



45th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 10: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia

Oral Statement Delivered by Joy Anne Icyan
On behalf of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Thursday, 1 October 2020

Madam President,

The government of Cambodia continues to attack its critics, including trade unionists, journalists, political opposition, and human rights defenders. The Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO), the State of Emergency Law and the draft Public Order Law are examples of legislative efforts to systematically restrict fundamental freedoms. Similarly, the proposed decree on the 'national internet gateway' will impose serious restrictions on fundamental freedoms online on the pretext of vague notions of 'national security' and 'social order'.

On 3 September, three staff members of the environmental NGO, Mother Nature, Thun Ratha, Long Kunthea and Phuong Keorasmeay, were charged with 'incitement to commit felony' for planning a peaceful march to oppose the filling in of Boeung Tamok lake, a site which will house a military base project in Phnom Penh¹.

Since July, at least 19 people², including Buddhist monk Koet Saray, Mean Prommony of the Khmer Student Intelligent League Association and a 17 year old, were detained and charged with incitement for calling for the release of detained union leader Rong Chhun, who was arrested on 31 July and charged with incitement for criticising land infringement in the Cambodia-Vietnam border that caused farmers to lose their land.

COVID-19 restrictions have provided the government yet another excuse to intensify attacks on critics. At least 30 people were arrested in the first six months of this year over allegations of spreading "fake news" about the pandemic.

Since the arbitrary dissolution of the main political opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), the government continues to systematically target and arrest former CNRP members and clampdown on protests by their family members.

The government's refusal to conduct credible investigations in to assassination of political commentator Kem Ley four years ago, and harassment of those who call for accountability for his killing, remains a chilling reminder of risks against human rights defenders and the culture of impunity in Cambodia.

We call on Cambodia to end arbitrary arrests, judicial harassment, police surveillance and attacks against human rights defenders, journalists and civil society, and amend all legislation that restrict fundamental freedoms. We further call on the Council to mandate additional monitoring and reporting by the OHCHR on the situation in Cambodia.

Thank you.

¹ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=32840>

² <https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/articles/20200922/169/index.html>