Joint statement

Civil society groups condemn baseless charges and call for an end to violence and repression

We the undersigned civil society groups condemn the unfounded charges against seven Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) MPs-elect and one CNRP grassroots leader. We call for their immediate and unconditional release and for all charges to be dropped.

All eight were arrested in connection with the violence of July 15 in Freedom Park and charged under Cambodia’s Criminal Code articles 28 and 218 (instigating aggravated, intentional violence), 495 (inciting others to commit a felony) and 459 (leading an insurrectional movement). The latter charge carries a sentence of up to 30 years’ imprisonment.

One other CNRP activist has been formally accused by the case prosecutor and an order has been made for his pre-trial detention. In addition, Kem Sokha, Deputy Leader of the CNRP has today received a summons for questioning at 8am on July 25.

“Eye witness accounts and video evidence from July 15 demonstrate that there is absolutely no evidence against the eight that could justify the charges.” said Ath Sam Ath, LICADHO’s Technical Coordinator, “Indeed, what evidence exists makes it clear that CNRP leaders present were actively urging their members and supporters to refrain from violence. Some were seen physically protecting security guards who were under attack.”

In response to the charges against the eight CNRP leaders, and following the violence in Freedom Park which left dozens injured, most of them security guards, we call on the government to take urgent measures to ensure full respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The violence and subsequent arrests follow six months of systematic government repression, often through brutal force, of the Cambodian people’s fundamental right to peaceful expression and assembly. Without meaningful and urgent reforms, which the CPP has to date shown no political will to undertake, we fear there will be further acts of unnecessary brutality.

“At this critical juncture we call on all parties to avoid further violence. Both the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) and the CNRP must recognize that threats, provocations and the use of violence will not solve political disputes. Instead, fundamental human rights principles must be at the heart of future approaches” said Moeun Tola, Head of the Labor Program at the Community Legal Education Centre.

The following ten steps must be prioritized:

- The CNRP leaders arrested in connection with the violence on July 15 must be released immediately and unconditionally and the charges against them dropped;
- Both the CPP and the CNRP must recognize and condemn in the strongest terms the recent violence. Politicians, members and supporters of both parties should be encouraged to commit to and maintain principles of non-violence;
- CNRP members and supporters, government authorities and security forces must all cooperate fully with any official and comprehensive investigation into the violence committed by security guards and protesters on July 15;
- The Cambodian government needs to recognize that its systematic repression of the rights to peacefully assemble causes resentment and may lead to more violence. All restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly must be immediately withdrawn; the barricades at Freedom Park should be dismantled and all peaceful gatherings allowed to resume;
- All parties must exercise restraint during public gatherings. Security forces must only use force when it is strictly necessary; untrained security forces such as the district security guards who have been responsible for many abuses against civilians and who were the target of vicious attacks yesterday should not be used to police public gatherings;
- Everyone arrested in connection with the violence of July 15 must be treated fairly and humanely. They must be protected from abuse and given a fair and prompt trial; pre-trial detention should only be used in exceptional circumstances;
There must be justice for all. Since September 2013 at least six people have been killed by government security forces and scores injured yet there has been no credible investigation and no arrests. All those responsible for criminal acts and human rights abuses should be punished fairly and appropriately. This must apply to members of government security forces as well as civilians;

Impunity must end. As a priority there must be full, independent and transparent investigations into the killings of protestors in the past year, including investigations into who ordered the use of lethal force against civilian crowds. Those responsible for the killings must be brought to justice without delay. There must also be a full investigation into the disappearance of teenager Khem Sophath;

Journalists, monitors and human rights defenders must be free to perform their duties without fear of intimidation, pressure, violence and harassment. The government must pay particular attention to the crucial work played by these actors and the need for them to continue this work without hindrance;

The promotion and protection of human rights principles must be at the heart of future political negotiations between the two parties in seeking meaningful reforms.

Banteay Srey
Boeung Kak Lake Community (BKL)
Borei Keila Community (BK)
Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation (BWTUC)
Cambodian Committee for Women (CAMBOW)
Cambodian Food and Service Worker Federation (CFSWF)
Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers Federation (CTSWF)
Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
Cambodia’s Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC)
Community Legal Education Centre (CLEC)
Community Peace-Building Network (CPN)
CamASEAN
Empowering Youth in Cambodia (EYC)
Equitable Cambodia (EC)
Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF)
Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
LICADHO Canada
Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (NICFEC)
Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
Thmor Kol Community

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