



UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

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**The High Commissioner for Human Rights expresses
deep regret over the arrests of human rights activists
Kem Sokha and Yeng Virak**

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4 January 2006

It is with deep regret that I have learnt of the arrest and detention on 31 December 2005 of Kem Sokha, President of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights and Yeng Virak, Director of the Cambodian Legal Education Centre on charges of defamation. These are the latest in a series of defamation, incitement and disinformation law suits and arrests of members of civil society, trade unions, media and the Sam Rainsy opposition party in the course of last year. This disturbing trend threatens to undo the progress made through painstaking efforts over the last decade to build an open and just society based on the rule of law. The international community, which has strongly supported Cambodia on this path since the 1991 Paris Agreement, has reason to be deeply concerned about these events.

I wish to recall that Cambodia is a party to all the core international human rights treaties. As such, the Royal Government of Cambodia is obliged to respect and ensure the rights they guarantee, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly which constitute the foundations for a democratic society, and are essential conditions for its progress. Cambodia's vibrant civil society plays a crucial role in Cambodia's quest to emerge from its troubled past. The ability of civil society to carry out their indispensable work, and to continue to contribute to the development of Cambodia, must be ensured and supported.

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