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Cambodia: Human rights defenders Hun Vannak and Chhoeun Daravy arrested and charged

On 13 August 2020, human rights defender **Hun Vannak** and woman human rights defender **Chhoeun Daravy** were arrested for their participation in a peaceful protest in Phnom Penh. The defenders were part of a larger group of protesters who had gathered outside the municipal court to demand the release of recently arrested human rights defender [Rong Chhun](#). Hun Vannak and Chhoeun Daravy are currently detained at the Phnom Penh Correctional Center (CC), in CC1 and CC2 respectively.

[Hun Vannak](#) is an environmental rights defender and a former member of Mother Nature Cambodia, a grass-roots organisation opposing land-grabbing and defending environmental rights. In early 2020, the defender founded the youth group Khmer Thavarak that advocates against social injustices and environment issues. [Chhoeun Daravy](#) is a woman human rights defender and a member of Khmer Thavarak. As one of the first members of the organisation, she has been heavily involved in drawing attention to several human rights issues in the region, especially those concerning the environment. She regularly livestreams events and protests organised by Khmer Thavarak and other defenders on social media, reaching large audiences.

On 13 August 2020, Chhoeun Daravy was arrested by authorities outside the Phnom Penh municipal court. She and Hun Vannak were part of a group of 30 peaceful protesters calling for the authorities to drop the charges against human rights defender Rong Chhun. The protesters were forcibly dispersed away from the court building by an elite unit of the security personnel known as “Khan 7 January”. Those who attempted to continue protesting outside the building were beaten and kicked by the security personnel, leaving at least 10 of them injured.

Chhoeun Daravy, who had remained outside the premises, was slapped by security personnel. Her backpack containing money was then seized, along with her ID and bank cards. Following this, the defender moved to an area across from the court building and started to livestream on Facebook the violent dispersal by the security officers. Two plain-clothed officers grabbed her whilst she was livestreaming, physically assaulted her and then pushed her into a vehicle. The Phnom Penh Municipal Court also issued a search warrant for Chhoeun Daravy’s home, and formally announced that she was being charged with “incitement to commit a felony or cause social unrest.”

Hours after Chhoeun Daravy’s arrest, authorities arrested five other members of Khmer Thavarak including the founder, Hun Vannak, from a small house rented by the organisation in the Pur Senchey district. The police alleged that the group had tried to incite disorder and insecurity by participating in the protest. Although four of the members were released, Hun Vannak continues to be held in detention and is being charged under Articles 494 & 495 of Penal Code, which relate to ‘incitement to commit a felony’. The crackdown on the peaceful protest and the subsequent arrests of the human rights defenders are clear signs of reprisal against those exercising their freedom of assembly and expression.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders in Cambodia. Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest of Hun Vannak and woman human rights defender Chhoeun Daravy, as it believes they are being targeted for their legitimate and peaceful work for the protection of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Cambodia to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Hun Vannak and Chhoeun Daravy and drop the charges against them, as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that Hun Vannak and Chhoeun Daravy are given the right to access legal representation and family members in line with Cambodia's national and international obligations;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Hun Vannak and Chhoeun Daravy, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Cambodia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals, and free of all restrictions including police and judicial harassment.

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