



Human Rights Now

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Statement on Continuing Political Suppression in Cambodia

Human Rights Now is deeply concerned by the indictments issued by the Phnom Penh Court of First Instance against eight politicians of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) on 12 March 2019, which the Supreme Court arbitrarily dissolved in 2017.¹ Those indicted include exiled founder Sam Rainsy, Eng Chhai Eang, Ou Chanrith, Ho Vann, Long Ry, Men Sothavrin and Tok Vanchan. The arrest warrants charge them with incitement to commit a felony and plotting to commit treason under articles 453, 494 and 495 of the Cambodian Criminal Code ('CC').

The criminal charges in the warrants are transparently politically motivated and constitute another attempt by the Cambodian government to harass opposition politicians. This is particularly evident from the criminal prosecution of Rainsy, charged with inciting military personnel to disobey orders and demoralizing the army under articles 471 and 472 CC due to his call on the armed forces to disobey orders if they were ordered to shoot civilians in 2017.

HRN further notes with great concern the excessive pre-trial detention of CNRP co-founder Kem Sokha (19 months) despite a lack of supporting evidence.² Sokha was arrested in 2017 for conspiring with foreign powers to overthrow the government (article 443 CC) due to a video clip posted on social media. The Phnom Penh municipal court denied the latest request to drop his treason charges.

These indictments continue a pattern of the current Cambodia government to harass, prosecute, and punish critical political opposition, seriously curtailing civil society and democratic space in Cambodia.³ They also demonstrate the continued lack of independence of the Cambodian judiciary, which only serves to shield the current government from legitimate criticism.

HRN protests the on-going suppression of political opposition in Cambodia and calls on the government and judiciary of Cambodia to revoke the indictments against the CNRP leaders consistent with established legal principles and their rights to freedom from arbitrary arrest and freedom of association and expression under Cambodia's Constitution and international human rights law.

HRN also calls on the government of Cambodia to end its campaign of suppression against political opposition, independent media, and civil society; to take concrete measures to bring its legislation and its implementation in compliance with the above-mentioned rights; and to allow critical political and civil society groups to conduct their legitimate activities without harassment or punishment.

¹ New York Times, "Exiled Cambodian Opposition Leaders Are Indicted as Prime Minister Tightens Grip", 19 Mar. 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/19/world/asia/cambodia-opposition-warrants-hun-sen.html>.

² Human Rights Council, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia", 7 Sep. 2018, A/HRC/39/73/Add.1, http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/73/Add.1.

³ Id.