JOINT STATEMENT
CSOs call for justice and respect for human rights

10 December 2017 – On the occasion of International Human Rights Day (IHRD), we, the undersigned members of Cambodian civil society, call for an end to government attacks on human rights defenders and civil society groups and the lifting of unjustifiable restrictions on fundamental freedoms.

Respect for fundamental freedoms is a basic requirement for a functioning civil society. It is also guaranteed by the Cambodian constitution and international law.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have been longstanding contributors to Cambodia’s post-war peace-building efforts, development and the promotion of human rights and democratic principles. The legitimate work of CSOs must be valued and protected as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development, rather than being wrongly characterised as a threat to national security.

Despite this, the space for civil society has been dramatically diminished in recent months.

The latest victims of this onslaught are two former Radio Free Asia (RFA) reporters – Yeang Sothearin and Uon Chhin – who face espionage charges that carry prison sentences of up to 15 years. No credible evidence has been presented to warrant such charges. Outspoken members of Kem Ley’s funeral committee, including labour rights advocate Moeun Tola, independent media proponent Pa Nguon Teang and activist monk But Buntenh, were similarly summonsed for questioning last month regarding unsubstantiated accusations of misappropriating funds. Other outspoken individuals have been silenced for perceived criticism of authorities and many communities and grassroots groups are refused the right to peaceful assembly.

Several NGOs, trade unions and associations also face serious restrictions and intimidation. Under severe pressure, the environmental group Mother Nature (MN) was de-registered in September. Two of the group’s activists – Doem Kundy and Hun Vannak – have been held in pre-trial detention for almost three months facing charges for trying to film suspected illegal sand dredging activities.

More recently, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) was threatened with closure over allegations that it serves foreign interests. It was later cleared of any wrongdoing. The land rights group Equitable Cambodia (EC) was suspended for allegedly violating the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO) and has not been allowed to re-open even though the legal suspension period had passed.

This latest crackdown on civil society and the dissolution of the main political opposition party took place in parallel with an unprecedented silencing of critical and independent media – notably dozens of radio transmissions from RFA, Voice of America (VOA) and Voice of Democracy (VOD) – and the forced closure of the English-language Cambodia Daily newspaper.
Cambodia’s criminal justice system has long been used to silence activists and human rights defenders. One of the most prominent, Tep Vanny, a Boeung Kak lake community leader, has spent 481 days behind bars following a string of convictions since her arrest at a peaceful demonstration in 2016.

We, the undersigned, call on the Cambodian government to immediately cease this campaign to stifle and silence civil society. Authorities should respect the Cambodian Constitution and promote an unrestricted and vibrant civil society which enjoys the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and association.

We also call for the dropping of charges, quashing of convictions and immediate release of imprisoned activists, journalists and human rights defenders who were detained while undertaking legitimate work that benefits Cambodian society. Any investigations into CSOs must respect due process, be grounded in law and uphold principles of independence and impartiality.

Finally, we call on the government to facilitate efforts by civil society groups and individuals to promote human rights, democracy and access to information in Cambodia, without unwarranted limitations or harassment. These activities should be valued for their necessary contribution to promoting the sustainable and equitable development of Cambodia, which benefits all of its citizens.

The following Cambodian communities, unions, associations, networks and NGOs have endorsed the joint media statement:

1. 24 Family Community (Preah Sihanouk)
2. 297 Land Community (Koh Kong)
3. 92 Community (Phnom Penh)
4. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
5. Activity for Environment Community (AEC)
6. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
7. Banteay Srey Community (Phnom Penh)
8. Beach Fishery Community Network (Kampot)
9. Beung Pram Land Community (Battambang)
10. Boeung Kak Community (Kampong Chhnang)
11. Boeung Trabek Community (Phnom Penh)
12. Borei Keila Community (Phnom Penh)
13. Bos Snao Community (Kampong Cham)
14. Buddhism for Peace Organization (BPO)
15. Cam ASEAN Youth (CamASEAN)
16. Cambodian Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA)
17. Cambodian Development People Life Association (CDPLA)
18. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
19. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
20. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
21. Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP)
22. Cambodian Domestic Workers Network (CDWN)
23. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
24. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
25. Cambodian Independent Civil-Servants Association (CICA)
26. Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA)
27. Cambodian League for the Promotion & Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
28. Cambodian Volunteers for Society (CVS)
29. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
30. Capacity Community Development Organization (CCD)
31. Cham Kravean Community (Kampong Cham)
32. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
33. Cheko Community (Phnom Penh)
34. Chek Meas Land Community (Svay Rieng)
35. Chikor Krom Community (Koh Kong)
36. Chikor Leu Community (Koh Kong)
37. Chi Tron Community (Kampong Cham)
38. C I 5 Community (Preah Sihanouk)
39. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)
40. Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC)
41. Community Network in Action (CAN)
42. Community Peace-Building Network (CPN)
43. Farmer Association for Peace and Development (FAPD)
44. Forestry Community (Pursat)
45. Forestry Resource Development Community (Kampong Chhang)
46. Free Trade Union of Workers (FTUW)
47. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
48. Indigenous Youth for Community (Preah Vihear)
49. Kbal Tahean Forestry Community (Pursat)
50. Koh Sralao Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
51. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
52. Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ)
53. Indigenous Youth for Community (Ratanakiri)
54. Indradevi Association (IDA)
55. Land Community, I Village (Preah Sihanouk)
56. Lor Peang Land Community (Kampong Chhnang)
57. Moeunchey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
58. Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC)
59. Non-Timber Forest Protects Organization (NTFP)
60. People Center for Development and Peace (PDP-Center)
61. Phum 22 Community (Phnom Penh)
62. Phum 23 Community (Phnom Penh)
63. Phum Bo Loy Community (Ratanakiri)
64. Phum Dei Chhnang Community (Kampong Speu)
65. Phum Kdeb Thmor Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
66. Phum Ou Svyay Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
67. Phum Prasat Rang Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
68. Phum Samut Leu Community (Ratanakiri)
69. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
70. Phnom Krom Community (Siem Reap)
71. Phnom Sruoch Community (Kampong Speu)
72. Poy Japan Land Community (Koh Kong)
73. Preah Vihear Indigenous Community Network
74. Prek Ksach Land Community (Koh Kong)
75. Prek Takung Community (Phnom Penh)
76. Prek Tanou Community (Phnom Penh)
77. Prey Chher Kbal Kla Community (Kampong Thom)
78. Prey Chher Pich Sangva Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
79. Prey Chher Romeas Hek Community (Svay Rieng)
80. Prey Peay Land Community (Kampot)
81. Railway Community (Phnom Penh)
82. Reakmey Samaki Community (Kampong Speu)
83. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
84. Samaki Romeas Hak Farmer Land Community (Svay Rieng)
85. Sdey Krom Fishery Community (Battambang)
86. SILAKA
87. Somros Koh Sdech Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
88. SOS International Airport Community (Phnom Penh)
89. Spean Chhes Community (Preah Sihanouk)
90. Sre Prang Community (Kampong Cham)
91. Tani Community (Siem Reap)
92. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
93. Teng Mao Land Community (Svay Rieng)
94. Thmar Da Land Community (Pursat)
95. Toul Rada Community (Phnom Penh)
96. Toul Samrong Community (Kampong Chhnang)
97. Toul Sangke B Community (Phnom Penh)
98. Tourism Employee and Service Union (TESU)
99. Traapaing Anhchanh Thmey Community (Phnom Penh)
100. Tumnop II Community (Phnom Penh)
101. Tunlong Community (Kampong Cham)
102. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
103. Youth Education for Development and Peace (YEDP)