

Joint Statement

Call to Drop All Charges and Release Chea Chantha

Phnom Penh, 14 July 2025

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, including trade unions, federations, associations, non-governmental organizations, and grassroots community networks, express our deep regret towards the Svay Rieng Provincial Court's continued and unjust detention of Mr. Chea Chantha. For almost a year, he has remained in pre-trial detention at Svay Rieng Provincial Prison while suffering from chronic health conditions. His family is also facing severe financial hardship. His arrest and continued imprisonment for encouraging informal economy workers to register in a government labour protection scheme is a grave miscarriage of justice. His actions to increase enrolment in the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) should have been encouraged by the relevant authorities, as they contribute to the Royal Government's goal of increasing awareness and access to social protection for informal workers. Instead, he has been unjustly imprisoned by the authorities.

On 16 July 2024, Mr. Chea Chantha - a local leader of the Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA) - was arrested by Svay Rieng provincial authorities and charged after disseminating information on the registration of NSSF cards to informal vendors. On 19 July 2024, the Provincial Court charged him with fraud under Articles 377 and 378, and with impersonating a public official under Article 610 of the Criminal Code.

Chantha and other IDEA members have actively engaged in raising awareness among informal workers, street vendors and home-based workers, to register as self-employed under the NSSF, including inviting NSSF officials to give presentations. This work directly supports the Royal Government's objective to ensure that all citizens, including both formal and informal workers, receive NSSF benefits, and that the rights of those working in the informal economy are protected.

On 9 December 2024, Mr. Heng Kesaro, Deputy President of the Svay Rieng Provincial Court, sentenced Chantha to eighteen months in prison. The court handed down this sentence without presenting any alleged victims of Chantha's actions. On 23 December 2024, Chantha filed an appeal against the conviction and has since waited almost seven months for a hearing to be scheduled. The Phnom Penh Appeal Court finally set the hearing date for the morning of 15 July 2025.

During his almost year-long pre-trial detention at the Svay Rieng provincial prison, Chea Chantha's physical and mental health have seriously deteriorated due to his pre-existing medical conditions and the difficult prison environment. His family is experiencing increasing financial strain, as all burdens now fall to his wife alone. His daughter, who is only 2 years old, cries constantly and calls for her father.

We, the undersigned civil society groups, respectfully urge the court to drop all charges and release Mr. Chea Chantha immediately, so that he may regain his freedom, resume his work in support of the national economy, and alleviate his family's suffering. His actions are a valuable contribution to the government's goal for citizens to attain higher incomes by 2030, in line with RGC's Pentagonal Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals.

For further information, please contact:

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This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. 185K Thida Chambork Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
2. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)

3. Bos Snor Community (Tbong Khmum)
4. Boeung Pi community (Battambang)
5. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)
6. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
7. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
8. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
9. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC)
10. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
11. Cambodian Informal Employment Reinforcement Association (CIERA)
12. Cambodian Informal Economic Workers Association (CIWA)
13. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
14. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
15. Cambodian Youth Network Association (CYN)
16. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
17. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
18. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
19. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
20. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
21. Federation of Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
22. Federation Union of Free and Independent (FUFI)
23. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
24. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
25. Kbal Kla Forestry Community (Kampong Thom)
26. Klaing Toek 78 Community (Siem Reap)
27. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
28. Kouy Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear)
29. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
30. Land Community (Pailin)
31. Nature Protection Odom Sre Pors Community (Kampong Speu)
32. Ou Bat Moan Community (Oddar Meanchey)
33. Partnership for Environment and Development Cambodia (PED Cambodia)
34. Phnom Krom Community (Siem Reap)
35. Phum Seila Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
36. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
37. Prey Lang Community (Kampong Thom)
38. Prey Lang Community (Kratie)
39. Prey Lang Community (Preah Vihear)
40. Prey Lang Community (Stung Treng)
41. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
42. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
43. Rural Women's Association for Agroecology (RWAA)
44. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut Organisation (STT)
45. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
46. Srae Prang Land Community (Tboung Khmum)
47. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
48. Stueng Khsach Sa Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
49. Thnaot Chum Land Community (Pursat)
50. Tonlung Community (Tboung Khmum)
51. Trapeang Chan Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
52. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)