

Joint statement

Civil Society Condemns Violence Against Cambodian Opposition MPs

27 October 2015

ADHOC, CCHR, CCIM, CLEC, STT and LICADHO strongly condemn yesterday's violence outside the National Assembly, and at the house of an opposition leader that left two opposition CNRP MPs injured and bloodied, and call for an immediate independent and transparent investigation into the orchestrated violence. We further express deep concerns over the lack of police action to control a related gathering in front of Kem Sokha's house, which was surrounded yesterday afternoon by several hundred individuals, some of who threw rocks at the front gates while others were heard calling for even further violence.

Over 2,500 well-organized protestors – many of whom wore red kramas and pieces of red cloth attached to shirts – gathered outside the National Assembly yesterday morning calling for the removal of CNRP vice-president Kem Sokha as First Vice President of the National Assembly, a position he has held since August 2014 following a political agreement between the ruling CPP and CNRP which ended a nearly year-long political deadlock.

Observers identified a number of plain-clothed para-police, also known as security guards, and police officers among the crowd, which also included CPP youth members and public officials. In stark contrast to the usual large security presence during protests in Phnom Penh, policing of the event was limited to a small number of traffic police directing traffic.

At about 12.30, groups of protestors wearing red kramas dragged two CNRP MPs – Kong Sophea and Nhory Chamreoun – from their cars as they left the National Assembly and physically assaulted the two men. Footage of the assaults show both men lying injured on the street just outside the National Assembly after suffering punches and kicks to the face. Some protestors shattered the windows of one of the cars. The two MPs required medical treatment for their injuries.

As the main protest in front of the National Assembly drew to a close, a splinter group of around 300 protestors wearing red kramas gathered outside Kem Sokha's house in Tuol Kork. The visibly agitated mob, some carrying slingshots and rocks, continued their call for Kem Sokha to step down and, at times, threw water bottles and rocks into the grounds of his villa. Again, there was no security presence other than two traffic police, leaving the mob undisturbed for hours.

“Over the last few years, we have seen countless peaceful protests violently dispersed in the capital by disproportionate deployment of state security forces – who were nowhere to be seen as two lawmakers were assaulted yesterday,” said Am Sam Ath, LICADHO's Technical Coordinator. “We demand that those responsible for the violence yesterday are held accountable, and properly punished.”

While some government officials claimed that the ruling CPP was not behind the protests yesterday morning, pro-CPP media published a statement from CPP's Oddar Meanchey branch yesterday afternoon which called for the same demands as the protestors. A further petition calling for the

removal of Kem Sokha was also released yesterday, signed by the deputy commander of the RCAF Kun Kim and senior military commander Srey Duk, both members of the CPP's central committee.

Yesterday's violence followed speeches from leaders of the ruling and main opposition parties. After CNRP leader Sam Rainsy said it was the right of Cambodians to protest in Paris during Prime Minister Hun Sen's ongoing state visit to France, the Prime Minister responded that there could also be protests in Phnom Penh, and that Kem Sokha could lose his position as National Assembly deputy. Two days ago, Kem Sokha made a speech in Preah Sihanouk stating that the CNRP could win the next national election in 2018 if everyone eligible to vote was registered.

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