

JOINT STATEMENT

Immediately Release of Chea Vuthy, Reverse 18 months in Prison Sentence Over Private Messenger Chat

Phnom Penh, 20 August 2026- We, the undersigned civil society organizations, are gravely concerned to the verdict delivered on 19 August 2026 by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court sentencing Mr. Chea Vuthy, a citizen journalist and social activist, to 18 months in prison and fine 2.000.000 Riles (approximately 500 USD) in connection with a message sent in a private Messenger group in August 2025.

We call on the relevant authorities to immediately release Chea Vuthy and to drop the charge of “incitement to commit a felony” against him, and urge the relevant authorities to ensure that his case is reviewed in full compliance with Cambodia's national and international human rights obligations.

Chea Vuthy, a 27-year-old monk at the time of his arrest, was charged with incitement and prosecuted on the basis of a comment he made within a private Messenger group. The comment referenced provincial territories in the context of the Cambodia-Thailand border situation and was the only evidence presented for the charge. Chea Vuthy acknowledged making the comment within the private group of about 20 people but denied having posted it publicly.

Cambodia is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which enshrines the right to freedom of expression under Article 19. This provision guarantees every person the right to hold opinions without interference and to freely seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

Article 19(3) of the ICCPR acknowledges that restrictions on freedom of expression may be permissible, but only if they meet three tests: (1) they must be provided by law; (2) they must pursue a legitimate aim specifically the protection of the rights or reputations of others, or the protection of national security, public order, public health, or morals; (3) and they must be necessary and proportionate to achieve that legitimate aim.

The conviction and sentence of Chea Vuthy do not meet these conditions. The comment was shared within a private Messenger group of approximately 20 members, not in a public forum. The reach and potential impact of a private message within such a small group cannot reasonably be considered sufficient to justify criminal prosecution, let alone an 18 months prison sentence.

We firmly believe that the conviction and sentencing of Chea Vuthy represents a serious violation of his right to freedom of expression as guaranteed under Cambodia's Constitution, Article 19 of the ICCPR and undermines Cambodia's commitments under its Fourth Cycle Universal Periodic Review recommendations on freedom of expression and press freedom. We urge the relevant authorities to immediately release Chea Vuthy and drop all charges against him, allowing him to resume his work and social activism freely.

This statement was endorsed by:

1. 185K Thida Chambork Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
2. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
3. Asia Human Rights and Labour Advocates (AHRLA)
4. Advocacy and Policy Institute (API)
5. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)

6. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
7. Boeung Pi community (Battambang)
8. Bos Snor Community (Tbong Khmum)
9. Building Voice and Community (BCV)
10. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
11. Cambodia Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
12. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
13. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
14. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
15. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
16. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
17. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
18. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
19. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
20. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
21. Communication and Media Promotion Organization (CMPO)
22. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
23. Community Training Organization for Development (CTOD)
24. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
25. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
26. Kuy Indigenous Community in Praeus K'ak Village (Preah Vihear)
27. Kuy Indigenous Community in Ngan Commune (Kampong Thom)
28. Kuy Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear)
29. Labor Rights Supported Union Khmer Employees of Naga World (L.R.S.U)
30. Land Community (Pailin)
31. Lor Peang Community (Kampong Chhnang)
32. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
33. Nature Protection Odom Sre Pors Community (Kampong Speu)
34. Ou Bat Moan Community (Oddar Meanchey)
35. Overseas Press Club of Cambodia (OPCC)
36. Partnership for Environment and Development Organization (PED)
37. Phnom Krom Community (Siem Reap)
38. Phum Seila Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
39. Pongrok Chey Leak community (Kampot)
40. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
41. Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN)
42. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
43. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
44. Srae Prang Land Community (Tboung Khmum)
45. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
46. Stueng Khsach Sa Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
47. Ta Ni Land Community (Siem Reap)
48. Tonlung Community (Tboung Khmum)
49. Trapeang Chan Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
50. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)