

14 September 2020

Cambodia: Human rights defender Muong Sopheak arrested

On 11 September 2020, human rights defender **Muong Sopheak** was arrested by police, from outside the Khmer Will Party headquarters in Phnom Penh. He now joins a long list of human rights defenders who have been arrested by authorities over the week, in relation to their organisation and participation in a peaceful assembly at Freedom Park. Muong Sopheak was arrested by court order for “incitement to commit a felony or cause social unrest”. He is currently detained at the Phnom Penh Correctional Center (CC) 1.

Muong Sopheak is a human rights defender and a member of the Khmer Student Intelligent League Association (KSILA). The group works on mobilising and building capacity, to increase students’ participation in social development, good government, and sustainable use of natural resources. In his capacity, the defender has been an active voice, especially amongst youth in the country, raising awareness on social injustices and human rights issues.

On 11 September 2020, Phnom Penh police arrested human rights defender Muong Sopheak after the Phnom Penh Court issued an order for his arrest, charging him with “incitement to commit a felony or cause social unrest”. The charge has been brought against him in relation to his participation in a peaceful assembly that took place at the Freedom Park in Phnom Penh on 7 September 2020. The demonstration called for the release of [imprisoned](#) human rights defender [Rong Chhun](#), as well as [imprisoned](#) members of Khmer Thavarak, [Hun Vannak](#) and [Chhoeun Daravy](#). Muong Sopheak is currently being held at Phnom Penh’s CC 1 where he has access to his lawyer.

In the past several days, there has been a crackdown on public gatherings in Cambodia, with several human rights defenders currently detained. Front Line Defenders has issued multiple [appeals](#) condemning judicial harassment of defenders, including the detention of the vice president of KSILA, Mean Prommony, who was [arrested](#) on 6 September 2020.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the progressively hostile environment in which human rights defenders carry out their work in Cambodia. Particularly concerning is the Government’s curtailing of defenders’ fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest of Muong Sopheak, as it believes he is being targeted for his legitimate and peaceful work for the protection of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Cambodia to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Muong Sopheak, and drop the charges against him, as it is believed that that he is being targeted solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Muong Sopheak, 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;
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 including police and judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 6 (c): *“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters”*, and to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director