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CAMBODIA

CRACKDOWN ON YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

Six youth environmental activists have been wrongfully imprisoned in retaliation for their peaceful environmental activism. The activists are members of Mother Nature Cambodia, a well-known environmental group that campaigns against environmental destruction and related human rights abuses. In Cambodia, environmental activists face severe threats and repression from private companies and the authorities, in retaliation for protecting the environment, advocating for climate justice, and promoting the rights of Indigenous communities.

The six youth activists are Long Kunthea, Phuon Keoraksmeay, Thun Ratha, Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth, and Yim Leanghy. Long Kunthea, Phuon Keoraksmeay and Thun Ratha were arrested and have been detained since September 2020, simply for announcing their plan to undertake a peaceful march to raise concerns over the planned privatization of the Boeung Tamok lake. Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth and Yim Leanghy were arrested on 16 June 2021, while two of them were investigating river pollution in the Tonle Sap river. All six are now being held in overcrowded prison cells in which their human rights, health and safety continue to be put at risk.

Please ask the Prime Minister to:

- Ensure the pardon and immediate release of Long Kunthea, Phuon Keoraksmeay, Thun Ratha, from prison and quash their convictions.
- Drop all charges against Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth and Yim Leanghy and ensure their immediate release from prison.
- End the harassment, intimidation and persecution of Mother Nature Cambodia and all environmental activists and groups.

Write to:

Prime Minister Hun Sen
Jok Dimitrov Boulevard
Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Twitter: @PeacePalaceKH

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Please copy:

His Excellency Sovann Ke
Ambassador for the Kingdom of Cambodia to
the United Nations
327 East 58th Street
New York NY 10022, USA

Phone: 212 336 0777

Fax: 212 759 7672

Email: cambodia@un.int

Additional Information

Long Kunthea (22), Phnon Keoraksmeay (19), and Thun Ratha (29) - have been imprisoned in Phnom Penh since their arbitrary arrest in September 2020. In May 2021, they were sentenced to between 18 and 20 months in prison for seeking to protest government plans to fill and privatize a major lake in the capital, Phnom Penh.

The three were arrested soon after publicly announcing a plan to undertake a two-person march to Prime Minister Hun Sen's house to express concerns regarding plans to privatize and develop Boeung Tamok lake, Phnom Penh's largest remaining lake.

Long Kunthea and Phnon Keoraksmeay were sentenced to 18 months in prison for "incitement to commit a felony or disturb social order" under Articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code and fined 4 million riel each (approximately \$1,000 USD). Thun Ratha was sentenced to 20 months under the same charges and also fined 4 million riel.

Sun Ratha (26), Ly Chandaravuth (22) and Yim Leanghy (32) were arrested on June 16, 2021 while two of them were investigating river pollution in the Tonle Sap river in Phnom Penh. On Monday 21 June, Phnom Penh Municipal Court Investigating Judge Im Vannak confirmed that Sun Ratha and Yim Leanghy were charged with both "plotting" and "insulting the King", under articles 453 and 437 (bis) of the Cambodian Criminal Code, which carry maximum prison sentences of 10 years and 5 years, respectively, while Ly Chandaravuth was charged with "plotting" only. Yim Leanghy and Ly Chandaravuth were sent to pre-trial detention in CC1 prison and Sun Ratha was sent to CC2 prison.

These activists are all affiliated with environmental group Mother Nature Cambodia, a prominent campaign group which has won several major environmental victories. Using a combination of community mobilization, direct action and public awareness raising, in 2015 they successfully convinced the Cambodian authorities to drop plans to build a major hydroelectric dam in Cambodia's Areng Valley, which had gravely threatened local Indigenous communities.

In 2016, their work to expose widespread environmental destruction and human rights abuses linked to the mining and export of sand from coastal areas of Cambodia led to yet another major victory – a total export ban on coastal sand announced by the Cambodian government.

Mother Nature Cambodia activists have faced a litany of repression in recent years, with many activists arbitrarily charged and imprisoned. Several of its activists have been [imprisoned](#) on baseless criminal charges of "incitement". The group has been accused of "causing chaos in society" and characterized as "illegal" by Cambodia's Ministry of Interior because it is not registered under Cambodia's notorious NGO Law.