

JOINT STATEMENT: Former Opposition Leader's Trial Must Allow Open Participation of Families, Independent Media and Civil Society Groups

January 15, 2020 – We, the undersigned Cambodian civil society groups, call on the Phnom Penh Municipal Court to ensure that the long-awaited trial of former opposition leader Kem Sokha is open to the public, independent media outlets and the full participation of civil society organisations. We also call on the court to record and broadcast the trial proceedings live, as they have done in the past.

Kem Sokha's trial on charges of "conspiring with a foreign power" – for which no credible evidence has yet been made public and which carries a sentence of up to 30 years in prison – is of significant public interest both to Cambodians across the country and those living overseas.

The charges resulted in the November 2017 dissolution the main opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) – which Kem Sokha led – and led to the disenfranchisement of more than 40% of Cambodians who voted for the party in the 2017 commune elections. Sokha, 65, was arrested in September 2017 in a midnight raid before spending more than a year in prison until being transferred to house arrest in September 2018.

No independent media outlet or NGO has been given a pass to attend the trial, which is slated to continue for up to three months. Two journalists from independent media outlets who managed to report on the first morning of the trial were later barred from returning to the courtroom.

May Titthara, executive director of journalist alliance CamboJA, said the court should allow journalists access to the court room so they can report exactly what happened, rather than waiting to get the information second-hand.

"If the room is limited, the court should broadcast the trial proceedings live – it's the digital age," he said. "To restore a better space for media, the court should change their mindset."

The decision to stop the two journalists from returning in the afternoon, despite having empty seats left in the courtroom, exposes the government's true motive behind its restrictive registration process – to deny access to journalists and independent civil society groups, as well as the families of the accused.

Firsthand reports from the trial found that despite the court's insistence that the court room could only seat 30 people, the room had capacity for more than 60 members of the public.

We call on the court to allow access for family, independent media outlets and civil society groups as well as broadcasting the court proceedings to ensure that this trial takes place in an open and transparent manner with the full participation of the public.

This statement is endorsed by:

1. 92 Community (Phnom Penh)
2. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
3. Anlong Run Community (Battambang)
4. Bat Khteah Community (Preah Sihanouk)
5. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
6. Buddhism for Peace Organization (BPO)
7. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

8. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
9. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
10. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
11. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
12. Chek Meas Land Community (Svay Rieng)
13. Cheko Community (Phnom Penh)
14. Chikor Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
15. Chikor Leu Land Community (Koh Kong)
16. Chorm Kravean Community (Kampong Cham)
17. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC)
18. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability
19. Independent Monk Network for Social Justice (IMNSJ)
20. Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC)
21. Ou Chheu Teal Community (Preah Sihanouk)
22. Phnom Bat Community (Phnom Penh)
23. Phum Dei Chhnang Community (Kampong Speu)
24. Phum Ou Svay Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
25. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
26. Prek Takung Community (Phnom Penh)
27. Prek Tanou Community (Phnom Penh)
28. Prey Chher Pich Sangva Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
29. Prey Peay Fishery Community (Kampot)
30. Railway Community (Phnom Penh)
31. Rum Cheik Land Community (Siem Reap)
32. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
33. Samaki 4 Community (Phnom Penh)
34. Sangkom Thmey Land Community (Pursat)
35. SOS International Airport Community (Phnom Penh)
36. Sre Prang Community (Kampong Cham)
37. Tani Land Community (Siem Reap)
38. Thnong Land Community (Koh Kong)
39. Toul Sangke B Community (Phnom Penh)
40. Trapaing Chor Community (Kampong Speu)
41. Tumnop II Community (Pursat)