

URGENT ACTION

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS FACE ADDITIONAL CHARGES

Six youth activists from Mother Nature Cambodia, a well-known environmental group that campaigns against environmental destruction and related human rights abuses, continue to face ongoing persecution. Three of the activists, already sentenced to 18-20 months imprisonment for trumped up charges of incitement, face an additional 10 years behind bars for “plotting” to endanger the Kingdom of Cambodia. Imprisoned solely for peacefully protecting the environment, advocating for climate justice, and promoting the rights of local communities, they should be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Prime Minister Hun Sen
Office of the Prime Minister
Jok Dimitrov Boulevard Phnom Penh,
Cambodia
Twitter: @PeacePalaceKH

Dear Prime Minister Hun Sen,

I am deeply concerned about the relentless persecution of young environmental activists affiliated with Mother Nature Cambodia. **Long Kunthea, Phuon Keoraksmey, Thun Ratha, Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth, and Yim Leanghy** have all been imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their human rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. They should be released immediately and unconditionally.

It is distressing to learn that Long Kunthea, Phuon Keoraksmey and Thun Ratha are facing additional criminal charges of ‘plotting’ by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court. Already sentenced to 18-20 months imprisonment for trumped up charges of ‘incitement’, they could now face an additional 10 years in prison if convicted. Adding to my alarm are reports that, contrary to their fair trial rights, the three youth were not afforded legal representation when escorted from the prison for questioning by an investigating judge.

All six individuals continue to be held in overcrowded prison cells to the severe detriment of their safety and wellbeing. Amnesty International has repeatedly raised concerns regarding overcrowding, poor conditions, and human rights abuses in Cambodian prisons. The organization has most recently raised [concerns](#) about Covid-19 outbreaks in many prisons, which are putting all prisoners at additional risk.

As you know, Cambodia is well-known for its precious natural resources including rainforests and lakes, and the preservation of these resources is vital both for the protection of the human rights of local communities, and to advance climate justice. The efforts of these brave young human rights defenders should be recognized and supported, not criminalized and punished.

I therefore urge you, Prime Minister Hun Sen, to take all necessary measures in order to:

- **Ensure the pardon and immediate release of Long Kunthea, Phuon Keoraksmey, Thun Ratha and quash their convictions.**
- **Drop all pending charges against Long Kunthea, Phuon Keoraksmey, Thun Ratha, Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth and Yim Leanghy and ensure their immediate and unconditional release from prison,**
- **Pending their release, ensure that they are protected from all forms of ill-treatment and provided access to adequate healthcare,**
- **End the harassment, intimidation and persecution of Mother Nature Cambodia and all environmental activists and groups and provide adequate support and protection to those working on defending the environment in Cambodia.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Long Kunthea (22), Phuong Keoraksmei (19), and Thun Ratha (29) were charged with ‘plotting’ under article 453 of the Criminal Code by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court during the week of 21 July 2021. If convicted, they could face 10 years in prison, in addition to the 18-20 months they are currently serving on charges of “incitement”.

“Plotting” is an exceptionally serious charge akin to terrorism or other offences against the state - it is intended to cover situations whereby individuals take steps towards committing an attack, or acts of violence, liable to endanger the institutions of the Kingdom of Cambodia or violate the integrity of the national territory.

The three were first arrested in September 2020, 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 Phuong Keoraksmei 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 16 June while two of them were investigating river pollution in the Tonle Sap river in Phnom Penh. On 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.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [Khmer, English]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 11 October 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Long Kunthea (she/her), Phuong Keoraksmei (she/her), Thun Ratha (he/him), Sun Ratha (she/her), Ly Chandaravuth (he/him), Yim Leanghy (he/him).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa23/4344/2021/en/>