

## **JOINT STATEMENT: CSOs call on authorities to step up the fight against endemic impunity in Cambodia**

Phnom Penh, 1 November 2018 – On the occasion of the [International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists](#), we, the undersigned civil society groups and communities, condemn the ongoing impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of crimes against journalists and human rights defenders in Cambodia, and urge the authorities to take immediate action to ensure the effective, independent, and transparent investigations of all crimes.

Since 1994, at least 13 journalists have been murdered: [Thou Char Mongkol](#), [Nun Chan](#), [Chan Dara](#), [Thun Bun Ly](#), [Chet Duong Daravuth](#), [Pich Em](#), [Dok Sokhan](#), [Ou Saroeun](#), [Chour Chetharith](#), [Khim Sambo](#), [Hang Serei Oudom](#), [Suon Chan](#) and [Taing Try](#). In all these cases, the victims were killed because of their work. Furthermore, at the time of their deaths 12 of the victims were engaged in activities that posed a direct threat to powerful individuals within the Cambodian elite: five worked for media outlets critical of the ruling party, while seven were investigating and reporting on allegations of corruption by high-level individuals in the government and military.

In 11 out of these 13 cases, no one was convicted for the murders;<sup>1</sup> in seven, no suspect was arrested or interrogated.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the killers of Thou Char Mongkol, the editor-in-chief of *Antarakum* newspaper who was found unconscious with a fractured skull on a road in June 1994 after having published several articles accusing government and military officials of corruption, were never identified by the police. Instead, they claimed he was the victim of a traffic accident. Similarly, even though Dok Sokhan was shot dead by two soldiers in July 1997 after having taken photos of them looting a market, no one has been arrested or charged. Another illustrative example is that of Khim Sambo, a journalist at *Moneaseka Khmer*, a daily newspaper aligned with the opposition party, who was shot dead by two men on a motorcycle in July 2008. 10 years later, calls for an independent commission of enquiry have been ignored and those responsible have not been brought to justice.

In the two cases where a trial took place, serious concerns remain. Suon Chan was reporting on illegal fishing activities when he was beaten to death by a group of fishermen in January 2014. In his case, only one of the perpetrators was arrested and convicted. Five other suspects were tried *in absentia* and given a 13-year sentence. They were never arrested. In the other case, that of Taing Try, who was found dead with a bullet in his forehead in October 2014, two of the three perpetrators who initially confessed to the murder were released on bail after the third claimed to have acted alone.

Crimes against journalists carry with them a [particular menace](#). Journalists perform an indispensable duty in the societies in which they work; they are the eyes, the ears, and the voice of the people. Journalists are responsible for reporting events as they happen, writing analysis and commentary to support lively expression and debate. Independent journalism plays an essential role in holding those in power accountable and makes a vital contribution to a just society. When journalists are targeted by violence for what they write or report, freedom of expression is stifled and replaced by self-censorship and fear; the public is denied information; and the powerful cannot be held to account. When the state fails to investigate and punish violence against journalists, it sends the chilling message that attacks on journalists are permissible.

In the last two years, while journalists have not been killed, they have been targeted with judicial harassment, including trumped-up charges, and media outlets perceived as critical have been forced to close.

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<sup>1</sup> Thou Char Mongkol, Nun Chan, Chan Dara, Thun Bun Ly, Chet Duong Daravuth, Pich Em, Dok Sokhan, Ou Saroeun, Chour Chetharith, Khim Sambo, Hang Serei Oudom.

<sup>2</sup> Thou Char Mongkol, Thun Bun Ly, Chet Duong Daravuth, Pich Em, Dok Sokhan, Chour Chetharith, Khim Sambo.

Impunity in Cambodia is not limited to attacks against journalists. The lack of effective, independent and transparent investigations into the deaths of environmental activist [Chut Wutty](#), trade unionists [Chea Vichea](#) and [Ros Sovannareth](#), and political analyst [Kem Ley](#) further illustrate the pervasive culture of impunity that prevails in Cambodia. The cases outlined above represent a fraction of the thousands of instances of abuse perpetrated against journalists, human rights defenders, political opponents, trade unionists, activists and individuals that have gone unaddressed by the institutions tasked with protecting the rights of Cambodians.

We condemn the rampant impunity that harms Cambodian people and society and demand justice for all those whose rights have been cast aside. We call upon the authorities to prosecute perpetrators of crimes committed against journalists and human rights defenders by undertaking effective, independent, and transparent investigations and prosecutions in accordance with international human rights standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the [United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) and the [United Nations Economic and Social Council's updated set of principles for the protection and promotion of human rights through action to combat impunity](#), and to restore the integrity of the Cambodian legal system.

*This joint statement is endorsed by:*

1. *Amnesty International (AI)*
2. *Article 19*
3. *ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)*
4. *Asian Democracy Network (ADN)*
5. *Asian Forum for Human Rights & Development (Forum Asia)*
6. *Boeung Chhouk Community*
7. *Boeung Kak Community*
8. *Boeung Trabek Community*
9. *CamASEAN Youth's Future*
10. *Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)*
11. *Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)*
12. *Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)*
13. *Cambodian Independent Teacher Association (CITA)*
14. *Cambodian League for the Promotion & Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)*
15. *Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)*
16. *Chroy Changva Community*
17. *CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation*
18. *Civil Rights Defenders*
19. *Coalition for Integrity & Social Accountability (CISA)*
20. *Coalition of Cambodian farmer Community (CCFC)*
21. *Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (COMFREL)*
22. *Equitable Cambodia (EC)*
23. *Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)*
24. *Human Rights Watch (HRW)*
25. *Indradevi Association (IDA)*
26. *International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders*
27. *IFEX*
28. *Kuoy Ethnic Community, Prame Village, Preah Vihea province*
29. *Land Community, I Village Preah Sihanouk province*
30. *Lor Peang Community, Kampong Chhnang Province*
31. *Minority Rights Organization (MIRO)*
32. *Ninety Two Community*
33. *Phnom Bat Community*

34. *Ponlok Khmer (PKH)*
35. *Railway Station, Tuol Sangkae A Community*
36. *Samakum Teang Tnaut (STT)*
37. *SILAKA*
38. *SOS International Airport Community*
39. *Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA)*
40. *Star Kampuchea*
41. *Strey Klaingsang Community*
42. *The Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)*
43. *World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders*