

Joint Statement

Veng Sreng Remembered: Eight Years of Silence but No Peace

Phnom Penh, 03 January 2022

We, the undersigned civil society groups, stand in solidarity with the families of the victims killed, injured, and disappeared eight years ago today when security forces opened fire on striking workers on Veng Sreng Boulevard in Phnom Penh. We continue to call for accountability for the violence and the disappearance of then-15-year-old Khem Sophath, who remains missing today.

On 3 January 2014, mixed government forces shot and killed at least four people and wounded at least 38 others when shutting down peaceful strikes on Veng Sreng Boulevard. The strikes of garment workers calling for a fair minimum wage were brutal and disproportionate. The eventual investigation into the shooting was reported to last just three weeks and failed to hold anyone accountable for the deaths of Kim Phaleap, Sam Ravy, Yean Rithy and Pheng Kosal. In contrast, 23 workers and human rights defenders were arrested and later convicted in a farcical trial on charges of aggravated intentional violence, aggravated intentional destruction of property, obstruction and insult related to the protests.

Khem Sophath, a 15-year-old child, remains missing to this day. Sophath was last seen lying face down in a pool of his own blood from an apparent gunshot wound to the chest, urging others to save themselves as forces continued to fire on demonstrators. When demonstrators returned to the spot after the gunfire ceased, Sophath was gone. Brigadier General Kheng Tito of the military police confirmed weeks after the incident that Sophath was not among the arrested.

In May 2014, two men found fragments of bones and the remains of burned tires at Brigade 70 military base in Kampong Speu province, leading to speculation that those remains belonged to Khem Sophath. The government denies that the remains were those of Khem Sophath, but has also failed to conduct a thorough, independent, impartial or effective investigation as is required by law. The government has further failed to provide the family with information regarding the investigation's measures and any developments towards uncovering the truth of what happened to their teenage son.

In Leakena, Sophath's mother, is left with only questions. "If he was shot and killed, his body shouldn't be taken away—then I couldn't arrange a proper ceremony for him." She said, "I pray for him every year at home—without his body or knowing whether he is still alive or dead." She appealed to all parties to "find justice for my son."

Cambodia agreed to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance prior to Khem Sophath's disappearance and is thus obligated to take appropriate measures to locate Sophath, to keep his family informed of the investigation into his disappearance, and to provide "fair and adequate" compensation.

On the anniversary of Khem Sophath's disappearance, we call on the Royal Government of Cambodia to:

- Assist the family of a disappeared child find peace by taking immediate, concrete measures to investigate Khem Sophath's disappearance until his fate is determined, including but not limited to identifying and effectively interviewing all armed and security forces present at the site of disappearance.

- Hold the appropriate parties accountable for the disappearance of Khem Sophath and the shooting of Khem Sophath, Kim Phaleap, Sam Ravy, Yean Rithy and Pheng Kosal, and file proper charges for a thorough, independent, impartial and effective prosecution.
- Share progress and results of the investigation to date and going forward with Khem Sophath's family, including what scientific examinations were conducted to examine the remains found in May 2014 at the Brigade 70 military base and how they were determined to not belong to Khem Sophath.
- Respect and return any identified remains to Khem Sophath's family and grant them its full support in seeking reparations.

Signed by:

1. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
2. Am Leang Community (Kampong Speu)
3. Activities for Environment Community (AEC)
4. Areng Indigenous Community (Koh Kong)
5. Bos Snor Community (Tbong Khmum)
6. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
7. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)
8. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
9. Cambodian Labor Confederation (CLC)
10. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
11. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
12. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
13. Cambodia's Independent Civil Servants Association (CICA)
14. Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA)
15. Cambodian Informal Economy Workers Association (CIWA-CLC)
16. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
17. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
18. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
19. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
20. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
21. Charay Indigenous Community (Ratanakiri)
22. Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)
23. Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community Association (CCFC)
24. Community Peace-Building Network (CPN)
25. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
26. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
27. Equitable Cambodia (EC)

28. Gender and Development Cambodia (GADC)
29. Haong Samnam Community (Kampong Speu)
30. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
31. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
32. Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear)
33. Khmer Kampuchea Krom For Human Rights and Development Association (KKKHRDA)
34. Koh Sralao Fishery Community (Koh Kong)
35. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
36. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
37. Land Community (Pailin)
38. Lor Peang Land Community (Kampong Chhnang)
39. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
40. Ou Damdaek Community (Kampong Thom)
41. Peace Bridges Organization (PBO)
42. Peam Ros Community (Kampong Speu)
43. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
44. Phnom Tnaut Community (Kampot)
45. Ponlok Khmer (PKH)
46. Prey Lang Community (Kampong Thom)
47. Prey Peay Fishery Community (Kampot)
48. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
49. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
50. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
51. Samaki Chek Meas Community (Svay Rieng)
52. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
53. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community
54. Sre Prang Community (Tboung Khmum)
55. Ta Ni Land Community (Siem Reap)
56. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong)
57. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
58. Transparency International Cambodia (TI)
59. Youth Resources Development Program (YRDP)