

Drop All Charges Against Arrested Union Leader Rong Chhun

We, the undersigned civil society groups, strongly condemn the nighttime arrest of Rong Chhun and call on the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Phnom Penh Municipal Court to immediately drop all charges against the union leader and release him from pre-trial detention.

Cambodian Confederation of Unions president Rong Chhun was arrested by police at his home late on Friday night after the government's Cambodia Border Affairs Committee publicly called on authorities to take action against the unionist for his comments following a visit to the Cambodia-Vietnam border on July 20. Chhun – a member of the non-governmental Cambodia Watchdog Council – had given a radio interview just hours before his arrest denying that he had been spreading false information about alleged community land loss along the border in a public statement the week before.

Chhun was taken to Phnom Penh Municipal Court on Saturday morning and charged with “incitement to commit a felony or cause social unrest” under articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code before being sent to pre-trial detention in Phnom Penh's notoriously overcrowded Correctional Centre 1. Dozens of supporters gathered outside the court all through the weekend to call for the unionist's release despite security forces ordering them to disperse.

This charge – which could see Rong Chhun sentenced to up to two years in prison – is a clear violation of the unionist's right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by Cambodia's constitution.

Rong Chhun has been an outspoken advocate for workers' rights in Cambodia for decades, having previously worked as president of the Cambodia Independent Teachers' Association before becoming a member of the country's National Election Committee.

On Wednesday, the union leader joined a group of more than 200 garment workers who gathered to submit a petition outside the home of Prime Minister Hun Sen to ask for his help following their factory's closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is not the first time that Rong Chhun has been arrested for his activism. In October 2005, the unionist spent three months in prison on charges of defamation and incitement after being arrested for comments he had made about a Vietnam-Cambodia border agreement.

In January 2014, he was arrested again alongside ten other human rights defenders while publicly calling for the release of almost two dozen demonstrators arrested during the widespread protests that followed the 2013 national election.

After more than a decade of harassment by authorities, this latest arrest of a respected union leader is a direct threat to every Cambodian who exercises their constitutional right to freely express their beliefs without having to fear a midnight visit by police and years lost in prison. We call on the government and the court to uphold their obligations to guarantee freedom of expression under the constitution and international law and immediately drop all charges and release Rong Chhun.

Signed,

1. 92 Community (Phnom Penh)
2. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
3. 297 Land Community (Koh Kong)
4. 766 Land Community (Koh Kong)
5. 843 Land Community (Koh Kong)

6. 185K Tita Chambak Thom Community (Kampong Chnang)
7. Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA) CAMBODIA
8. Activities for Environment Community (AEC)
9. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
10. Am Leang Community (Kampong Speu)
11. Andong Thmar Community (Preah Sihanouk)
12. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
13. Banteay Srey Community (Phnom Penh)
14. Bat Khteah Community (Preah Sihanouk)
15. Boeung Kak Community (Kampong Chhnang)
16. Boeung Chuk Community (Phnom Penh)
17. Borei Keila Community (Phnom Penh)
18. Buddhism for Peace Organization (BPO)
19. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)
20. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
21. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
22. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
23. Cambodia Institute of Democracy (CID)
24. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
25. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
26. Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC)
27. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
28. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)
29. Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C. CAWDU)
30. Coalition of Free Trade Union of The Women's Textile (CFTUWT)
31. Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA)
32. Cambodia Informal Economy Reinforce Association (CIERA)
33. Cambodian Informal Economy Workers Association (CIWA)
34. Cambodian Labor Confederation (CLC)
35. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
36. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
37. Cambodian Tourism and Service Workers Federation (CTSFWF)
38. Cambodia Youth and Monk Network (CYMN)
39. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
40. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
41. Chak Krey land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
42. Chambak Trang Community (Kampong Speu)
43. Chek Meas Land Community (Svay Rieng)
44. Choeung Prey Community (Kampong Cham)
45. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
46. Choam Kravien Community (Tbong Khmum)
47. Chray Indigenous Community (Ratanakiri)
48. C I 5 Community (Preah Sihanouk)
49. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC)
50. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
51. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
52. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
53. Dambae Community (Tbong Khmum)
54. Democratic Union of Worker of Angkor Beer Company
55. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
56. Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUFI)
57. Free Trade Union of Workers of Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)

58. Gender and Development Cambodia (GADC)
59. Haong Samnam Community (Kampong Speu)
60. Indigenous Youth for Community Ratanakiri
61. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
62. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
63. Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ)
64. Indradevi Association (IDA)
65. Kem Ley Foundation Association (KLFA)
66. Kean Tuek Land Community (Koh Kong)
67. Khmum Srakar Thlok Russey Community (Kampong Thom)
68. Khmer Kampuchea Krom For Human Rights and Development Association (KKKHRDA)
69. Khmer Thavrak
70. Khum Seda Community (Tbong Khmum)
71. Klaing Toek 78 Community (Siem Reap)
72. Koh Sralao Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
73. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
74. Land Community (Pailin)
75. Lor Peang Land Community (Kampong Chhnang)
76. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
77. Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC)
78. Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC)
79. Not 1 More (N1M)
80. Ochheuteal Community (Preah Sihanouk)
81. Ou Ampil Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
82. Ou Tracheak Chet Community (Preah Sihanouk)
83. Ou Vor Preng Community (Battambang)
84. Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)
85. Peam Ros Community (Kampong Speu)
86. People Center for Development and Peace (PDP)
87. Phnom Krom Community (Siem Reap)
88. Phnom Tor Toeung Community (Kampot)
89. Phnom Tnaut Community (Kampot)
90. Phum 22 Community (Phnom Penh)
91. Phum 23 Community (Phnom Penh)
92. Phum Dei Chhnang Community (Kampong Speu)
93. Phum Khva Community (Phnom Penh)
94. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
95. Phum Phsar Kandal Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
96. Phum Prasat Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
97. Prek Ksach Land Community (Koh Kong)
98. Phnom Sleuk Community (Battambang)
99. Ponlok Khmer (PKH)
100. Prek Tanou Community (Phnom Penh)
101. Prek Takong Community (Phnom Penh)
102. Prek Trae Community (Preah Sihanouk)
103. Prey Cheou Ou Domdek Community (Kampong Thom)
104. Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN)
105. Prey Peay Fishery Community (Kampot)
106. Prey Chher Pich Sangva Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
107. Promote for Human Right and Land Right Community (Kandal)
108. Tunlong Community (Tboung Khmum)
109. Railway Community (Phnom Penh)

110. Raksmeay Samaki Community (Kampong Speu)
111. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
112. Rural Cambodia Technological Support Organisation (RCTSO)
113. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
114. Samaki 4 Community (Phnom Penh)
115. Samaki Romeas Haek Community (Svay Rieng)
116. Sambok Chab Community (Phnom Penh)
117. Setrey Klaing Sang Community (Phnom Penh)
118. Samros Koh Sdach Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
119. Sdey Krom Fishery Community (Battambang)
120. SILAKA
121. Skun Land Community (Siem Reap)
122. SOS International Airport Community (Phnom Penh)
123. Spean Chhes Community (Preah Sihanouk)
124. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chnang)
125. Sre Prang Community (Tbong Khmum)
126. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource Community (Kampong Chnang)
127. Stung Bot Land community (Banteay Meanchey)
128. Tani Land Community (Siem Reap)
129. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
130. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
131. Thnong Land Community (Koh Kong)
132. Thmar Da Community (Pursat)
133. Thmar Thom Community (Preah Sihanouk)
134. Toul Rada Community (Phnom Penh)
135. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)
136. Trapeang Ropov Community (Kampot)
137. Transparency International Cambodia (TI)
138. Union Service Workers of ALASKA Massage Center (USWAMC)
139. Union Service Workers of CHEVRON COMPANY (CAMBODIA) LIMITED SIEMREAP (USWCSR)
140. Union of Food and Service of Cambodia Beverage Company LTD
141. Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP)