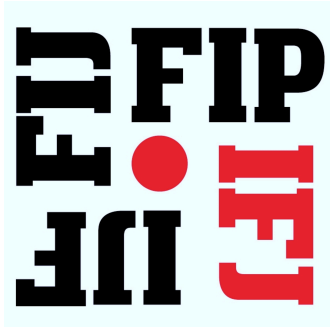




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5 October 2012

H.E. Hun Sen
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia
Fax: +855 23 36 06 66 / 855 23 88 06 24
(c/o Council of Ministers)
Email: leewood_phu@nida.gov.kh

Your Excellency,

We are writing on behalf of the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), the International Federation of Journalists Asia Pacific (IFJ) and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC). CLD is an international human rights NGO that specialises in providing legal and policy expertise to promote foundational rights for democracy, including freedom of expression and association. The IFJ is the world's largest organisation of journalists, representing around 600,000 members in over 130 countries. LRWC is a committee of Canadian lawyers who promote human rights and the rule of law by providing support internationally to human rights defenders in danger.

We write to you to express our grave concern and dismay over the arrest and now conviction of Mam Sonando, owner and operator of the independent Beehive Radio

station in Cambodia and President of the Democrats Association. Mr. Sonando has essentially been imprisoned for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

On 15 July 2012 Mr. Sonando was charged with violating six sections of the Penal Code, chiefly as the result of an accusation that he attempted to form a secession movement in the province of Kratie. He has now been convicted on all counts and sentenced to twenty years in prison. Eleven other activists were also convicted in connection with the alleged plot, including prominent land-rights activist Bun Ratha.

The absence of compelling evidence against Mr. Sonando was clear when he was first charged, and nothing of substance has yet been presented. Nor was due consideration given to Mr. Sonando's advanced age (he is 70) and deteriorating health, which has gotten worse due to repeated refusals by the government to grant him bail while the case was ongoing.


This lack of substantial evidence against Mr. Sonando, and his harsh treatment, are even more troubling in consideration of the fact that he has been a prominent critic of human rights abuses in Cambodia, and has been arrested twice before on spurious charges after publicly criticising the Cambodian government. This last arrest followed an appearance by Mr. Sonando at the International Criminal Court for a presentation by the Khmer People Power Movement on alleged crimes against humanity by the Cambodian government.

This leads us to believe that Mr. Sonando was convicted on dubious charges, to punish him for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, as guaranteed by Article 41 of the Constitution of Cambodia and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Cambodia became a party in 1992. The conviction of Mr. Sonando violates Cambodia's human rights obligations. We call on the Cambodia authorities and government to immediately release him from prison, to remove his sentence entirely, and to drop all of the charges against him.

Yours Sincerely,



Toby Mendel
Executive Director
Centre for Law and
Democracy



Jacqueline Park
Director, Asia Pacific Region
International Federation of
Journalists

