

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 06/06 (ASA 23/002/2006, 6 January 2006) - Prisoners of conscience/human rights defenders at risk

KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA **Kem Sokha (m), President, Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)**
Pa Nguon Teang (m), CCHR Acting Director/Radio Director
Rong Chhun (m), President, Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA)
Mam Sonando (m), Director, Beehive Radio
Yeng Virak (m), Director, Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)

Chea Mony (m), President, Free Trade Union of Workers
Ea Channa (m), Deputy Secretary-General, Students' Movement for Democracy
Men Nath (m), President, Cambodian Independent Civil Servants Association
Prince Sisowath Thomico (m), Secretary to former King Sihanouk
Say Bory (m), Advisor to former King Sihanouk

Yeng Virak, Director of the Community Legal Education Center (CLEC), was released on bail on 11 January. He has been charged with criminal defamation in connection with comments critical of the government allegedly written on a banner displayed at a 10 December rally for International Human Rights Day. The investigating judge has reportedly found that Yeng Virak was not involved with the banner, but the charge against him has not been dropped. It is punishable by one year's imprisonment

Kem Sokha and Pa Nguon Teang are facing the same charge. Under Cambodian law they may be held for up to six months before they go on trial. Kem Sokha, President of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), was arrested at the CCHR office in the capital, Phnom Penh, on 31 December. Yeng Virak was arrested at his office around two hours later. Pa Nguon Teang, the CCHR's Acting Director, was arrested in Stung Treng Province on 4 January and taken to Phnom Penh.

Mam Sonando, manager of Beehive Radio (Sambok Khmum), was arrested on 11 October 2005 over an interview with a Paris-based group called Cambodia's Border Committee, which criticised the government's border policies. He was charged with criminal defamation, disinformation and incitement to commit a crime, for which he could be sentenced to several years in prison.

On 14 October, warrants were issued for the arrest of four leaders of the Cambodian Watchdog Council, a lobby group affiliated to the opposition Sam Rainsy Party, which had signed a written statement, criticising the border agreement with Viet Nam. Rong Chhun, President of the Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association, was arrested the next day as he attempted to flee the country. He was charged with criminal defamation and incitement, and could face several years in prison. Chea Mony, Ea Channa and Men Nath are sheltering abroad.

Amnesty International considers Kem Sokha, Pa Nguon Teang, Rong Chhun and Mam Sonando to be prisoners of conscience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The coalition government under the leadership of Prime Minister Hun Sen, in power since July 2004, has been stepping up efforts to stifle peaceful dissent over the past year.

Cambodia is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and all the other core international human rights treaties, and has thus committed to respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association. These rights are also protected under the Cambodian constitution.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- welcoming the release on bail of Yeng Virak, and urging the authorities to withdraw the criminal charges against him;
- urging the authorities to release Kem Sokha, Pa Nguon Teang, Rong Chhun and Mam Sonando immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of their beliefs;
- calling on the authorities to withdraw criminal complaints against all others who have only voiced peaceful dissent;
- asking the authorities to guarantee that all Cambodians will be able to enjoy the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

APPEALS TO:

Hun Sen
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia
Fax: + 855 12 813 781
+ 855 23 360 666 (c/o Council of Ministers)
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Sar Kheng
Deputy Prime Minister, Co-Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior, 275 Norodom Blvd
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia
Fax: + 855 23 21 27 08
+ 855 23 726 052
Salutation: Dear Deputy Prime Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Cambodia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 February 2006.