

Cambodian Civil Society Groups Condemn Ongoing Attacks on Freedom of the Media

May 9, 2018 - We, the undersigned civil society groups, condemn the latest blow to press freedom in Cambodia, with the opaque sale of The Phnom Penh Post, and the new owner's immediate interference in the paper's editorial independence, which compelled 13 senior staff and reporters to resign and led to the sacking of the paper's Editor-in-Chief.

This is just the latest in a series of attacks which have devastated Cambodia's media landscape since mid-2017. The Phnom Penh Post was Cambodia's last remaining independent English-Khmer language daily, and its change of ownership raises serious questions about the paper's continued independence.

A representative of the Post's new owner, Sivakumar S. Ganapathy, ordered the removal of an article divulging his background and past business dealings with the Cambodian government, just two days after taking control of the publication on 5 May 2018. He reportedly failed to cite any substantial factual inaccuracies to justify this order, and three editors and a senior reporter resigned after refusing to remove the article from the Post's website. The newspaper's longstanding Editor-in-Chief was then fired for allowing the publication of the article, prompting the CEO and digital editor to also resign. Seven more resignations followed on 8 May.

Monday's assault on the 26-year-old newspaper's editorial independence was followed by a virulent written attack on the professional ethics of its journalists by Mr. Ganapathy – both of which cast serious doubt on the ability of the reporters to investigate and publish news of public interest in the future.

When the newspaper's sale was announced, the new owner's full name was not included in the media release, nor were any relevant details of his business dealings in Cambodia, including heading a public relations agency which claims to have worked for the Cambodian prime minister. The disputed article, which investigated these issues, has now been removed from the paper's website.

The opaque manner in which the newspaper changed hands – on the heels of a massive and disputed \$3.9 million tax bill – raises many questions, not least how the tax bill was resolved at the same time as the sale of the 26-year-old publication. The Cambodia Daily, which like the Post published critical, impartial and investigative reports, was forced to close in September after receiving an equally disputed US\$6.3 million tax bill.

Critical Khmer-language media outlets have also been severely restricted, including the closure of 32 radio transmissions from Radio Free Asia (RFA), Voice of America (VOA) and Voice of Democracy (VOD). RFA closed its Cambodia bureau citing the repressive media environment, and two of its former reporters have spent almost six months in jail facing treason and other criminal charges related to their journalistic work. Dozens of other reporters and free media advocates have left the country out of fear of persecution. This year Cambodia fell ten places in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, ranking near the bottom at 142 out of 180 countries.

An independent media, free from editorial interference by corporate and political interests, is a crucial part of any open and functioning democratic society that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms as guaranteed by the Cambodian Constitution and international human rights law. We, the undersigned, call for respect for independent media, freedom of expression and an end to the judicial harassment of journalists and free media advocates.

This statement is endorsed by:

1. 24 Family Community (Preah Sihanouk)
2. 297 Land Community (Koh Kong)
3. Activity for Environment Community (AEC)
4. Alliance for Conflict Transformation Organization (ACT)
5. Beung Pram Land Community (Battambang)
6. Bous Snour Land Community (Tboung Khmum)
7. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)
8. CamASEAN Youth's Future (CamASEAN)
9. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
10. Cambodian Domestic Workers Network (CDWN)
11. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
12. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
13. Cambodian Independent Civil-Servants Association (CICA)
14. Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA)
15. Cambodian Informal Economic Workers Association (CIWA)
16. Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC)
17. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
18. Cambodian of HIV/AIDs Education and Care (CHEC)
19. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
20. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
21. Cheko Community (Phnom Penh)
22. Chikor Krom Community (Koh Kong)
23. Chikor Leu Community (Koh Kong)
24. Chi Tron Community (Kampong Cham)
25. C I 5 Community (Preah Sihanouk)
26. Chrak Tek Community (Kampong Speu)
27. Coalition for Integrity & Social Accountability (CISA)
28. Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C.CAWDU)
29. Coalition of Cambodia Farmer Community (CCFC)
30. Community Peace-Building Network (CPN)
31. Confederation of Cambodia worker-movement (CCW)
32. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
33. Farmers Association for Peace and Development (PAPD)
34. Fine and Art Association (FAA)
35. Forestry Community (Pursat)
36. Forestry Resource Development and Conservation Community (Kampong Chhang)
37. Free Trade Union of Worker (Kampong Chhnang)
38. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)

39. Highlanders Association (Ratanakiri)
40. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
41. Indigenous Youth at Brome Commune, Preah Vihear Province
42. Indradevi Association
43. Land Community, I Village, Preah Sihanouk Province
44. Lor Peang Land Community (Kampong Chhnang)
45. Minor Indigenous Right Organization (MIRO)
46. Neutral and Impartial Committee for the Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (NICFEC)
47. Paris Peace Accords Khmer Youth (PPA)
48. Phum Dei Chhnang Community (Kampong Speu)
49. Phum Kdeb Thmor Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
50. Phum Ou Svay Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
51. Phum Prasat Rang Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
52. Phum Samut Leu Community (Ratanakiri)
53. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
54. Ponlok Khmer
55. Poy Japan Land Community (Koh Kong)
56. Prek Ksach Land Community (Koh Kong)
57. Prek Takung Community (Phnom Penh)
58. Prek Tanou Community (Phnom Penh)
59. Prey Chher Pich Sangva Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
60. Prey Lang Community
61. Preah Vihear indigenous community network (Prame Kui Indigenous community)
62. Railway Community (Phnom Penh)
63. Samaki Meanchey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
64. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
65. Sangkom Thmey Land Community (Pursat)
66. Sdey Krom Rohal Soung Fishery Community (Battambang)
67. Somros Koh Sdach Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
68. SOS International Airport Community (Phnom Penh)
69. Spean Chhes Community (Preah Sihanouk)
70. Sre Prang Community (Kampong Cham)
71. Tani Community (Siem Reap)
72. Tanuon Land Community (Koh Kong)
73. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
74. Toul Rada Community (Phnom Penh)
75. Toul Samrong Community (Kampong Chhnang)
76. Tourism Employee and Service Union (TESU)
77. Trapaing Anhchanh Thmey Community (Phnom Penh)
78. Tumnop II Community (Phnom Penh)
79. Union Coalition for labor (UCL)