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Cambodia: Woman human rights defender Chhim Sithor detained upon her return to Cambodia

On 26 November 2022, woman human rights defender and Trade Union leader **Chhim Sithor** was detained by immigration police at the Phnom Penh International Airport after returning to Cambodia following a 12-day trip to Australia. She was detained at immigration at around 10:30am and subsequently sent to pre-trial detention in Correctional Centre 2, where she is subject to horrendous and extremely poor prison conditions. Chhim Sithor's lawyer, who was present at the airport, has not been allowed to accompany her during questioning.

[Chhim Sithor](#) is a Cambodian woman human rights defender and the president of the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees of NagaWorld (LRSU), an internal union created by staff of the large casino and hotel complex called Naga World. She was an employee of this company since 2007, and in 2009 she joined with other workers in actively demanding the rights and better working conditions for the workers. She was elected the Union Vice President in 2012 and then elected as the President of Naga World Union in 2014.

Chhim Sithor was previously arrested and imprisoned in January 2022. She was violently arrested after she and other fellow strikers were peacefully protesting in front of the casino. She was accused of endangering public security and charged for incitement under Articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code. She spent over two months in pre-trial detention alongside other union leaders and members before being released on bail in March 2022. Chhim Sithor has remained socially active since her release from pre-trial detention by speaking out to the media and attending strikes by her colleagues.

She travelled to Australia to attend international trade union confederation world conference and was arrested at her return in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, under the accusation of having violated the terms of her bail. Upon her release, neither Chhim Sithor nor her lawyers were informed of any judicial supervision or probation conditions, such as travel restrictions. The woman human rights defender and her lawyer declared that Chhim Sithor never received a notification by the court regarding her need to get court permission before leaving Cambodia, and even in that case, she should have been notified when trying to leave the country, instead of being arrested at her return.

The prison conditions where she is being held are poor. The detention facilities are extreme overcrowding, little or no access to adequate sanitary conditions, and a chronic lack of funding from jail for inmates. The poor prison conditions in Cambodian jails could potentially translate into life-threatening consequences for inmates.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemn the arrest, detention, and continued incarceration of woman human rights defender Chhim Sithor. The right to peaceful protest and advocate for labor rights must be ensured under national and international human rights commitments. It calls on the authorities in Cambodia to immediately and unconditionally release woman human rights defender

Chhim Sitor and quash the charges against her, as it believes that these acts are solely attempts to deter the human rights defender's peaceful work.

Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in Cambodia to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release woman human rights defender Chhim Sithor, drop any charges against her, refrain from further reprisals against her, and guarantee her fundamental freedoms;
2. Take steps to guarantee the health and well-being of Chhim Sithor while she is in detention;
3. 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.

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