



## **Civil Society under Threat in Cambodia: One Year in Prison for the ADHOC 5**

**(Bangkok, 28 April 2017)** – Exactly one year ago, the Cambodian Government arrested the ADHOC 5, five prominent Cambodian human rights defenders, on trumped up charges connected to helping a victim of government harassment. Since then, the five have been subjected to a never-ending nightmare of more than ten denials of bail requests, deliberate court delays, and political manipulation of the judicial system designed to punish them through pre-trial detention. The ADHOC 5 should be immediately released, FORUM-ASIA and Human Rights Watch said today.

“One year of pre-trial detention is inhumane. Not only for my colleagues, but also for their families and friends,” said Thun Saray, President of ADHOC, via Skype. “The Cambodian Government should listen to the UN, the diplomats, and civil society groups around the world, and end this charade by letting the ADHOC 5 go free now.”

Thun Saray himself was forced into exile last year because of threats he faced when calling for the release of his staff and colleagues.

The ADHOC 5 are four senior staff members from the NGO Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) -- Mr. Ny Sokha, Mr. Yi Soksan, Mr. Nay Vanda, and Ms. Lim Mony -- and Mr. Ny Chakrya, a former ADHOC staff member who now serves as Deputy Secretary-General of the National Election Committee. Cambodian officials arrested them after the government’s Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) levelled a politically inspired charge of bribing a witness against them for assisting Khom Chandaraty, a.k.a. Srey Mom, a woman alleged by the Cambodian Government to have had an extra-marital relationship with opposition leader Kem Sokha. ADHOC has consistently maintained that she only received legal advice and legitimate reimbursement of food and transport costs, provided as a matter of policy to all persons seeking legal support from ADHOC.

Their plight underscores the Cambodian Government's intensifying crackdown on human rights that has swept up the ADHOC 5, and has inspired fear among other human rights defenders in the country. Their case is part of a broader Cambodian Government effort to intimidate civil society organisations and stifle any criticism of the government as the country holds commune elections in June 2017, and then national elections sometime in 2018.

Many other human rights defenders and activists have been harassed and persecuted too, including Tep Vanny, one of the leaders of the citizens group resisting the seizure of land and development of the Boeung Kak Lake area in central Phnom Penh. She was sentenced to two and half years in prison in February 2017 for her involvement in peaceful public protests.

“Targeting human rights defenders and human rights organisations has unfortunately become a predictable pattern in Cambodia. Challenges to the government are not tolerated. Cambodia is at a turning point, and if the situation deteriorates even further, particularly when it comes to freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, it cannot claim to be a human rights respecting country anymore,” said Betty Yolanda, Director of FORUM-ASIA.

Another component of this growing wave of government’s intimidation against civil society and the political opposition is the amendment of the Political Parties Law that will allow easy suspension or dissolution of political parties by the Ministry of Interior, and the passage of the Law on NGOs (LANGO), which has had dire consequences for the rights to freedoms of expression, assembly, and association in Cambodia.

“Leaders of the ruling Cambodian People’s Party are pulling out all the stops in their rights abusing effort to intimidate critics into silence ahead of elections because they know if they win then there will be no limits on their power,” said Phil Robertson, Deputy Asia Director of Human Rights Watch. “The ADHOC 5 are being used as an example of what happens to rights advocates who oppose the government’s disastrous driving of Cambodia deeper into dictatorship.”

Human Rights Watch and FORUM-ASIA urge the Government of Cambodia once again to end its crackdown on human rights defenders and ease the harsh restrictions on civic space. The immediate release of the ADHOC 5 would be a good place to start.

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