

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# CAMBODIA: STOP HARASSMENT OF OPPOSITION FIGURES IN THAILAND

The Cambodian authorities must stop the harassment and intimidation of members of the banned Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) who have fled political persecution in Cambodia and are seeking refuge in Thailand, Amnesty International said today.

Amnesty International has received information that Mr. Soun Chamroeun, a 37-year-old CNRP activist, was subject to a physical attack and an apparent attempted abduction in Bangkok on the evening of 22 December 2019. Mr. Chamroeun is at serious risk of further human rights abuses at the hands of the Cambodian authorities should he be forcibly returned to Cambodia.

During the incident, two men approached Mr. Chamroeun at approximately 9.30pm and attempted to coerce him into a nearby van. After Mr. Chamroeun refused he was apprehended by the men and shocked with a taser, but ultimately managed to escape to safety. Mr. Chamroeun sustained a number of injuries during the incident.

Mr. Chamroeun is a CNRP working group member in Cambodia's Battambang province. He is one of 18 senior CNRP members who were labelled as traitors by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen on 14 November. The 18 have since been targeted for arrest by the Cambodian authorities.

Mr. Chamroeun is also among the 39 individuals affiliated with the CNRP whose passports were declared null and void by Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in November. Mr. Chamroeun was recognised as a Person of Concern by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on 24 December 2019.

This incident follows a pattern of harassment and intimidation of Cambodians fleeing political persecution and seeking refuge in Thailand, which has intensified in recent months.

On 23 November, CNRP activist Mr. Tor Nimol along with his wife, Chen Lim – both UNHCHR-recognised Persons of Concern since 29 November – were forcibly returned to Cambodia after being arrested in Bangkok. They later "confessed" under threat of long-term imprisonment to supporting former CNRP President Sam Rainsy's attempted return to Cambodia on 9 November, which has been characterised as an attempted coup d'état by the Cambodian authorities.

Amnesty International calls for an immediate end to the harassment, intimidation and surveillance of Cambodians seeking refuge in Thailand. The Thai authorities must ensure that all individuals residing in Thailand are protected from violence and arbitrary arrest, and prevent collusion in human rights abuses which continue to be perpetrated against Cambodian citizens fleeing political persecution.

### BACKGROUND

Former CNRP President Sam Rainsy pledged in August to return to Cambodia on 9 November. In response, the Cambodian authorities labelled the planned return as an attempted coup d'état and undertook a heavy-handed crackdown against individuals affiliated with the CNRP. Since 9 November, this crackdown has especially targeted individuals who are believed to be supporters of Sam Rainsy within the CNRP.

The Cambodian authorities' crackdown on CNRP members has also encompassed a campaign of coerced "confessions" and defections targeting CNRP activists. At least 50 CNRP members have "confessed" to plotting against the state in the past three months. The UN Special Rapporteur on Cambodia, Rhona Smith, has expressed grave concern regarding the "alarming" crackdown, noting the involvement of neighbouring countries.<sup>1</sup>

Ahead of 9 November, the Thai authorities refused CNRP members entry into Thailand. CNRP deputy leader Mu Sochua was denied entry to Thailand by Thai immigration officials on 20 October after the Cambodian authorities issued warrants for the arrest of CNRP leaders to fellow ASEAN states.

The CNRP was founded in 2012 following a merger between the Sam Rainsy Party and the Human Rights Party. Soon after, the CNRP achieved a historic result in the 2013 national election, narrowly losing out to the ruling CPP.

The party was dissolved by the Supreme Court in November 2017 based on a complaint filed by the Ministry of Interior, which accused the CNRP of seeking to stage an “illegal coup d’état.” The party was ultimately dissolved despite what was widely considered to be a lack of credible evidence to support the accusation.

The Supreme Court ruling further banned 118 of the CNRP’s most senior members from engaging in any political activity for five years. Following the CNRP’s dissolution, all of the party’s seats at the commune, district, and national levels were redistributed to the CPP and minor, unelected parties.

Other Cambodians who have fled persecution for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression have also been forcibly returned to Cambodia with the collusion of the Thai authorities in recent times, including prisoners of conscience Rath Rott Mony and Sam Sokha. [Mr. Rath Rott Mony](#) is currently serving a two-year prison sentence for “incitement to discriminate” for his role in an RT documentary on human trafficking.<sup>ii</sup> [Ms. Sam Sokha](#) is also serving a two-year sentence for “incitement to discriminate” and “insulting a public official” for throwing her shoe at a billboard bearing an image of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25260&LangID=E>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/cambodia-quash-conviction-rt-documentary-fixer/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA2378662018ENGLISH.pdf>