was later changed to the Chongkal District Hall.

Before attending the meeting, Sophal consulted his publisher for advice. Believing that the authorities might only wish to provide guidance or suggestions, the publisher advised him to go. Upon arriving at the Chongkal district hall, Sophal was immediately arrested by military police.

The publisher also said that Sophal has consistently supported the army and has been actively involved in humanitarian work. He argued that Sophal should not have been accused or charged, noting that the issue raised on social media reflected a situation widely observed by the public—namely, the lack of adequate supplies for soldiers.

(Type of act: Pre-trial detention)

4. February 12, 2026, Takeo province

On 12 February 2026, two journalists from different media outlets were arrested and detained by Takeo provincial police after publishing articles related to an alleged online scam building in Takeo province. The journalists—Prom Sophai, a publisher with Penhchet Media and a reporter for Koh Santhepheap in Takeo, and Seang Bunsong, a publisher with Sunday News—were arrested on separate locations and at different times.

Prior to their arrest, both journalists were invited to attend a meeting with local authorities to discuss their reporting. One affected journalist said that at the time of arrest, no official summonses or arrest warrants had been issued in connection with the case.

According to a pro-government media outlet, Fresh News, the detentions followed the journalists' publication of claims alleging the presence of online scam sites in Takeo province. The report stated that the journalists accused the Bati District Governor and the District Police Chief of accepting a USD 5,000 bribe to conceal criminal activities—allegations that authorities have denied as false. Officials further claimed that the dissemination of such information could cause fear among investors.

Both journalists were released on 13 February 2026 after publishing an apology video addressed to Takeo authorities, and the related articles were subsequently removed.

On 16 February 2026, Prom Sophai told CamboJA that accusations of disseminating false information should be addressed under the Press Law rather than through criminal charges. *(Type of act: Detention)*

5. February 11, 2026, Koh Kong province

On 11 February 2026, a well-known investigative journalist Mech Dara was arrested by military police in Koh Kong and briefly detained for nearly one hour after photographing a large-scale raid in the Dara Sakor area. The operation targeted compounds suspected of being involved in scam activities.

The journalist told CamboJA on 13 February 2026 that he arrived in Dara Sakor at around 4:00 p.m. to report on suspected scam compounds and took several photographs at the scene. Shortly afterward, military police pursued him and brought him to a military police base, where he was detained for approximately one hour.

During the detention, he was forced to delete the photographs from his phone and was warned not to disclose the incident to others. He was released after complying with the demand.

The journalist said he was not informed of the reason for his arrest.

(Type of act: Detention)

6. February 9, 2026, Kandal province

On 9 February 2026, an online video and photo-journalist from Buddhist News was arrested and detained for six hours by local police after publishing an article stating that people without identity cards were not allowed to participate in Buddhist ceremony at Wat Phutthamonkol pagoda in Kandal province.

The journalist was initially confined by officers from the Ministry of Culture and Religion at Wat Phutthamonkol, before being transferred to local police for further detention. Authorities accused the journalist of publishing content that allegedly affected leadership and caused discrimination.

Sirey Muny, Editor-in-Chief of Buddhist News, told CamboJA that the journalist was first arrested and handed over to bodyguards responsible for security at the ceremony, before being sent to the commune police station. He said the journalist was detained at Phsar Dek Police Post in Phsar Dek Commune, Ponhea Leu District, Kandal Province, from 2:36 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.

Muny said that during the detention, the journalist was forced to delete all photos and videos and remove the published article. Authorities accused the journalist of publishing content that negatively affected leadership. He added that, in exchange for the journalist's release, he agreed to take down the article and a separate article reporting on the journalist's arrest. *(Type of act: Detention)*

7. February 3, 2026, Banteay Meanchey province

Hem Vanna, a journalist with HVNN TV Online in Banteay Meanchey province, was arbitrarily arrested by Poipet military police after reporting on a suspected online scam compound and was subsequently charged with incitement.

On 4 February 2026, local rights group Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) and Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense for Human Rights (LICADHO) confirmed the arrest and reported that the journalist was being held in pre-trial detention on a charge of incitement to commit a felony under Article 495 and intercepting or recording private conversation under Article 301 of the criminal code.

Another journalist and a friend of Vanna, told CamboJA on 3 February 2026 that the journalist was summoned to the Poipet military police earlier that day without being informed of the reason. He was later transferred to the Banteay Meanchey provincial military police. He said the arrest was reportedly linked to allegations that the journalist had published misleading information.

On 30 January 2026, the journalist released a video report detailing an incident in which a group of Chinese nationals were reportedly physically assaulted at a suspected online scamming compound in Poipet town. The report indicated that the compound was located approximately 100 meters behind the Poipet military police station, a fact that authorities should have been aware of. Following this, the journalist was accused by officials of attempting to tarnish the reputation of the institution.

He added that the authorities should have followed the Press Law by first requesting a correction or an apology, rather than proceeding with legal action. The journalist was later released on bail in April. *(Type of act: Pre-trial detention)*

8. January 12, 2026, Stung Treng province

A journalist in Stung Treng province has been sued for extortion by an individual in which the journalist said the complaint was made in retaliation after he took pictures of suspected illegal fishing.

The journalist was summoned to appear at the provincial court on 28 January following the complaint filed by an individual in which the journalist asked for delay to appear at the court, claiming that he was seeking legal counseling first.

The journalist told CamboJA on 26 January 2026 that, on 27 November 2025, he travelled to the Krala Puos forest area located near Sesan Hydroelectric dam in Talat commune, Sesan district, to report on deforestation. However, authorities prevented him from entering the area. While traveling back from Krala Puos, he encountered a fish trader who later filed complaint against him— transporting a large quantity of fish.

The journalist said that, based on information provided by two villagers, the fish had been caught through illegal fishing activities. He took photographs and sent them to the Sesan District Governor. He also followed the alleged perpetrator until district authorities arrived, which reportedly angered her and led her to verbally insult him.

The following day, the journalist filed a complaint against the alleged perpetrator for public insult. However, he explained that one day later she also filed a complaint against him, accusing him of extortion. The journalist said that he did not know why

he had been accused of extortion, maintaining that he had committed no such act. He nevertheless expressed concern about the case because the complaint reportedly possesses significant financial resources.

The provincial court subsequently issued a second summons. The journalist appeared before the court for second time on 19 February 2026. According to the journalist, no further action had been taken in the case at the time of reporting.

(Type of act: summons/Interrogation)

9. January 12, 2026, Kratie province

A journalist in Kratie province has been sued by an individual who demands 10 million riels in compensation, accusing the journalist of violating his privacy after publishing a report on allegedly illegal mining activities in a local community.

On 22 January 2026, the journalist was summoned by local police following a complaint filed by the plaintiff. According to the journalist, the complaint claimed that a report published on 4 January 2026 violated the plaintiff's privacy by publicly exposing the image of a private individual.

However, the journalist said the man appeared in the footage only because he was present at the mining site at the time and was accidentally captured while documenting the alleged mining activities.

The journalist told CamboJA on 23 January 2026 that on 4 December 2025, he went to investigate alleged illegal mining activities in Kbal Domrei commune, O Krieng Senchey district, Kratie province. During the visit, he observed six to seven medium- and small-scale mining sites reportedly operated by local residents and private individuals.

About an hour later, a man—later identified as the plaintiff—arrived at the mining site while the journalist was taking photos and videos of the mining activities. An infographic report with voice-over narration about the mining activities was subsequently published on 4 January 2026, and no reaction was recorded until 12 January.

The journalist further explained that on 12 January 2026, he and his director returned to the area to follow up on whether the mining activities had stopped after the initial report. They found that the activities were still ongoing and subsequently broadcast a live video on the same issue.

The journalist said that later that day, he received a call from a police officer from Srae Chis commune, asking him to appear at the commune police post. He was informed

that a complaint had been filed against him for publishing images of an individual in a report published on 4 January.

On 22 January 2026, the journalist appeared at the commune police post in response to the summons. There, he met the plaintiff, who demanded 10 million riels in compensation and threatened to escalate the case to higher authorities.

Fearing further legal action, the journalist eventually agreed to remove the report and issue a public apology to the plaintiff in order to resolve the dispute. The journalist said after he made public apology, no further action was taken by the plaintiff.

(Type of act: summons/Interrogation)

10. January 2, 2026, Kandal province

On 2 January 2026, a journalist from the Khmer Independent news outlet was warned by police that he could be arrested if he continued his live reporting on a villagers' protest related to a land dispute.

In an interview with CamboJA following the incident, the journalist said that at around 9:00 a.m., he went to cover a protest by villagers in Kien Svay district, Kandal province. The villagers were protesting against a company allegedly owned by Okhna Khun Sear, accusing it of land grabbing. At the protest site in front of the company, a police officer approached the journalist and ordered him to enter the company's compound without providing any explanation. The journalist refused.

At around 10:20 a.m., the villagers continued their protest by marching to the Kean Svay district hall to seek intervention from the authorities. The journalist followed the group and continued recording the protest. Upon arriving in front of the district hall, four police officers approached him and asked him to go inside the building to meet their superior. The journalist questioned the request and again refused to comply.

According to the journalist, the police then accused him of inciting the villagers to protest and warned that he would be arrested if he did not cooperate.

Fearing arrest, the journalist left the scene immediately. He said, "After hearing this, I asked to retrieve my motorbike and immediately left the protest site," adding that the intimidation was intended to prevent him from reporting on the protest.

(Type of act: Intimidation)

Report cases of journalists' rights violations

☎ +855 10 882 311 (Telegram)

✉ feedback@camboja.net

📍 SSP Office Space, 4th floor (G), #48, Samdech Pen Nut Blvd (289), Sangkat Boeung Kak 2, Khan Toul Kork, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

