

Cambodia: UN experts concerned by arrests around Kem Ley memorial service

GENEVA (26 July 2019) – UN human rights experts today called on the Cambodian authorities to release and drop charges against two men who were arrested in connection with activities marking the third anniversary of the murder of political analyst and social activist Kem Ley.

Mr. Kong Raiya was arrested on 9 July 2019 over Facebook posts selling t-shirts featuring the image of Kem Ley and providing details for a taxi service to the commemoration service the following day. Mr. Soung Neakpaon was arrested on 10 July 2019 while attempting to participate in the commemoration service. Both men were charged with ‘incitement to commit a felony’.

“We are concerned about the arrest, detention and criminal charges brought against Kong Raiya and Soung Neakpaon,” said the UN experts. “According to information we have received, Kong Raiya and Soung Neakpaon were engaged in the legitimate exercise of their freedom of speech and Soung Neakpaon was about to participate in a peaceful commemoration ceremony. We are concerned that, yet again, the authorities are targeting free speech and peaceful assemblies.”

The Special Rapporteurs have previously expressed concern about the ongoing crackdown on civil society and the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms.

“We again call on the Government to reverse the current downward trend in enjoyment of fundamental freedoms,” the experts said. “Open discussions on a range of subjects, even when dealing with sensitive or critical issues, is not only an end in itself; it is a way to promote ideas, creativity and debate that is needed to propel Cambodia towards sustainable development and lasting peace.”

The Special Rapporteurs also expressed concern that, three years on, there has been no apparent independent and impartial investigation into the murder of Kem Ley. After a half-day hearing on 23 March 2017, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court found an individual guilty of the murder and sentenced him to life imprisonment. On 24 May 2019, the Supreme Court upheld the life sentence. Ongoing investigations seeking to identify others who may have been involved in Kem Ley’s murder have apparently stalled with no one summoned in relation to the investigation.

“We are concerned at the apparent failure to conduct adequate investigations to

clarify Kem Ley's murder," the Special Rapporteurs said. "We call on the Government to commission an independent body to undertake a transparent and impartial investigation as soon as possible," they said, calling for international assistance in the process.

In light of the criminal proceedings against other independent voices, such as journalists Uon Chhin and Yeang Sothearin, the experts called on the Government of Cambodia to take immediate and meaningful action to protect the safety of journalists who are attacked for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

The UN experts have communicated their concerns to the Government.

ENDS

() UN experts: Ms Rhona Smith, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia](#); Mr. Clement Nyaletsossi Voule, [Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and association](#); Mr. David Kaye, [Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); Ms Agnes Callamard, [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); Mr. Michel Forst, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#).*

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