

JOINT STATEMENT: END IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS IN CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh, 1 November 2024 — On this International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, we, the undersigned civil society organizations, call upon the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to take immediate and concrete action to ensure the effective, independent, and transparent investigation of all crimes committed against media workers and human rights defenders (“HRDs”) in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Based on the records of journalists killed compiled by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, since 1994, at least 15 journalists have been killed in Cambodia. Twelve of these individuals were reporting on sensitive issues at the time of their deaths.

Harassment and crimes against journalists continue to be a concerning trend this year. According to Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)’s monitoring report, 28 cases of harassment against 46 journalists were reported in the first nine months alone (from January to September 2024). Of these 46 journalists, 34 faced legal harassment, which included detained/imprisoned, summons for questioning, orders to appear in court and arrests. Additionally, seven journalists experienced physical harassment, while five faced restrictions on their activities. Furthermore, the operating licences of three media outlets were revoked during this period. As a result of this, Reporters Without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index 2024 ranked Cambodia 151 out of 180 countries, categorizing it among nations where the situation is deemed “very serious.”

Targeting journalists – particularly those reporting on human rights issues – undermines freedoms of expression and the press, thereby threatening the public’s access to information. This environment complicates efforts to hold those in power accountable for their wrongdoing. When authorities fail to investigate and punish perpetrators of crimes against journalists, it conveys the message that such offences are permissible.

Impunity for such crimes extends beyond attacks on journalists. The inadequate investigations and lack of proper criminal proceedings in the cases of environmental activist *Chut Wutty*, trade unionists *Chea Vichea* and *Ros Sovannareth*, and political analyst *Kem Ley* exemplify the pervasive culture of impunity that exists in Cambodia. These cases represent only a fraction of the thousands of instances of abuse against journalists, human rights defenders, political opposition members, trade unionists, and activists that remain unaddressed by the very institutions responsible for safeguarding the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Cambodians.

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

We demand justice for all those whose rights have been disregarded. The RGC must condemn and put an end to the impunity exhibited towards perpetrators of crimes against journalists and HRDs.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
2. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Union (CATU)
3. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
4. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
5. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
6. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
7. Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID)
8. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) Malaysia
9. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
10. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
11. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
12. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
13. Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUPI)
14. Federation of Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
15. Kiri Post
16. International Federation of Journalists (IJF)
17. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFEE)
18. Labour Rights Supported Union Khmer Employees of Naga (L.R.S.U)
19. Partnership for Environment and Development (PED)
20. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut Organization (STT)
21. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia