

## **Joint Statement**

### **Immediately End Legal Threats Against ADHOC Staffer Soeng Senkaruna**

Phnom Penh, 14 February 2024 – We, the undersigned organisations, associations, unions and communities, are outraged by the threats of legal action against Soeng Senkaruna, a senior staffer at the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), over comments attributed to him in a media article. Senkaruna is the Deputy Head of the Human Rights, Land Rights and Natural Resource Section and Spokesperson of ADHOC. He has for years courageously spoken out in defence of human rights and social justice.

The Cambodia Daily Khmer published an article on 2 February paraphrasing Senkaruna as saying that political conflicts should be resolved through dialogue rather than in court. The article also paraphrased Senkaruna as noting that the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) had regularly used the courts as a barrier to oppress opposition parties.

On 4 February, former Prime Minister and CPP President publicly instructed the party’s lawyer to assess whether legal action could be brought against Senkaruna as a result of this article. The next day, the CPP filed a complaint urging the Phnom Penh Capital Court – often referred to as the Phnom Penh Municipal Court – to indict and sentence Senkaruna under existing law. The CPP demanded 2 billion riel (around US\$500,000) in compensation, claiming that Senkaruna’s remarks had seriously damaged the ruling party’s reputation. It is unclear if Senkaruna has been charged by the court.

This legal threat is the latest in an onslaught of strategic lawsuits and criminal charges levelled against activists and political opponents, aimed at undermining public participation and silencing all forms of dissent. At least 37 prisoners of interest, including political activists, land activists and others, are currently imprisoned in Cambodia.

Senkaruna has since denied having conveyed the ideas attributed to him in the article, clarifying that his comments were simply aimed at promoting “respect for human rights, law, social justice and democracy” and that he did not name or attack any political party. The Cambodia Daily has since corrected the article and related Facebook post.

Freedom to express political criticism is protected under Cambodia’s Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Cambodia is a party. This type of speech should not be criminalised or repressed.

We call for the complaint against Senkaruna to be withdrawn, and for the Cambodian Government to immediately end all forms of harassment against human rights defenders and activists. We stand in solidarity with Senkaruna, and every Cambodian working to peacefully promote and defend human rights.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
2. Am Leang Community (Kampong Speu)
3. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
4. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
5. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
6. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
7. Cambodian Cross Sector Confederation (CCC)
8. Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation (CFSWF)
9. Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA)

10. Cambodian Informal Economy Workers Association (CIWA)
11. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
12. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
13. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
14. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
15. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
16. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
17. Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)
18. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
19. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
20. Federation of Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
21. Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUFU)
22. Gender and Development Cambodia (GADC)
23. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
24. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
25. Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear)
26. Kbal Kla Forestry Community (Kampong Thom)
27. Khmer Student Intelligent League Association (KSILA)
28. Khmer Kampuchea Krom for Human Rights and Development Association (KKKHRDA)
29. Klahaan
30. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
31. Labor Rights Supported Union Khmer Employee of NagaWorld (LRSU)
32. Land Community (Pailin)
33. Ou Batmaon Land Community (Oddar Meanchey)
34. People Center for Development and Peace (PDP)
35. Ponlok Khmer Organization (PKH)
36. Phnom Krom Community (Siem Reap)
37. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
38. Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN)
39. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
40. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
41. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
42. Samaki Chek Meas Community (Svay Rieng)
43. Samaki Romeas Haek Community (Svay Rieng)
44. Srae Prang Land Community (Tboung Khmum)
45. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
46. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
47. Ta Ni Land Community (Siem Reap)
48. The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability-Cambodia (ANSA)
49. Thnaot Chhum Land Community (Pursat)
50. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
51. Transparency International Cambodia (TIC)
52. Trapeang Chan Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
53. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)
54. Tonlung Community (Tboung Khmum)
55. Youth Education for Development and Peace (YEDP)