



# **Cambodia: Regression of UN freedom of expression commitments**

Universal Periodic Review mid-term report

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## CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Legal framework for freedom of expression	6
Digital rights	9
Media freedom	12
Threats to human rights defenders, including environmental activists	15
Civil society and freedom of association	18
Political association and free and fair elections	20
Freedom of peaceful assembly	23

## INTRODUCTION

Since Cambodia's third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2019, the situation for the rights to freedom of expression, information, assembly, and association has significantly deteriorated. In August 2021, Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, stated that 'regression of the democratic space and civil and political rights and freedoms, interlinked with the monopolization of power, has emerged as the most ostensible longitudinal issue.'<sup>1</sup>

Two years since Cambodia received 198 UPR recommendations to improve its human rights protections, the government has failed to meaningfully implement the vast majority of recommendations. In particular, the government has largely failed to implement recommendations on freedom of expression, information, assembly, association, digital rights, and the protection of human rights defenders. Rather, the situation has further regressed. Over the last two years, the government of Cambodia has taken decisive steps to suppress critical and dissenting voices, the independent media, civil society organisations, environmental activists, and peaceful protesters.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the protection of fundamental freedoms has worsened as authorities imposed unduly restrictive policies and laws to the detriment of public participation and civic space. Further repressive legislation is being advanced by the government and could impede freedom of expression even further.

Independent journalists, environmental activists, and peaceful protesters have faced physical violence, threats, judicial harassment, and imprisonment. Government restrictions on the freedom of expression—often presented by the government as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic—have far exceeded those permissible under international human rights law. This systematic attack on public discourse and dissenting voices is eroding the confidence of Cambodians in their ability to safely exercise their rights and encouraging widespread self-censorship.

In a submission<sup>2</sup> ahead of Cambodia's third UPR, ARTICLE 19 and PEN America made recommendations relevant to the following areas of concern:

- Legal framework for freedom of expression
- Digital rights
- Media freedom
- Threats to human rights defenders, including environmental activists
- Freedom of association and the right to participate in public affairs

This mid-term report will cover these five key areas and two additional issues: freedom of peaceful assembly, which declined steeply since Cambodia's last UPR, and the right to political association, which is especially relevant with commune and national elections expected in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

While 56 recommendations were made by 31 states covering these topics, there has been minimal progress on implementation. Much more still needs to be done to stop rights abuses in these areas. In

<sup>1</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, UN Doc. A/HRC/48/79, 3 August 2021, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/48/79>.

<sup>2</sup> ARTICLE 19 and PEN America, Joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Cambodia, 12 July 2018, available at: <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018.07.12-A19-PEN-America-Joint-UPR-Cambodia-as-submitted-1.pdf>.

this mid-term report ARTICLE 19 and PEN America will review recommendations made to Cambodia during its third UPR and any relevant progress or regression over the last two years.

*Table 1: Relevant third cycle recommendations and implementation progress*

Topic	Number of third cycle UPR recommendations	Number of accepted and noted recommendations <sup>3</sup>	Implementation progress
Legal framework for freedom of expression	16	Nine accepted; seven noted	Progress towards one recommendation only.
Digital rights	12	Ten accepted; two noted	None
Media freedom	18	15 accepted; three noted	None
Threats to human rights defenders, including environmental activists	12	11 accepted; one noted	None
Civil society and freedom of association	33	27 accepted; six noted	Progress towards recommendations calling for reform of the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations and the Law on Trade Unions.
Political association and free and fair elections	24	16 accepted; eight noted	None for accepted recommendations. Two noted recommendations partially implemented.
Freedom of peaceful assembly	14	Nine accepted; five noted	None

<sup>3</sup> Accepting a recommendation shows a commitment to implement it before the next cycle, noting a recommendation makes no such commitment.

# LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

## Third cycle UPR recommendations

During the third UPR, 16 recommendations were made to Cambodia regarding reform of the domestic legal framework to bring it in line with international human rights standards on freedom of expression.<sup>4</sup> Of those recommendations, nine were accepted by the government while seven were noted.<sup>5</sup> Accepted recommendations included calls to revise the Law on Telecommunications and the Penal Code to bring them into compliance with international human rights standards for freedom of expression. The government of Cambodia also accepted two recommendations from Germany and the United States of America to revoke Interministerial Prakas No. 170 on publication controls of websites and social media processing via the Internet.<sup>6</sup> A recommendation by Switzerland to adopt a Law on Access to Information was also accepted by Cambodia.<sup>7</sup>

## Implementation over the last two years

Cambodia has made minimal progress on implementing the nine recommendations on the legal framework for freedom of expression that it accepted in 2019. Only one recommendation,<sup>8</sup> on the adoption of freedom of information legislation, has seen meaningful progress towards implementation, with a spokesperson for the Ministry of Information announcing the finalisation of the draft law in September 2021.<sup>9</sup> The Cambodian government originally intended to pass the Law on Access to Information in 2020 but postponed its adoption using the COVID-19 pandemic as justification.<sup>10</sup> The draft law is currently awaiting finalisation by the Ministry of Justice before it is sent to the Council of Ministers for approval.<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that while the government's efforts to enshrine the right to information through legislation is encouraging, the latest publicly available draft of the Law on Access to Information has numerous shortcomings that contravene international standards and, in its current form does not sufficiently protect the right to information.<sup>12</sup>

There have been no known steps towards implementation regarding the remainder of the accepted recommendations. Cambodia has not undertaken any legal reform of existing laws that violate freedom of expression, including the Law on Telecommunications and the Penal Code. Instead, over the past two years the government has enacted further repressive legislation to the detriment of freedom of expression, with the apparent aim of stifling criticism and dissent.

<sup>4</sup> **110.26 (Iceland), 110.29 (Czechia), 110.31 (Austria), 110.79 (Finland), 110.81 (France), 110.82 (Germany), 110.83 (Germany), 110.84 (Germany), 110.92 (Spain), 110.93 (Italy), 110.94 (Sweden), 110.96 (Switzerland), 110.97 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), 110.98 (United States of America), 110.105 (Denmark),** and 110.108 (Greece).

<sup>5</sup> Those recommendations that were accepted are emboldened in the previous footnote; the remainder were noted by the government of Cambodia.

<sup>6</sup> 110.83 (Germany) and 110.98 (United States of America).

<sup>7</sup> 110.96 (Switzerland).

<sup>8</sup> 110.96 (Switzerland).

<sup>9</sup> Sar Socheath, Law on access to information awaits endorsement from Justice Ministry, *Khmer Times*, 29 September 2021, available at: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50943620/law-on-access-to-information-awaits-endorsement-from-justice-ministry/>.

<sup>10</sup> Khuon Narim, Gov't says draft access to information law delayed by COVID-19 pandemic, *CamboJA*, 6 January 2021, available at: <https://cambodianews.com/govt-says-draft-access-to-information-law-delayed-by-covid-19-pandemic/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ry Sochan, Info access draft law all set for final review, *Phnom Penh Post*, 28 September 2021, available at: <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/info-access-draft-law-all-set-final-review>.

<sup>12</sup> See, ARTICLE 19, Cambodia: Access to Information Bill falls short, 11 December 2019, available at: <https://www.article19.org/resources/cambodia-access-to-information-bill-falls-short/>; and Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), Access to Information in Cambodia, 28 September 2020, available at: <https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/newsletter/newsletter/english/infographic-of-A2I-in-English.pdf>.

In March 2021, Cambodia enacted the new **Law on Measures to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and other Serious, Dangerous and Contagious Diseases** (the COVID-19 Law). The law grants authorities the power to undertake COVID-19 prevention measures. However, the actions authorities are empowered to take to curb the spread of COVID-19 under the law are broadly and vaguely termed, and the law includes a catch-all provision permitting the imposition of ‘other measures which are necessary to respond and prevent the spread of COVID-19.’ Such vague wording bestows seemingly unfettered powers on authorities and could be utilised to arbitrarily target activists, journalists, or civil society organisations, who already bear the brunt of persecution by the government. Reportedly, the COVID-19 Law has led to the arbitrary arrest of more than 700 people between March and October 2021, including for posts on social media about the pandemic.<sup>13</sup> This report contains *infra* additional information on authorities using the law to target those peacefully expressing themselves, including a journalist.

In February 2021, seven months after it was drafted, the **Sub-Decree on the Establishment of a National Internet Gateway** (NIG Sub-Decree) was adopted, setting in motion the creation of a national internet gateway (NIG)—a virtual portal through which all Internet communications and Internet data traffic circulating within and coming into Cambodia must pass. The NIG Sub-Decree facilitates monitoring and surveillance of Internet activity, empowers the interception and censorship of digital communications, and enables the collection, retention, and sharing of personal data, thus fundamentally threatening the rights to privacy, freedom of expression, and information. Three UN Special Rapporteurs have shared their concerns about the NIG Sub-Decree.<sup>14</sup> Although the NIG Sub-Decree itself has not yet come into effect, its impact on the media and civil society is already being felt. Journalists, activists, and human rights defenders fear arrest and are increasingly practicing self-censorship.<sup>15</sup>

In April 2020, the Cambodian government passed the heavily criticised and hastily drafted **Law on the Management of the Nation in State of Emergency**,<sup>16</sup> which grants the government sweeping and vaguely defined powers to restrict human rights if a state of emergency is declared.<sup>17</sup> During a state of emergency, the government may restrict or prohibit free speech, surveil telecommunications, and monitor and control social media. The law creates imprecise criminal offences with penalties of up to five years’ imprisonment for ‘intentionally disobeying’ emergency measures if the action ‘brings chaos to the public,’ and up to ten years’ for ‘obstructing’ the response to the emergency if the action ‘brings chaos to the public or impacts national security.’

The wave of repressive new laws appears set to continue as two more pieces of legislation are currently being drafted, each with the ability to deliver another blow to freedom of expression in Cambodia.

<sup>13</sup> Phorn Bopha, Cambodia ‘bleeding’ as space for civil society shrinks, *AlJazeera*, 3 November 2021, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/3/cambodia-bleeding-as-space-for-civil-society-shrinks>.

<sup>14</sup> Three UN Special Rapporteurs, Joint letter by three UN human rights expert in relation to the Sub-decree on the establishment of the National Internet Gateway, AL KHM 3/2021, 7 April 2021, available at: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26263>.

<sup>15</sup> Momy Say, Cambodia’s Internet Gateway Ushers in Silence, Media Say, VOA, 19 October 2021, available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-s-internet-gateway-ushers-in-silence-media-say-6277380.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Ben Sokhean, State of Emergency draft signed into law, *Khmer Times*, 30 April 2020, available at: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50718535/state-of-emergency-draft-signed-into-law/>.

<sup>17</sup> See, 66 organisations and communities, Joint Statement: Civil Society Organizations call for the Royal Government of Cambodia to Amend the State of Emergency Law to Protect Human Rights, 13 May 2020, available at: [https://cchrcambodia.org/media/files/press\\_release/756\\_ccftrtatsoeltphref\\_en.pdf](https://cchrcambodia.org/media/files/press_release/756_ccftrtatsoeltphref_en.pdf); and UN OHCHR, Cambodia’s state of emergency law endangers human rights, warns UN expert, 17 April 2020, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25801&LangID=E>.

The **draft Law on Public Order**, released in July 2020, contains an extensive array of overbroad and arbitrary provisions that effectively criminalise the legitimate everyday activities of many within Cambodia.<sup>18</sup> It would grant the government the authority to regulate a vast array of public and private behaviour and would prohibit activities that impact ‘national tradition and dignity.’

The **draft Law on Cybercrime** creates criminal offences that will foreseeably be used to criminalise online expression protected under international law, prohibiting broad categories of online content and impacting all internet users. Notably, while the Ministry of Information announced in July 2020 that it will not proceed with the drafting of an Anti-Fake News Law,<sup>19</sup> Article 45 of the draft Law on Cybercrime criminalises ‘disinformation’ through information technology, punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment and a fine of up to 2,500 USD.<sup>20</sup> It specifies punishment of disinformation in six vaguely defined different contexts which could be used to punish any criticism of the government or any state institution, severely impeding government accountability and violating the right to freedom of expression.

## How Cambodia can effectively implement third cycle recommendations

- Take immediate steps to repeal or reform all legislation that restricts the right to freedom of expression and bring such laws in line with international human rights law and standards, including by:
  - Amending the Law on Telecommunications,
  - Repealing Interministerial Prakas No. 170 on publication controls of websites and social media processing via the Internet,
  - Amending the Penal Code, namely Articles 495 – 497 (incitement) and repealing all provisions concerning criminal defamation and insult (Articles 305 - 310), including lèse-majesté (Article 437(*bis*)) and insult of a public official (Article 502),
  - Amending the Law on Measures to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and other Serious, Dangerous and Contagious Diseases,
  - Repealing the Sub-Decree on the Establishment of a National Internet Gateway, and
  - Amending the Law on the Management of the Nation in State of Emergency.
- Ensure the draft Law on Access to Information complies with international human rights law and standards on the right to information before it is enacted.
- End all criminal proceedings against individuals for lawfully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

<sup>18</sup> See, 65 organisations and communities, Joint Statement: Civil Society Organizations Call for the Draft Law on Public Order to be Immediately Discarded, 13 August 2020, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA2328732020ENGLISH.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Why Sovuthy, Information Ministry to push ‘fake news’ education over draft law, *CamboJA*, 24 July 2020, available at: <https://cambojanews.com/information-ministry-to-push-fake-news-education-over-draft-law/>.

<sup>20</sup> See, Human Rights Watch, Cambodia: Scrap Draft Cybercrime Law, 13 November 2020, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/13/cambodia-scrap-draft-cybercrime-law>.



## DIGITAL RIGHTS

### Third cycle UPR recommendations

Cambodia received 12 recommendations regarding digital rights during its third UPR.<sup>21</sup> Of those recommendations, ten were accepted by the government while two were noted.<sup>22</sup> Accepted recommendations include calls to reform the Law on Telecommunications and repeal Interministerial Prakas No. 170 on publication controls of websites and social media processing via the Internet. Cambodia also accepted recommendations calling for actions to protect freedom of expression online and guarantee freedom of expression on the internet. One accepted recommendation from the Netherlands called for Cambodia to ‘refrain from prosecuting persons for exercising their fundamental rights under the Penal Code and the law on telecommunications.’<sup>23</sup>

### Implementation over the last two years

Disappointingly, there has been no visible progress towards the implementation of any of the recommendations made on digital rights. Domestic law has gone unreformed, with new legislative developments further threatening digital rights;<sup>24</sup> efforts by authorities to restrict and censor online expression, particularly on social media, have proliferated; surveillance of online platforms has increased; and prosecutions for online expression under the Penal Code remain frequent.

In the two years since Cambodia’s third UPR, the government has increasingly restricted internet freedom and targeted individuals responsible for critical online commentary. **Social media users** in particular have become the focus of criminal charges for expressing opinions online. Users of Facebook,<sup>25</sup> YouTube,<sup>26</sup> and TikTok<sup>27</sup> have experienced judicial harassment for their online expression. In 2019, Interior Minister Sar Kheng assigned a working group of 14 members to monitor the Facebook page of Prime Minister Hun Sen to identify users who make ‘undesirable’ comments, illustrating the government’s concerted effort to increase its policing of social media platforms. In February 2021, the Information Ministry announced that it was expanding its online monitoring activities to include TikTok as well as closed-sourced platforms such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and Telegram.<sup>28</sup>

The **COVID-19 pandemic** provided Cambodia’s government with more opportunities to silence expression. The Cambodian authorities have arrested dozens of individuals for expressing critical opinions about the government’s COVID-19 response online, including at least seven individuals for their criticism of the government’s vaccination campaign.<sup>29</sup> Authorities have also prosecuted at least

<sup>21</sup> 110.26 (Iceland), 110.29 (Czechia), 110.31 (Austria), 110.79 (Finland), 110.81 (France), 110.83 (Germany), 110.94 (Sweden), 110.96 (Switzerland), 110.98 (United States of America), 110.101 (Brazil), 110.106 (Lithuania), and 110.110 (Netherlands).

<sup>22</sup> Those recommendations that were accepted are emboldened in the previous footnote; the remainder were noted by the government of Cambodia.

<sup>23</sup> 110.110 (Netherlands).

<sup>24</sup> The NIG Sub-Decree and the draft Law on Cybercrime.

<sup>25</sup> See, Hul Reaksmeay, Family at Risk After Arrest of Cambodian Woman for ‘Sexy’ Online Sales, *VOA Khmer*, 10 March 2020, available at: <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/family-at-risk-after-arrest-of-cambodian-woman-for-sexy-online-sales/5322573.html>.

<sup>26</sup> See, Mech Dara, Siem Reap provincial court sentenced two rappers, *VOD*, 22 December 2020, available at: <https://vodkhmer.news/2020/12/22/siamreap-provincial-court-sentence-two-youths-who-sing-rap-in-prison/>.

<sup>27</sup> See, National Police, A Tik Tok user question at national police, 6 July 2020, available at: <https://phnompenhpolice.com/social-security/2170.html>.

<sup>28</sup> *UCA News*, Cambodia expands monitoring of ‘fake news’, 19 January 2021, available at: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/cambodia-expands-monitoring-of-fake-news/91186#>.

<sup>29</sup> See, Nhim Sokhorn and Samoeun Nicseybon, Two Deaths Ruled Unrelated to Vaccine, Covid; Two Arrested Over Posts, *VOD*, 2 March 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/two-deaths-ruled-unrelated-to-vaccine-covid-two-arrested-over-posts/>.

three individuals—Korng Sambath, Nov Kloem, and Pann Sophy—under the COVID-19 Law for posting TikTok videos criticising the use of Chinese-made vaccines.

While only two recommendations were made in 2019 specifically regarding **digital surveillance**,<sup>30</sup> over the last two years surveillance of online expression has emerged as a critical concern for digital rights.<sup>31</sup> Article 97 of the Law on Telecommunications permits the surveillance of private communications without judicial oversight, garnering concern about the law being misused by authorities to silence dissenting voices. Such concerns have come to fruition since the last UPR. Kong Bunheang and Hang Seng, both former political opposition members, were arrested on 17 and 18 October 2020, respectively, and charged with insulting the King for comments they made during a private phone call with one another. A recording of the conversation was used to convict the pair in March 2021.<sup>32</sup> In another suspected episode of state surveillance, a video of a Zoom meeting that appears to be between Mother Nature environmental activists was leaked online.<sup>33</sup> It is not known how the video was obtained but it is believed to be evidence that will be used against the activists who are currently in pre-trial detention following their arrest on 16 June 2021 for alleged plotting under Article 453 of the Penal Code<sup>34</sup> and insulting the king (*lèse majesté*) under Article 437(*bis*).<sup>35</sup> Additionally, on 1 November 2021, the 16-year-old son of a former Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) official was convicted of incitement and insulting public officials for content he shared on the private messaging app Telegram.<sup>36</sup> He was sentenced to eight months in prison but was released on 10 November 2021 after four and a half months.<sup>37</sup> Raising further concerns over digital surveillance, Prime Minister Hun Sen joined a private zoom call of former-CNRP members and boasted about listening in on 20 previous calls without revealing his presence.<sup>38</sup>

In a deal signed in September 2021 to support Cambodian law enforcement, China agreed to give Cambodia new biometric surveillance technology. The invasive technology is a foreseeable threat to the future of the right to privacy and freedom of expression in Cambodia and could be used by authorities to monitor the activities of government critics.<sup>39</sup>

## Steps required to effectively implement third cycle recommendations

- End all ongoing criminal proceedings against individuals based on their exercise of the right to freedom of expression in online spaces and quash all convictions on such grounds.

<sup>30</sup> 110.79 (Finland) and 110.81 (France).

<sup>31</sup> See, Sorn Sarath and Sam Sopich, Digital surveillance increasingly used to oppress civil society, rights groups say, *Cambodia*, 28 June 2021, available at: <https://cambodianews.com/digital-surveillance-increasingly-used-to-oppress-civil-society-rights-groups-say/>.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Nachemson and Kong Meta, Cambodia's digital surveillance serves to silence the opposition and suppress criticism of the government, *Post Magazine*, 19 October 2019, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/3033508/cambodias-digital-surveillance-serves-silence>; and Ouch Sony, Two Ex-CNRP Members Sentenced for Insulting King in Private Call, *VOD*, 3 March 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/two-ex-cnrp-members-sentenced-for-insulting-king-in-private-call/>.

<sup>33</sup> Video available on Fresh News TV Facebook account: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=346703053635914&rdc=1&rdi>.

<sup>34</sup> Article 453: Plotting 'consists of a resolution agreed upon by two or more persons to commit an attack where the resolution was put into effect by one or more material actions'.

<sup>35</sup> Article 437 (*bis*) prohibits anyone from defaming, insulting or threatening the King through 'any speeches, gestures, scripts/writings, paintings or items that would affect the dignity of the King'.

<sup>36</sup> Licadho, 16-year-old with autism convicted over Facebook posts, Telegram messages, 1 November 2021, available at: <https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/flashnews.php?perm=296&english>.

<sup>37</sup> Nat Sopheap and Mech Dara, Opposition Activist's Teenage Son Released From Prison, *VOD*, 10 November 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/opposition-activists-teenage-son-released-from-prison/>.

<sup>38</sup> Sopheng Cheang, Cambodian leader boasts he barged into opposition video call, *ABC News*, 18 September 2021, available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/cambodian-leader-boasts-barged-opposition-video-call-80081048>.

<sup>39</sup> See, Aun Chhengpr, Surveillance Tools, DNA Screening Equipment Part of Cambodia's New Security Deal With China, *VOA*, 6 October 2021, available at: <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/surveillance-tools-dna-screening-equipment-part-of-cambodia-new-security-deal-with-china/6258369.html>.

- Repeal Interministerial Prakas No. 170 on publication controls of websites and social media processing via the Internet.
- Ensure that any future legislative or policy proposals governing online spaces are developed transparently and in full consultation with the public and civil society and that they comply with international human rights law and standards.
- Revise the Law on Telecommunications in line with international human rights standards.
- Facilitate a safe environment for exercising freedom of expression on social media platforms without fear of retribution.
- Cease all arbitrary or unlawful digital surveillance and ensure that any interference with the right to privacy is consistent with the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality.
- Repeal the NIG Sub-Decree and substantively amend the draft Law on Cybercrime in line with international human rights standards.

# MEDIA FREEDOM

## Third cycle UPR recommendations

During Cambodia's third UPR, 18 recommendations were made regarding media freedom and the protection of journalists.<sup>40</sup> Of those recommendations, 15 were accepted by the government while three were noted.<sup>41</sup> Accepted recommendations include calls to guarantee the exercise of the right to freedom of expression for journalists and strengthen the independence of the media. Cambodia also accepted multiple recommendations calling on it to cease interference with media and end harassment of journalists, including judicial harassment. A recommendation from Slovenia to promote a safe environment for journalists by investigating and prosecuting all attacks against them was also accepted.<sup>42</sup>

## Implementation over the last two years

In the two years since the third UPR, Cambodia has made no apparent effort to implement any of the 18 media freedom recommendations. Rather, media freedom and the right to freedom of expression for journalists have deteriorated further, reaching new lows as Cambodian authorities have actively discouraged and obstructed independent journalism. Since 2019, journalists in Cambodia have been threatened, attacked, arrested, and silenced through the application of arbitrary criminal charges.

The authorities' perpetual harassment of journalists for legitimate journalistic activities is blurring the boundaries of lawful journalism and leading to self-censorship. For example, in July 2021, three reporters who were questioned by police for their coverage of a protest over a land dispute in Phnom Penh were made to sign an agreement accepting wrongdoing for starting 'filming too early' and capturing footage of protesters 'shouting and yelling.'<sup>43</sup>

**Violence against journalists** is a growing threat, with at least 12 journalists being physically attacked in 2020 alone<sup>44</sup> and at least 20 recorded incidents of violence against journalists between January and October 2021.<sup>45</sup> On 29 September 2020, one journalist died in what police claimed to be a traffic accident, while others speculated that his death could have been an extrajudicial killing.<sup>46</sup> In March 2021, Pran Sean, a journalist and publisher for digital news outlet *Anachak Khmer*, was beaten at night as he slept in a hammock outside a temple.<sup>47</sup> Sean believes that it was a premeditated attack by

<sup>40</sup> 110.79 (Finland), **110.81 (France)**, **110.85 (Iceland)**, **110.88 (Norway)**, **110.91 (Ireland)**, 110.97 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), **110.98 (United States of America)**, **110.99 (Argentina)**, **110.102 (Canada)**, **110.103 (Japan)**, **110.106 (Lithuania)**, **110.110 (Netherlands)**, **110.112 (Croatia)**, **110.113 (Slovenia)**, **110.114 (Czechia)**, **110.116 (Chile)**, 110.117 (Greece), and **110.118 (Italy)**.

<sup>41</sup> Those recommendations that were accepted are emboldened in the previous footnote; the remainder were noted by the government of Cambodia.

<sup>42</sup> 110.113 (Slovenia).

<sup>43</sup> Mech Dara, Three Journalists Detained, Educated for Covering Boeng Tompun Dispute, *VOD*, 22 July 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/three-journalists-detained-educated-for-covering-boeng-tompun-dispute/>.

<sup>44</sup> *CamboJA*, Cambodian Journalism Situation Report 2020, March 2020, available at: <https://www.camboja.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Cambodian-Journalism-Situation-Report-2020.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> *CamboJA et al.*, Joint Statement: CSOs call on Cambodian authorities to step up the fight against impunity for crimes committed against journalists, 2 November 2021, available at: <https://www.camboja.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-11-02-Joint-Statement.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> *UCAnews*, TV journalist reportedly murdered in Cambodia, 29 September 2020, available at: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/tv-journalist-reportedly-murdered-in-cambodia/89691#>.

<sup>47</sup> Vann Vichar, Journalist Beaten as He Slept Outside Temple, *VOD*, 16 March 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/journalist-beaten-as-he-slept-outside-temple/>.

illegal loggers in retribution for writing articles about illegal timber trading. In addition to physical violence, threats of attack and death threats are routinely used against journalists to silence them.<sup>48</sup>

The last two years have seen a spike in the **prosecution of journalists** in Cambodia. In 2020, four journalists—Sovann Rithy,<sup>49</sup> Sok Oudom,<sup>50</sup> Ros Sokhet,<sup>51</sup> and Keo Hour—were arrested on incitement charges, three of whom were later convicted.<sup>52</sup> Courts handed down harsh and disproportionate sentences to Rithy, Oudom, and Sokhet, likely to cultivate self-censorship among independent media. In 2021 so far, at least 31 journalists have been arrested,<sup>53</sup> including online news publisher Yuon Chhiv who was quickly sentenced to one year imprisonment for incitement just two days after being questioned by police over alleged disinformation regarding a land dispute in a protected national park involving Defence Minister Tea Banh.<sup>54</sup> The high number of prosecutions of journalists demonstrates the tightening press landscape in Cambodia.

Between January and April 2021, the government **revoked the licenses** of at least seven media outlets under accusations of spreading ‘fake news’ about COVID-19 or spreading hate against the majority religion.<sup>55</sup>

Amid the **COVID-19 pandemic**, the space for press freedom in Cambodia has continued to shrink, impeding the ability of independent journalists to operate freely and inform the public. In May 2021, Cambodian authorities placed a *de facto* ban on independent reporting in Phnom Penh’s red zones—areas deemed to be high risk for COVID-19 transmission—by permitting only state media or journalists invited by the government.<sup>56</sup> A Chinese journalist, Shen Kaidong, was deported for publishing an alleged ‘fake news’ story in which multiple Chinese nationals reported receiving a text offering them the Sinopharm vaccine for a service fee.<sup>57</sup> On 15 July 2021, a second journalist, Kouy Piseth, was arrested and charged with incitement to commit a felony under Article 495 of the Penal Code and ‘obstruction’ under Article 11 of the COVID-19 Law for posts on Facebook criticising the efficacy of Chinese-made vaccines and accusing the government of having a political motive in using them.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *CamboJA*, Cambodian Journalism Situation Report 2020, March 2020, p.11, available at: <https://www.camboja.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Cambodian-Journalism-Situation-Report-2020.pdf>. See for example, Khut Sokun, Journalist Says He Was Threatened After Covering Land Clearing Case, *VOD*, 4 August 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/journalist-says-he-was-threatened-after-covering-land-clearing-case/>.

<sup>49</sup> Soun Narin, Online Journalist Convicted and Given Suspended Sentence for Quoting Hun Sen, *VOA*, 5 October 2020, available at: <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/online-journalist-convicted-and-given-suspended-sentence-for-quoting-hun-sen-5609194.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, Cambodia sentences journalist Sok Oudom to 20 months in prison, 22 December 2020, available at: <https://cpj.org/2020/12/cambodia-sentences-journalist-sok-oudom-to-20-months-in-prison/>.

<sup>51</sup> Sun Narin, Cambodia Convicts Journalist for Criticizing Hun Sen, *VOA*, 16 November 2020, available at: <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/cambodia-convicts-journalist-criticizing-hun-sen>; and Committee to Protect Journalists, Cambodia jails journalist Ros Sokhet for criticizing Prime Minister Hun Sen, 13 November 2020, available at: <https://cpj.org/2020/11/cambodia-jails-journalist-ros-sokhet-for-criticizing-prime-minister-hun-sen/>.

<sup>52</sup> 57 non-governmental organisations, Cambodia’s Government Should Stop Silencing Journalists, Media Outlets, 2 November 2020, available at: <https://www.article19.org/resources/cambodias-government-should-stop-silencing-journalists-media-outlets/>.

<sup>53</sup> *CamboJA et al.*, Joint Statement: CSOs call on Cambodian authorities to step up the fight against impunity for crimes committed against journalists, 2 November 2021, available at: <https://www.camboja.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-11-02-Joint-Statement.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> See, Mech Dara, Koh Kong journalist immediately sentenced over report on land conflict, *VOD*, 30 September 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/koh-kong-journalist-immediately-sentenced-over-report-on-land-conflict/>; and Khuon Narim and Sam Sopich, Family of online news publisher say Yuon Chhiv’s arrest linked to land dispute, *CamboJA*, 30 October 2021, available at: <https://cambojanews.com/family-of-online-news-publisher-say-yuon-chhivs-arrest-linked-to-land-dispute/>.

<sup>55</sup> Khuon Narim and Sam Sopich, 21 journalists harassed in past three months, reports *CamboJA*, *CamboJa*, 20 October 2021, available at: <https://cambojanews.com/21-journalists-harassed-in-past-three-months-reports-camboja/>.

<sup>56</sup> Mech Dara, Red-Zone News Reporting Is Invite-Only: Information Ministry, *VOD*, 3 May 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/red-zone-news-reporting-is-invite-only-information-ministry/>.

<sup>57</sup> Sun Narin, Cambodia Depports Chinese Journalist Over Vaccine for Sale Story, *VOA*, 3 March 2021, available at: <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/cambodia-deports-chinese-journalist-over-vaccine-for-sale-story-5800111.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Khuon Narim, Online journalist charged with the incitement after criticizing Chinese vaccines, *CamboJA*, 16 July 2021, available at: <https://cambojanews.com/online-journalist-charged-with-the-incitement-after-criticizing-chinese-vaccines/>; and Mech Dara, Jailed Journalist Slapped With Incitement, Covid-19 Law Charges, *VOD*, 16 July 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/jailed-journalist-slapped-with-incitement-covid-19-law-charges/>.

## Steps required to effectively implement third cycle recommendations

- Publicly acknowledge the importance of independent media and commit to creating a media environment conducive to independent and effective journalism.
- Ensure that all licensing laws and regulations are applied consistently, without bias, and in a manner that complies with international human rights law and standards.
- End all ongoing criminal proceedings against media actors based on their journalistic work and quash all convictions on such grounds.
- Ensure that any media codes of conduct comply with international human rights law and standards.
- End impunity for all acts of violence or harassment against journalists, ensuring the prompt, thorough and impartial investigation of all such cases and facilitate a safe environment for journalists and media workers.

## THREATS TO HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, INCLUDING ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

### Third cycle UPR recommendations

Cambodia received 12 recommendations regarding threats towards human rights defenders.<sup>59</sup> Of those recommendations 11 were accepted by the government while one was noted.<sup>60</sup> Accepted recommendations include calls to protect the rights of human rights defenders and cease interference and harassment with their work. Recommendations to end arbitrary arrests were also accepted, along with calls to protect them from violence and prosecute perpetrators. Explicit reference to the protection of environmental activists was made in one recommendation by Iceland.<sup>61</sup>

### Implementation over the last two years

The government of Cambodia has made no apparent progress towards the protection of human rights defenders and environmental activists. On the contrary, government harassment of these groups has intensified, leaving them incredibly vulnerable. Government authorities and private actors have used physical attacks, intimidation, and judicial harassment to silence those speaking out against human rights abuses, land grabs and environmental degradation.

President of the Cambodian Confederation of Unions and **labour rights defender**, Rong Chhun, was convicted of incitement to cause social unrest and sentenced to two years in prison for a statement he made on behalf of the Cambodian Watchdog Council, a civil society group, concerning community land loss resulting from the demarcation of the Cambodia-Vietnam border.<sup>62</sup> His sentence was reduced on appeal and he was released on 12 November 2021.<sup>63</sup> Another labour rights defender and Cambodian Independent Teachers Association President, Ouk Chhayavy, was violently attacked by unknown assailants on motorbikes which she believes was intended to discourage her from campaigning for Rong Chhun's release.<sup>64</sup>

In 2020, a wave arrests accompanied the government's renewed crackdown on human rights defenders. 28 human rights defenders and activists were arrested between 31 July and 20 September 2020 alone.<sup>65</sup> **Khmer Thavrak**, a youth group that advocates against social injustice, has been repeatedly targeted by Cambodian authorities over the last two years. Eight Khmer Thavrak members were arrested in August and September 2020 for peacefully exercising their fundamental freedoms.<sup>66</sup> Three were later released but the other five were subsequently convicted of incitement on 26 October

<sup>59</sup> 110.85 (Iceland), 110.91 (Ireland), 110.92 (Spain), 110.93 (Italy), 110.106 (Lithuania), 110.109 (Finland), 110.110 (Netherlands), 110.112 (Croatia), 110.113 (Slovenia), 110.114 (Czechia), 110.115 (Argentina), 110.116 (Chile).

<sup>60</sup> Those recommendations that were accepted are emboldened in the previous footnote; the remainder were noted by the government of Cambodia.

<sup>61</sup> 110.85 Take all measures to protect and support journalists, human rights defenders, trade union workers, land and environmental activists and other civil society actors, and members of the political opposition (Iceland).

<sup>62</sup> OMCT, Cambodia: Conviction of human rights defender Rong Chhun to two years in prison, 24 August 2021, available at: <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/cambodia-conviction-of-human-rights-defender-rong-chhun-to-two-years-in-prison>.

<sup>63</sup> Buth Reaksmeay Kongkea, Activists trio to be released from prison today, *Khmer Times*, 12 November 2021, available at: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50969812/activists-trio-to-be-released-from-prison-today/>.

<sup>64</sup> RFA, Cambodia teachers activist attacked in alleged fake traffic accident, 10 August 2020, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/ouk-chhayavy-08102020213943.html>.

<sup>65</sup> The Cambodian Center for Human Rights, Crackdown of Arrests, September 2020, available at: [https://cchrcambodia.org/index\\_old.php?url=media/media.php&p=newsletter\\_detail.php&nsid=149&id=5](https://cchrcambodia.org/index_old.php?url=media/media.php&p=newsletter_detail.php&nsid=149&id=5).

<sup>66</sup> Svay Samnang, Yornng Sok Hai, Chea Kunthin, Hun Vannak, Chhoeun Daravy, Buddhist Monk Venerable Koet Saray, Tha Lavy, and So Metta (also known by Eng Malai).

2021 and sentenced to 20 months imprisonment.<sup>67</sup> Three UN Special Rapporteurs were critical of the convictions and of Cambodia for ‘weaponising’ its court system to methodically reduce the scope for citizen action.<sup>68</sup> All Khmer Thavrak activists were released in November 2021 after serving their sentences.<sup>69</sup>

ARTICLE 19 and PEN America identified **environmental activists** as a particularly vulnerable group in its UPR submission ahead of the third cycle. However, in the two years following the UPR the harassment of environmental activists has rocketed, now making them one of the most targeted groups in Cambodia. In June 2021 the United States announced its withdrawal of 100 million USD of funding from the Cambodian government’s ‘Greening Prey Lang Project,’ stating that the decision was due in part to the harassment of environmental activists. The funds are being redirected to local groups working on environmental protection instead.

Environmental rights group **Mother Nature** and its members have long faced harassment from authorities. Mother Nature Cambodia decided to de-register in September 2017, citing judicial harassment of its members. However, some Mother Nature activists have continued their environmental activism as a movement of concerned citizens. In a press release dated 7 September 2020, the Ministry of Interior labelled the organisation as ‘illegal’ and called for authorities to take legal measures against its members. In 2020, multiple Mother Nature environmental campaigns were shut down by authorities, including a bicycle ride campaign<sup>70</sup> and a gallery viewing to raise awareness of Koh Kong Krao Island and call for it to be classified as a protected national sea park to preserve its natural resources.<sup>71</sup>

In 2020 and 2021, a total of seven Mother Nature activists were arrested.<sup>72</sup> Five received convictions for incitement to commit a felony (*two in absentia*)<sup>73</sup> for planning a one-woman march from Wat Phnom to the Prime Minister’s residence to share concerns over the filling-in of Boeung Tamok Lake.<sup>74</sup> Charges of insulting the king (*lèse majesté*) and/or plotting under Articles 437(*bis*) and 453 of the Penal Code respectively, were levied against seven Mother Nature activists<sup>75</sup> on baseless allegations of using foreign funds to topple the government. If convicted they each face up to ten years in prison. Six activists were held in detention until their release on 12 November 2021 amid a flurry of political prisoners being released with sentence reductions.<sup>76</sup> Two UN entities expressed their concern at the arrest of Mother Nature activists, adding that it raised “renewed concern for the shrinking space for human rights defenders in Cambodia”.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>67</sup> LICADHO, Ten imprisoned activist convicted of incitement for their peaceful work, 26 October 2021, available at: [https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/flashnews.php?perm=295&english&fbclid=IwAR0nzOri5D0wtC6VFG6a6j7Cc2xOlxoVBuq7Y769o\\_P0ZldhZWEhwMK-O9s](https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/flashnews.php?perm=295&english&fbclid=IwAR0nzOri5D0wtC6VFG6a6j7Cc2xOlxoVBuq7Y769o_P0ZldhZWEhwMK-O9s).

<sup>68</sup> Three UN Special Rapporteurs, Cambodia: Stop using courts to persecute people who stand up for human rights—UN experts, 2 November 2021, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27745&LangID=E>.

<sup>69</sup> Kuoy Longdy, Mech Dara and Ouch Sony, Updates: Mother Nature Activists, Rong Chhun Among 18 Released in Flurry of Verdicts, Reunions, VOD, 12 November 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/updates-rong-chhun-gets-out-as-dam-breaks-on-prisoners-release/>.

<sup>70</sup> 100 organisations and communities, With No Will to Amend, LANGO Must Be Repealed, 10 February 2020, available at: <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/koh-kong-police-block-mother-nature-environmental-campaign/5447613.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Khuon Narim, Demonstration for conservation of Koh Kong island shut down, *CamboJA*, 23 June 2020, available at: <https://cambojanews.com/demonstration-for-conservation-of-koh-kong-island-shut-down/>.

<sup>72</sup> Long Kunthea, Phuon Keo Reaksmey, Thun Ratha, Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth, Seth Chhivlimeng, and Yim Leanghy.

<sup>73</sup> Long Kunthea, Phuon Keo Reaksmey, Thun Ratha, Chea Kunthin, and Alejandro Gonzalez-Davidson.

<sup>74</sup> World Organisation Against Torture, Cambodia: Sentencing of five environmental activists, 6 May 2021, available at: <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/cambodia-sentencing-of-five-environmental-activists>.

<sup>75</sup> Long Kunthea, Phuon Keo Reaksmey, Thun Ratha, Alejandro Gonzalez-Davidson, Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth, and Yim Leanghy

<sup>76</sup> Kuoy Longdy, Mech Dara and Ouch Sony, Updates: Mother Nature Activists, Rong Chhun Among 18 Released in Flurry of Verdicts, Reunions, VOD, 12 November 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/updates-rong-chhun-gets-out-as-dam-breaks-on-prisoners-release/>.

<sup>77</sup> UN OHCHR and UN Environment Programme, ‘NEWS RELEASE: United Nations entities concerned by arrest of environmental human rights defenders in Cambodia’ (30 June 2021) <https://bangkok.ohchr.org/ehrd-cambodia/>.



Mother Nature is not the only environmental group that is being persecuted. Police have also systematically hindered the efforts of activists from the **Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN)**, a grassroots movement working to document illegal logging and deforestation in Prey Lang Forest.<sup>78</sup> The Ministry of Environment has labelled the community-based organisation as illegal<sup>79</sup> and has accused the group of having a political agenda.<sup>80</sup> In February 2020 the Ministry of Environment imposed a ban on PLCN, preventing PLCN activists from patrolling the forest—a core aspect of PLCN’s fight against deforestation—and has threatened them with arrest.<sup>81</sup> PLCN has been repeatedly blocked by local authorities and barred entry to the forest.<sup>82</sup> A PLCN environmental activist, Chan Thoeun, was arrested and convicted of intentional violence with aggravating circumstances under Articles 217 and 218 of the Penal Code in October 2021.<sup>83</sup> The charges were imposed after Chan Thoeun had taken photos of trucks illegally transporting timber from Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary. The complainant is a timber trader believed to be engaged in illegal logging, and the false accusations are therefore suspected of being retaliatory.

Environmental activist Chhorn Phalla was convicted of illegally clearing forests and sentenced to five years imprisonment on 10 November 2021. His prosecution stemmed from a complaint by local officials after Phalla raised allegations that those officials were encroaching on community land.<sup>84</sup>

## Steps required to effectively implement third cycle recommendations

- Publicly condemn violence, threats, and harassment against human rights defenders, including environmental activists, and publicly commit to holding those responsible to account.
- End impunity for all attacks against human rights defenders, ensuring the prompt, thorough and impartial investigation of all cases of murder, attacks, and threats, including by examining the alleged involvement of public officials.
- Cease and prevent the abuse of legal processes to harass human rights defenders and environmental activists, including through threats of arrest, arbitrary arrest, detention, and prosecution.
- End all ongoing criminal proceedings against human rights defenders and environmental activists based on the exercise of their human rights, and quash all convictions on such grounds.
- Cease the targeting of activists from Khmer Thavrak, Mother Nature, and PLCN, and acknowledge the valuable work they do on environmental rights and social justice.

<sup>78</sup> See, Human Rights Watch, Cambodia: Environmental Activists Harassed, 20 March 2020, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/20/cambodia-environmental-activists-harassed>.

<sup>79</sup> Despite the LANGO’s definition of ‘association’ being exceptionally broad, potentially imposing mandatory registration on every informal group in Cambodia, including community-based organisations (CBOs), in a letter to the Cambodian Center of Human Rights, dated 22 September 2015, the Ministry of Interior indicated that the LANGO should not apply to small CBOs.

<sup>80</sup> Thorn Tharo, Prey Lang community demand ministry of environment to show evidence, *RFA*, 9 February 2020, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/khmer/news/environment/PreyLangs-requires-MoE-for-evidence-accusing-for-political-reasons-02092020035005.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Cheat Chamnan, Environmental Activists said they threaten to arrest by environmental official, *RFA*, 10 February 2020, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/khmer/news/environment/forest-protection-activists-says-environment-official-threatens-them-02112020070436.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Danielle Keeton-Olsen and Hun Sirivadh, Officials Block Prey Lang Activists Form Forest Ahead of Annual Event, *VOD*, 21 February 2020, available at <https://vodenglish.news/officials-block-prey-lang-activists-from-forest-ahead-of-annual-event/>.

<sup>83</sup> Amnesty International, Cambodia: Conviction of Prey Lang activist marks further repression of environmental defenders, 11 October 2021, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/cambodian-environmental-activist-convicted/>.

<sup>84</sup> Mao Sreypitch, Ratanakiri Environmentalist Sentenced to Five Years in Prison, *VOD*, 10 November 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/ratanakiri-environmentalist-sentenced-to-five-years-in-prison/>.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

### Third cycle UPR recommendations

In its third UPR, Cambodia received 33 recommendations regarding civil society and freedom of association.<sup>85</sup> Of those recommendations, 27 were accepted by the government while six were noted.<sup>86</sup> Accepted recommendations include calls to bring the Law on Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO) in line with international human rights obligations and ensure LANGO is not used to close non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Recommendations to protect civil society actors, remove undue restrictions on civil society, and ensure they can carry out work without interference were also accepted by Cambodia. Canada's recommendation to establish a safe and enabling environment for civil society and trade unions was accepted,<sup>87</sup> along with the Netherland's recommendation to ensure a free civic space.<sup>88</sup> Cambodia also accepted recommendations to reform registration procedures for trade unions and civil society actors (CSOs), to revise the Law on Trade Unions, and to protect the rights of trade union workers.

### Implementation over the last two years

There has been minimal implementation of the recommendations on civil society and freedom of association. Cambodia has made some progress towards the nine recommendations calling to repeal, revise, amend, or review the LANGO. Review of the law is ongoing, and the government has begun consultation with stakeholders, although the COVID-19 pandemic has halted meetings.<sup>89</sup> Further, some NGOs have chosen not to engage with the consultative process due to doubts about its effectiveness and claims that only the concerns of pro-government NGOs or 'soft-advocacy' NGOs are being considered. Persistent problems with the LANGO include how its onerous registration requirements, reporting obligations, and broad grounds for denial of registration or deregistration all provide substantial leeway for government actors to put pressure on NGOs for politically motivated reasons. There has also been some progress towards the six recommendations calling to revise the Law on Trade Unions. Amendments to the Law on Trade Unions were enacted in January 2020. However, the amendments fail to bring the law in line with international standards.<sup>90</sup> Ten articles were revised, and while some improved the law,<sup>91</sup> it continues to impinge on the right to freedom of association.

Civic space has further shrunk over the last two years. Since Cambodia received its third cycle UPR recommendations, at least one NGO has been shuttered for non-compliance with the **LANGO**. In August 2020, the Ministry of Interior deleted the Cambodian Wildlife Forest Fisheries Protection and

<sup>85</sup> 110.12 (Greece), 110.24 (France), 110.25 (Germany), 110.26 (Iceland), 110.27 (New Zealand), 110.28 (Slovenia), 110.29 (Czechia), 110.30 (Australia), 110.31 (Austria), 110.79 (Finland), 110.84 (Iceland), 110.85 (Iceland), 110.87 (Costa Rica), 110.88 (Norway), 110.91 (Ireland), 110.92 (Spain), 110.93 (Italy), 110.95 (Switzerland), 110.98 (United States of America), 110.101 (Brazil), 110.102 (Canada), 110.103 (Japan), 110.105 (Denmark), 110.107 (Lithuania), 110.108 (Greece), 110.109 (Finland), 110.110 (Netherlands), 110.112 (Croatia), 110.113 (Slovenia), 110.114 (Czechia), 110.117 (Greece), 110.151 (Sweden), 110.152 (United States of America), and 110.153 (Belgium).

<sup>86</sup> Those recommendations that were accepted are emboldened in the previous footnote; the remainder were noted by the government of Cambodia.

<sup>87</sup> 110.102 (Canada).

<sup>88</sup> 110.110 (Netherlands).

<sup>89</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, UN Doc. A/HRC/48/79, 3 August 2021, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/48/79>.

<sup>90</sup> CCHR, ADHOC, Solidarity Center, and ICNL, Cambodia Fundamental Freedoms Monitor: Fourth Annual Report, July 2020, pages 9-13, available at: <https://cchrcambodia.org/ffmp/report4>.

<sup>91</sup> For instance, Article 29 was amended in a positive fashion, as the provision permitting a union to be dissolved in the event that its leaders or managers commit a serious misconduct or offense, was removed. Article 28's amendment was also welcomed as it added the requirement for wages and other benefits to be fully paid to all workers before automatic dissolution of the union can occur upon closure of the enterprise.

Conservation Organization from its register. While no reason was given for the deregistration, it occurred after the organization's 90-day suspension for failure to comply with the financial reporting requirements of Articles 10 and 25 of the LANGO.<sup>92</sup> The authorities have also used the justification of non-compliance with LANGO to target civil society groups critical of the government, including Mother Nature, Khmer Thavrak, and PLCN.

The government's persistent curtailment of freedom of association has continued since its third UPR. A survey conducted by a Cambodian human rights NGO in October 2020 reported that 40% of CSO leaders experienced government monitoring or surveillance and that 26% of CSO leaders were subjected to restrictions or threats for exercising the right to freedom of association.<sup>93</sup> This toxic environment hinders civil society's valuable work and encourages self-censorship of individuals and organisations.

### Steps required to effectively implement third cycle recommendations

- Reform the LANGO and the Law on Trade Unions to bring them in line with international human rights law and standards.
- Review all decisions leading to the closure or suspension of NGOs and civil society organisations and take steps to restore the rights of such groups.
- Cease all harassment and threats towards civil society actors and take action to facilitate an enabling environment for civil society.

<sup>92</sup> *Fresh News*, Ministry of Interior decides to delete the name of the Cambodian Wildlife Fisheries Protection and Conservation, 14 August 2020, available at: <http://freshnewsasia.com/index.php/en/localnews/168226-2020-08-14-05-56-14.html>.

<sup>93</sup> CCHR, ADHOC, Solidarity Center, and ICNL, Cambodia Fundamental Freedoms Monitor: Fifth Annual Report, April 2021, available at: <https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/CCHR%20FFMP%20Report%20Year%205%20Apr%20Dec%202020%20Eng.pdf>.

## POLITICAL ASSOCIATION AND FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

### Third cycle UPR recommendations

Cambodia received 24 recommendations regarding political association and free and fair elections.<sup>94</sup> Of those recommendations 16 were accepted by the government while eight were noted.<sup>95</sup> Accepted recommendations included four calls to amend the Law on Political Parties. Cambodia accepted recommendations to cease the harassment of the political opposition and investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of physical attacks against them. Recommendations to restore an inclusive democratic space and foster the full participation of opposition parties in the next elections were also accepted. Creating conditions conducive to free political debate and competition and promoting dialogue among political actors were recommendations accepted by Cambodia. Ireland recommended ensuring the independence of the National Election Commission,<sup>96</sup> while Bhutan and Chile recommended electoral reform to enable pluralistic electoral processes.<sup>97</sup>

### Implementation over the last two years

Regrettably, there has been no apparent progress towards the implementation of the 16 accepted recommendations on political association since Cambodia's third UPR. Implementation has been observed for two recommendations that were noted by the Cambodian government, each calling for the release of opposition leader **Kem Sokha**.<sup>98</sup> Cambodian authorities released him from house arrest on 10 November 2019, after being held for over two years. He is not permitted to leave Cambodia and is banned from politics.<sup>99</sup> Kem Sokha's trial commenced on 15 January 2020 but has been indefinitely suspended since March 2020 due to COVID-19.<sup>100</sup> In February 2021, a request for the trial to restart was rejected by the Court, despite other courts in Cambodia generally operating as usual at the time.<sup>101</sup> Kem Sokha's trial has yet to resume, raising concerns that his trial is being purposefully and unjustifiably postponed. On 21 November 2021, the director of Phnom Penh Municipal Court said that Kem Sokha's trial would resume either at the end of 2021 or early 2022.<sup>102</sup>

Over the past two years, the government has continued its efforts to intimidate and suppress any form of political dissent through a surge in **judicial actions against former Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) members and supporters**. In late 2020 and early 2021, mass trials were held for 153

<sup>94</sup> 110.25 (Germany), 110.26 (Iceland), 110.27 (New Zealand), 110.30 (Australia), 110.31 (Austria), 110.78 (United States of America), 110.80 (France), 110.85 (Iceland), 110.88 (Norway), 110.90 (Republic of Korea), 110.91 (Ireland), 110.97 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), 110.100 (Brazil), 110.102 (Canada), 110.103 (Japan), 110.104 (Canada), 110.109 (Finland), 110.111 (New Zealand), 110.112 (Croatia), 110.113 (Slovenia), 110.123 (Ireland), 110.137 (Greece), 110.138 (Bhutan), 110.139 (Chile).

<sup>95</sup> Those recommendations that were accepted are emboldened in the previous footnote; the remainder were noted by the government of Cambodia.

<sup>96</sup> 110.123 (Ireland).

<sup>97</sup> 110.138 (Bhutan) and 110.139 (Chile).

<sup>98</sup> 110.78 (United States of America) and 110.111 (New Zealand).

<sup>99</sup> Leonie Kijewski, Cambodian opposition leader Kem Sokha freed from house arrest, *Aljazeera*, 10 November 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/10/cambodian-opposition-leader-kem-sokha-freed-from-house-arrest/>.

<sup>100</sup> *The Guardian*, Cambodia: treason trial of opposition figure Kem Sokha begins, 15 January 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/15/cambodia-treason-trial-of-opposition-figure-kem-sokha-begins>.

<sup>101</sup> Ouch Sony, Phone taps against teachers debated in CNRP trial, *VOD*, 4 February 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/phone-taps-against-teachers-debated-in-cnrp-trial/>.

<sup>102</sup> Son Minea, Kem Sokha trial set to resume soon, *Khmer Times*, 22 November 2021, available at: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50974435/kem-sokha-trial-set-to-resume-soon/>.

CNRP officials and activists facing criminal charges.<sup>103</sup> After being delayed by the pandemic, the mass trials resumed in December 2021.<sup>104</sup> In January 2021, five former CNRP activists were convicted of plotting and sentenced to five to seven years in prison each.<sup>105</sup> In March 2021, an excessive prison sentence of 20 to 25 years was imposed on nine CNRP leaders living overseas who were convicted of the criminal offence of attack.<sup>106</sup> The nine were also stripped of their right to vote, stand for election, or be a public official.

CNRP members or supporters have also been subject to spontaneous and unprovoked **violent attacks** by unidentified individuals.<sup>107</sup> Throughout 2019 and 2020, there were at least 17 incidents of physical assaults of CNRP activists or members.<sup>108</sup> The similar circumstances of these attacks suggest these individuals were not targeted at random but rather for their association to the CNRP. Sin Khon, an outspoken CNRP activist, was struck on the back of the head in May 2021 and was later murdered on 21 November 2021 by unknown assailants.<sup>109</sup> Human rights defenders and Khon's relatives believe the killing was politically motivated. UN Human Rights Office Spokesperson expressed concern at inconsistencies between the official version of events offered by the authorities and information received by their office.<sup>110</sup>

**Threats** towards those affiliated with the CNRP are also frequent. The wife of a detained CNRP member reported that authorities showed up at her house several times to coerce her to join the ruling party in exchange for her husbands' release from prison.<sup>111</sup>

CNRP members have also been subject to systematic **online surveillance and digital attacks**. Frances Haugen, a Facebook whistle-blower, exposed that an internal investigation by Facebook found that a hacker collective, seemingly of Chinese origin, engaged in 'consistent and long-term targeting' of CNRP members, with cyberattacks launched from Cambodian government servers.<sup>112</sup>

## Steps required to effectively implement third cycle recommendations

- Take steps to allow the restoration of the CNRP and the registration of new political parties in line with international standards.

<sup>103</sup> Sameang Chea, Ket Eyeon, Ananth Baliga and Ouch Sony, CNRP Mass Trials: The Cases and the Controversy, *VOD*, 28 January 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/cnrp-mass-trials-the-cases-and-the-controversy/>.

<sup>104</sup> Ouch Sony, CNRP mass trials set to resume this week, *VOD*, 6 December 2021, available at <https://vodenglish.news/cnrp-mass-trials-set-to-resume-this-week/>.

<sup>105</sup> Leng Maly, Pailin court sentences five CNRP activists to seven years in prison, *RFA*, 9 January 2021, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/khmer/news/politics/pailin-court-sentences-five-cnrp-activists-7-years-in-prison-01092021195056.html>.

<sup>106</sup> Seng Thai, CNRP leaders lose right to stand for office, get 20-25 year sentences, *VOD*, 2 March 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/cnrp-leaders-lose-right-to-stand-for-office-get-20-25-year-sentences/>.

<sup>107</sup> See for example, Youn Samean, Another opposition activist repeatedly beaten by unknown individuals in Khan 7 Makara, *RFA*, 23 January 2021, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/khmer/news/politics/another-dissent-was-assaulted-after-monitoring-trial-against-cnrp-leaders-in-phnom-penh-01232021234203.html>; Khe Sonang, Opposition activist in Kandal province was knocked unconscious by a stranger on a motorcycle, *RFA*, 14 February 2021, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/khmer/news/social-economy/a-cnrp-activist-fainted-from-intentional-motorcycle-crash-02142021054633.html>; and Van Vichar, Former CNRP member continues to fear while authorities have not caught the perpetrator, *CamboJA*, 25 February 2021, <https://khmer.cambodianews.com/former-cnrp-membes-are-scared-as-police-have-not-arrested-suspects-for-using-violence/>.

<sup>108</sup> CCHR, ADHOC, Solidarity Center, and ICNL, Cambodia Fundamental Freedoms Monitor: Fourth Annual Report, July 2020, available at: <https://cchrcambodia.org/ffmp/report4>; and CCHR, ADHOC, Solidarity Center, and ICNL, Cambodia Fundamental Freedoms Monitor: Fifth Annual Report, April 2021, available at: <https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/CCHR-FFMP-Report-Year-5-Apr-Dec-2020-Eng.pdf>.

<sup>109</sup> Ananth Baliga, Updated: CNRP Activist Slain Overnight in Phnom Penh, Witness Recalls Slashing, *VOD*, 21 November 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/cnrp-activist-slain-overnight-in-phnom-penh-witness-recalls-slashing/>.

<sup>110</sup> UN OHCHR, Comment by UN Human Rights Office spokesperson Rupert Colville on killing of Cambodian activist and refolements from Thailand, 3 December 2021, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27906&LangID=E%20and%20RGC%20response>.

<sup>111</sup> Tin Zakaria, Authorities force wife of opposition activist to surrender to ruling party, *RFA*, 11 November 2020, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/khmer/news/politics/wife-of-jailed-CNRP-member-accuse-authorities-monitor-and-threaten-her-to-stop-protesting-11112020062439.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Jack Adamović Davies, Facebook Papers: Chinese state-linked hackers targeting Cambodian opposition, *RFA*, 15 November 2021, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/china-facebook-11152021162138.html>.

- Immediately drop charges against, and unconditionally release, all opposition members or supporters targeted for their political affiliations or opinions.
- Restore the political rights of CNRP leaders and other barred from political activities or otherwise denied political rights.
- End the use of criminal charges to target political speech.
- Amend the Law on Political Parties and ensure it is not used to prevent meaningful political opposition.
- End impunity for all attacks (including cyberattacks) against CNRP members, ensuring the prompt, thorough and impartial investigation of all cases, including an investigation for the murder of Sin Khon.
- Ensure upcoming commune and national elections in 2022 and 2023 are free and fair and that political opposition can meaningfully compete.
- Ensure the independence of the National Election Commission.

# FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

## Third cycle UPR recommendations

During its third UPR, 14 recommendations were made to Cambodia regarding the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.<sup>113</sup> Of those recommendations nine were accepted by the government while five were noted.<sup>114</sup> Accepted recommendations included calls to ensure all individuals can fully enjoy the right to freedom of assembly and to prevent the harassment of protesters. Cambodia also accepted recommendations to bring laws, regulations, and policies on freedom of assembly in line with international standards and Cambodia's international obligations. One recommendation from Lithuania, calling to ensure that the right to freedom of assembly is not hindered by arbitrary restrictions or excessive use of force, was also accepted.<sup>115</sup>

## Implementation over the last two years

In the two years since the third UPR, Cambodia has made no apparent effort to implement any of the nine accepted recommendations on freedom of peaceful assembly. Instead, authorities have increasingly employed excessive force against peaceful protesters, arrested people for exercising their right to freedom of assembly, and issued blanket bans on assemblies. Overly restrictive laws governing freedom of assembly have been maintained, while new laws further threaten the right to protest. Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has been utilised by the government as a pretence to unduly prohibit assemblies.

The arrest of **Rong Chunn** in July 2020 (see above) caused an eruption of assemblies calling for his release. Individuals including monks, youths, environmental activists, and other union leaders held numerous peaceful protests which were dispersed by police officers using excessive force. In August and September 2020, 17 individuals were arrested under charges of incitement for participating in, planning to participate in, or organising protests demanding the release of Rong Chhun.<sup>116</sup>

Family members of detained CNRP activists have been protesting for their relatives' release in front of the Phnom Penh Municipal Court most Fridays since 19 June 2020, garnering them the name the '**Friday Women**'. The protests, comprised mostly of female protesters, have been heavily monitored and security forces have frequently interfered violently with these peaceful assemblies. Assembly monitors have documented peaceful protesters being shoved, kicked, and dragged across the pavement by armed security forces. At one protest by the Friday Women on 4 September 2020, Seng Chanthorn, the wife of a detained former-CNRP official, was thrown to the ground by district security guards resulting in hospitalisation.<sup>117</sup> The Cambodia Fundamental Freedoms Monitor documented

<sup>113</sup> 110.84 (Germany), **110.87 (Costa Rica)**, 110.89 (Norway), **110.91 (Ireland)**, 110.92 (Spain), **110.93 (Italy)**, **110.95 (Switzerland)**, 110.97 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), **110.101 (Brazil)**, **110.105 (Denmark)**, **110.107 (Lithuania)**, 110.108 (Greece), **110.109 (Finland)**, and **110.114 (Czechia)**.

**110.105 (Denmark)**, and 110.108 (Greece).

<sup>114</sup> Those recommendations that were accepted are emboldened in the previous footnote; the remainder were noted by the government of Cambodia.

<sup>115</sup> 110.107 (Lithuania).

<sup>116</sup> CCHR, Crackdown of Arrests, September 2020, available at:

[https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/newsletter/newsletter/english/Crackdown%20of%20Arrests-ENG\\_Final.pdf](https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/newsletter/newsletter/english/Crackdown%20of%20Arrests-ENG_Final.pdf).

<sup>117</sup> Joshua Lipes, Cambodian Opposition Activist's Wife Hospitalized After Authorities Disperse Protest, *RFA*, 4 September 2020, available at: <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/wife-09042020135412.html>.

that the rate of unlawful use of state force against assemblies organised by the Friday Women was much higher (43%) than the ordinary rate of unlawful state violence for assemblies (11%).<sup>118</sup>

Assemblies marking the **Paris Peace Agreements Day** on 23 October 2020 and 22 October 2021 were met with excessive state violence. During and in the days following the 2020 protest, seven individuals were forcibly arrested and sent to pre-trial detention.<sup>119</sup> On 2 August 2021, the seven activists plus two further individuals who remain at large were convicted by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court and each sentenced to between 12 and 20 months in prison.<sup>120</sup> At the 2021 protest a huge police presence with a mixture of police forces intervened in a peaceful demonstration of around 20 women.<sup>121</sup> Video footage of the protest shows police beating protesters in a shocking display of aggression.<sup>122</sup>

Cambodian authorities have increasingly **prohibited assemblies**. On 3 August 2020, the Ministry of Justice issued a press release stating that, 'People gathering in front of the Phnom Penh Court of First Instance to demand the release of the accused, Rong Chhun, is against the law.'<sup>123</sup> The Ministry stated its aim was to protect 'judicial integrity.' The press release declared that the exercise of freedom of assembly in front of a Court to demand the release of a detainee is a crime under Article 522 of the Penal Code, 'Publication of commentaries intended to unlawfully coerce judicial authorities.' Article 552 prohibits commentaries that are intended to 'put pressure on the court...in order to influence its judicial decision' and carries a prison term of up to six months. The press release seems to be espousing an interpretation of Cambodian law that criminalises all future assemblies in front of a Court calling for the release of an accused person, amounting to a blanket ban on such assemblies.

The Cambodian government's response to the **COVID-19 pandemic** has had a severe impact on the right to freedom of assembly. The government has repeatedly justified its restrictions on protest activities based on the supposed goal of promoting public health and curbing the COVID-19 pandemic. In practice, such prohibitions have been both unnecessary and disproportionate to the aim of protecting public health, as demonstrated by the prohibition of Human Rights Day celebrations in 2020.<sup>124</sup> Six UN Special Procedure Mandates have expressed concern over the government's 'apparent attempts to incite fear amongst human rights defenders', including by criminalising the means through which they carry out their work, such as organising and participating in peaceful demonstrations.<sup>125</sup>

During the pandemic, the government imposed strict lockdowns on certain 'red zones' in Phnom Penh deemed to be high risk for COVID-19 transmission. Residents in red zones were prohibited from

<sup>118</sup> CCHR, ADHOC, Solidarity Center, and ICNL, Cambodia Fundamental Freedoms Monitor: Fifth Annual Report, April 2021, p.24, available at: <https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/CCHR%20FFMP%20Report%20Year%205%20Apr%20Dec%202020%20Eng.pdf>.

<sup>119</sup> Khy Sovuthy and Khuon Narim, Three CNRP activists arrested in Paris Peace Agreements demonstration, *CamboJA*, 23 October 2020, available at: <https://cambodianews.com/three-cnrp-activists-arrested-in-paris-peace-agreements-demonstration/>.

<sup>120</sup> Son Minea, Court sentences protesters to 12-20 months in prison, *Khmer Times*, 4 August 2021, available at: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50907959/court-sentences-protesters-12-20-months-in-prison/>.

<sup>121</sup> Gerald Flynn and Phoung Vantha, Protesters beaten ahead of Paris Peace Agreements 30th anniversary, *Cambodianess*, 22 October 2021, available at: <https://cambodianess.com/article/protesters-beaten-ahead-of-paris-peace-agreements-30th-anniversary>.

<sup>122</sup> @geraldrflynn, Twitter, 22 October 2021, available at: <https://twitter.com/geraldrflynn/status/1451376475844661251>.

<sup>123</sup> Ministry of Justice, Press Release from the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Justice, 3 August 2020, available at: <https://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/announcements/press-release-ministry-of-justice-calls-on-protesters-requesting-the-ministry-to-drop-the-charge-against-rong-chhun-to-stop-action-immediately-before-authorities-take-legal-action/>.

<sup>124</sup> CCHR, ADHOC, Solidarity Center, and ICNL, Cambodia Fundamental Freedoms Monitor: Fifth Annual Report, April 2021, p.27, available at: <https://cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/CCHR%20FFMP%20Report%20Year%205%20Apr%20Dec%202020%20Eng.pdf>.

<sup>125</sup> Six UN Special Procedure Mandates, Information received concerning the detention of and charges against Cambodian human rights defenders, AL KHM 8/2020, 10 November 2020, available at: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25670>.



leaving their homes for any purpose except medical emergencies. As a result, many experienced food insecurity and voiced their desperation at food shortages.<sup>126</sup> Spontaneous protests erupted within red zones, and the Prime Minister responded by threatening to deny food aid to those protesting.<sup>127</sup> During one red zone protest on 29 April 2020, residents held signs reading, 'We are starving.'<sup>128</sup> In response, the local commune chief labelled protesters as an 'opposition group,' accused them of not being poor, denied that the residents were in fact hungry, and chastised them for giving authorities 'headaches.'<sup>129</sup> On 1 May a spokesperson of the Council of Ministers called those claiming to be hungry 'liars,'<sup>130</sup> and local authorities dismissed protesters asking for food as 'politically motivated.'<sup>131</sup>

## Steps required to effectively implement third cycle recommendations

- Immediately cease the use of excessive state force at peaceful protests, including all assemblies organised by 'Friday Women.'
- Immediately cease the deployment of informal district security guards to disperse peaceful protests and ensure that all authorities policing protests are adequately trained on crowd control, the use of force, and applicable human rights and law enforcement standards.
- Immediately release from detention and end all ongoing criminal proceedings against individuals for their peaceful exercise of freedom of assembly and quash all convictions on such grounds.
- Ensure any restrictions or prohibitions of assemblies are strictly necessary and meet international human rights standards.

<sup>126</sup> Amnesty International, Cambodia: Authorities must avert COVID-19 humanitarian crisis, 30 April 2021, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/04/cambodia-humanitarian-crisis-covid/>.

<sup>127</sup> Ramsmei Kampuchea Daily, available at: [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=143168371088354&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=143168371088354&ref=watch_permalink).

<sup>128</sup> Khmer Times, Red Zone residents in Meanchey District gather to demand for immediate food assistance, defying curfew and lockdown measures, 30 April 2021, available at: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50848522/red-zone-residents-in-meanchey-distict-gather-to-demand-for-immediate-food-assistance-defying-curfew-and-lockdown-measures/>.

<sup>129</sup> Mech Dara, Red-Zone Residents Protest for Food, Official Labels Them 'Opposition Group', VOD, 29 April 2021, available at: <https://vodenglish.news/red-zone-residents-protest-for-food-official-labels-them-opposition-group/>.

<sup>130</sup> Phorn Bopha, Mounting desperation in Cambodia amid COVID lockdown, AlJazeera, 2 May 2021, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/2/mounting-desperation-in-cambodia-amid-covid-lockdown>.

<sup>131</sup> Hul Reaksmey, Phnom Penh Administration Dismisses Food Shortage Concerns in Red Zones, VOA, 7 May 2021, available at: <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/phnom-penh-administration-dismisses-food-shortage-concerns-in-red-zones-/5881862.html>.