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Technical assistance and capacity-building

Written statement submitted by Human Rights Now, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 August 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Cambodia's government has accelerated its assault on civil and political rights in 2026, even as the humanitarian crisis for persons affected by the border conflict continues

Human Rights Now (HRN) is deeply concerned about continuing arbitrary arrests and civil and political rights restrictions by Cambodia's government against its political opponents, journalists, activists, and other civil society members in Cambodia, and we remain concerned about the continuing humanitarian needs of those affected by the recent border conflict with Thailand. We call on the Cambodia's government to release all persons arbitrarily arrested and end its campaign of repression against civil society, and on the international community to provide further aid to those impacted by the conflict.

1. The government's continuing assault on civil and political rights

a. The current situation in Cambodia

The Cambodian government's long history of harassment and retaliation against political opposition, independent media, activists, and civil society has only continued since it reached a high point under former Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2017, when it dissolved the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), harassed and banned its members from future political participation and later arbitrarily arrested over 150 of them, and closed at least 19 independent radio stations and took effective control over the major newspapers, after it had already passed its draconian Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO) in 2015 and repeatedly targeted environmental and rights activists. Although the transfer of the Prime Minister position to his son, Hun Manet, in 2023 raised hopes for greater political openness, the government's campaign of repression against civil society has not only continued but accelerated as discussed below.[1]

b. Continuing arbitrary arrests of opponents and critics

To put the Cambodian government's accelerating assault on civil and political rights into perspective, at least 82 persons were arrested for their speech or activism in 2025, the number of people arbitrarily arrested for their speech or activism reached a record high of 131 in April 2026, and it remains at 117 as of August 2026.[2] These included political opposition members, journalists and media workers, environmental and land rights activists, union leaders, and other persons expressing political views or taking actions critical of the government.

The following is a short survey of representative cases of arbitrary arrests and harassment in 2026 and other relevant facts.

i) Political opposition

- In June, Cambodia's Supreme Court upheld the incitement conviction of Rong Chhun, a prominent opposition politician and adviser.[3] Although the remainder of his sentence was suspended, he remains barred from voting or participating in politics for five years.
- Also in June, Khmer Will party candidate Chhin Sengkheang was arrested for incitement for Facebook comments critical of the government's handling of the border conflict.[4]
- In May, opposition activist and former Khmer Will Party district council candidate Chan Cheat was sentenced to 10 years in prison for taking photos of Thai-placed barriers along the Thai-Cambodia border in September 2025, more than a month after the first ceasefire, which he claims were for his taxi business.[5]

- On May 25, an appeals court upheld CNRP co-leader Kem Sokha's 27-year prison sentence for treason, following which he was pardoned by Hun Sen on behalf of the king.[6]
- On May 21, Nation Power Party district deputy chief Eam Ravut was sentenced to three years in prison for insulting the king in social media posts.[7]
- On April 26, former CNRP member Hem Channy was arrested for plotting following a meeting with the Kampong Speu provincial governor.[8]
- On March 30, the six year sentences for former CNRP activists Kak Komphear and Heng Chansothy for incitement and plotting were upheld.[9]
- In January, the Phnom Penh Appeal Court upheld a two-year prison sentence of opposition Candlelight politician Eng Sroy,[10] and Candlelight members Rath Sothy and Sar Nal were arrested for plotting and incitement respectively.[11]

ii) Journalists

- In RSF's 2026 World Press Freedom Index, Cambodia was ranked 151 out of 180 countries due to persistent crackdowns on journalists.[12]
- On 15 July, journalist Luot Sophal was sentenced to two years for reporting on an alleged water shortage among soldiers in the Cambodia-Thailand conflict.[13]
- On June 25, the Supreme Court upheld the treason convictions and 14-year prison sentences of journalists Phorn Sopheap and Pheap Pheara, who had posted photographs of soldiers linked to the Cambodia-Thailand border clashes, reportedly taken after the ceasefire.[14]
- In February, journalist Hem Vanna was arrested for reporting on an alleged case of violence at a scam compound.[15]

iii) Activists

- On July 13, activist Thy Sovantha and her husband Phae Sovannarith were sentenced to three years for social media posts allegedly critical of the military.[16]
- July 2 was the second anniversary of the 2022 conviction of the five Mother Nature activists for 6-8 year prison sentences for their activism.[17]
- In April, opposition activist Khoeun Virath was arrested for incitement and insulting a public official.[18]
- In January, an appeals court upheld the four-year prison sentence of Koet Saray, a student activist arrested for incitement.[19]

iv) Social media criticism

- On July 16, tuk tuk driver Hok Ren was sentenced to four years for social media posts about the Cambodia-Thailand conflict.[20]
- On June 30, bank staffer Mai Buth was sentenced to two years for comments critical of the government sent in a private Telegram group.[21]
- On June 24, law student Yon Senglat was convicted for posts criticizing a large development project.[22]

- On June 17, furniture seller Muy Youleng was convicted to two years in prison for Facebook posts critical of the government's handling of the Cambodia-Thailand conflict.[23]
- On June 11, deputy school director Ma Chandara was convicted to two years for Facebook posts critical of the recent conflict and Luot Sophal's arrest.[24]
- In June, wedding chef Kong Sopheap was sentenced to 18 months prison for Facebook comments critical of the Cambodian-Thai border conflict.[25]
- Arrests like this have been occurring about every week in this manner throughout the year.

v) Union leaders.

- In July, LRSU union members were summoned by a court for questioning following their participation in a peaceful strike.[26]

c. Revoking the citizenship of critics and opposition members

Another significant milestone in the government's continuing assault on civil society under Hun Manet occurred in July 2025, when the National Assembly unanimously approved an amendment to Article 33 of the Constitution allowing Cambodian citizenship to be revoked in cases involving treason or collaboration with foreign powers to harm the national interest.[27] A month later, the National Assembly unanimously approved an amendment to the Law on Nationality establishing the legal framework to revoke citizenship in such cases.[28] Given the ongoing practice of the government arbitrarily arresting opposition members and activists, there is legitimate concern that the law will be used as one more measure to arbitrarily silence critics for their speech without evidence of harm. For example, CNRP co-founder Sam Rainsy, who currently lives in exile in France, and activists of the NGO Mother Nature Cambodia were already arbitrarily convicted of treason, making them ready targets for the law.[29]

2. The humanitarian and social needs of people affected by the recent conflict

The border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand last year displaced more than 650,000 people, of whom more than 20,000 remain displaced, over 900,000 Cambodian migrant workers have returned from Thailand,[30] and at least 627 houses and other structures were destroyed across several border villages by Thai forces after the December 2025 ceasefire agreement, impeding people's return.[31] All of these factors have contributed to the continuing humanitarian crisis and social and economic disruption in the area since the fragile ceasefire began in December 2025, calling for greater international support.[32]

3. Recommendations

HRN protests the accelerating assault on civil and political rights by Cambodia's government over 2026, and we call on it to:

- End arbitrary arrests, harassment, and restrictions against political opposition members, journalists, activists, and others for their speech or peaceful activities, and release those arbitrarily detained; and
- Rescind the amendments allowing the government to revoke Cambodian citizenship and repeal the associated law.

HRN calls on the international community to:

- Take appropriate measures to press the government to protect civil and political rights and prevent arbitrary deprivation of citizenship; and

- Provide greater humanitarian aid to assist those affected by the border conflict and to help rebuild the area.

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- [1] <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2026/8/7/hun-manet-is-refining-cambodias-authoritarian-model>
- [2] <https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/articles/20260227/206/index.html>; <https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/articles/20260814/213/index.html>
- [3] <https://apnews.com/article/cambodia-opposition-rong-chhun-appeal-8b322acf0c0bc54784c49b66ec560a5b>
- [4] <https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/flashnews.php?perm=537>
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- [28] <https://apnews.com/article/cambodia-revoke-citizenship-bill-nationality-law-cb2bb44d3c7ed21a197ee1fd4fa9214f>
- [29] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/01/23/cambodia-finalizes-process-to-arbitrarily-strip-citizenship>
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