

## Joint Press Release – Phnom Penh, 01 November 2015

### CSOs call for an End to Impunity in Cambodia on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists

To mark the United Nations' second International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, we, the undersigned civil society organizations ("CSOs"), call upon the Royal Government of Cambodia to bring an end to Cambodia's rampant culture of impunity, and to ensure that the perpetrators of human rights violations are brought to justice.

This joint call comes one week after violent attacks against opposition lawmakers Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Saphea last Monday during a protest outside the National Assembly, calling for Vice President of the Cambodian National Rescue Party ("CNRP") Kem Sokha to be removed from his position as First Vice President of the National Assembly. The two politicians were severely injured by protesters – largely comprising Cambodian People's Party supporters and including plainclothes security personnel - during a protest that was predicted by Prime Minister Hun Sen the previous day. Despite the violent nature of the protest, no action was taken by the authorities to maintain order or to protect the victims, and so far, the perpetrators have yet to be identified by the authorities.

While Prime Minister Hun Sen has publicly called for the arrest of those responsible for the violence against the two CNRP lawmakers, it remains to be seen whether the authorities will ensure a prompt and independent investigation resulting in the arrest of the perpetrators, especially given Cambodia's track record of ensuring justice to victims over the last three decades.

Cambodian journalists have been among the most common victims of impunity throughout this period. As a journalist in Cambodia, highlighting wrongdoing on the part of the government and private sector has frequently been a matter of life and death; 13 journalists have been killed since 1994, with the most recent case occurring in October 2014. Of these 13 cases, there have been successful convictions in only two; the perpetrators of at least 11 killings were never being brought to justice. Similarly, Cambodian journalists are often the subject of brutal assaults, threats and intimidation at the hands of police and security forces, with the perpetrators consistently escaping justice. In May 2014, Lay Samean and Tat Oudom, two reporters from Voice of Democracy ("VOD") were attacked by Daun Penh district security guards in Phnom Penh. They were reporting on a peaceful rally being held by the CNRP, which was part of their election campaign. In August 2015 two more VOD journalists, Khut Sokun and Heng Vichet, were threatened and assaulted, again by Phnom Penh security guards, while covering a protest by Boeung Kak land rights activists. No investigation has taken place into the actions of the security personnel in either case.

The pervasive culture of impunity in Cambodia is highlighted by the recent response of the Cambodian authorities to calls made by civil society for an investigation into the killing of Mao Sok Chan, a 29-year old man shot dead after being caught in the middle of protests following the 2013 election while travelling to his workplace. His killer remains at large and was never brought to justice. Following the call for an investigation into his death last month, the Ministry of Interior's spokesperson Khieu Sopheak announced that the case should be "*buried*", exemplifying the nature of the government's attitude towards rampant impunity.

As well as journalists, prominent victims of impunity such as Chut Wutty, Chea Vichea, Khem Sophath, and Mao Sok Chan serve as examples among the thousands of other cases of impunity in Cambodia, whereby journalists, activists, environmentalists, trade unionists, human rights defenders and ordinary citizens throughout the country have had their human rights seriously violated, while those responsible remain unpunished.

Now, it is more relevant than ever to remind the government that the victims of impunity who have been killed or otherwise harmed and denied justice by the Cambodian authorities must never be forgotten.

We, the undersigned CSOs, condemn the rampant impunity that is so pervasive in Cambodia and call upon the Cambodian government to ensure justice for victims and their families as guaranteed under domestic and international law.

**This joint statement is endorsed by:**

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