

Joint Declaration

Phnom Penh, 2 May 2025— We, the undersigned Cambodian and international civil society organizations, human rights defenders and media rights advocates, express deep concern in response to the increasing restrictions on and threats to the country's remaining independent media. In addition to the myriad challenges faced by journalists and independent outlets by the Government and powerful actors – legal harassment, intimidation, arrest, arbitrary license revocation, censorship - they now face an additional challenge: funding cuts. These financial constraints severely hinder the ability of independent media to continue to operate. The impact of this will be felt most significantly by the Cambodian public, as their access to credible information will be undercut and democratic processes undermined.

On the occasion of the 32nd anniversary of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, we — together with development partners — commemorated this important day on 2 May under the theme *"Protecting Cambodia's Independent Media."* This event aimed to draw public and stakeholder attention to the urgent need to protect and promote pluralistic media voices essential to a healthy democracy, specifically in response to the funding cuts that independent media outlets have recently faced.

This year's theme highlights the significant financial challenges faced by independent media outlets across Cambodia, both those operating at the national and local community level. These cuts exacerbate the current situation for such independent outlets and journalists who were already a minority in Cambodia's media landscape, in which reporting that critically analyzes the actions and policies of those in power is increasingly scarce, due to the retaliation it is systematically met with.

In 2024, CamboJA documented 41 cases of harassment involving at least 64 journalists. Legal harassment was the most common, with five journalists placed in pre-trial detention and one tragically killed while carrying out their work. In early 2025, three more journalists were detained on charges of incitement, and a British investigative journalist—who had spent five years reporting on deforestation and environmental issues in Cambodia—was banned from reentering the country.

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Cambodia ranked 128th out of 180 countries in 2016 in the World Press Freedom Index. This ranking declined further to 161st in 2025, reflecting the country's deteriorating media environment. This decline is exemplified by the February 2023 closure of Voice of Democracy (VoD)—one of Cambodia's last remaining independent media outlets—and the revocation of three media licenses in 2024, as documented by CCHR, in response to reporting published by those outlets.

Recognizing the critical role that journalism plays in promoting human rights, good governance, and democracy, we, the undersigned civil society groups and media rights advocates, stand united in our unwavering commitment to the fundamental principles of independent media in Cambodia.

This ongoing erosion of a free press not only stifles our voices and the voices of the Cambodian people but also undermines the very essence of our democracy. We call on all Cambodians to join us in demanding an end to these restrictions and to stand in solidarity for a vibrant media landscape that champions truth, transparency, and accountability.

We urge the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and all relevant stakeholders to take the following actions:

1. Ensure a free, safe, and secure environment—both online and offline—for journalists and media outlets to carry out their work without restriction or fear.
2. Refrain from pursuing criminal charges against journalists in relation to their professional activities.
3. Immediately drop pending charges, review criminal sentences against journalists and human rights defenders, and investigate all cases of violence against these individuals.
4. Release the journalists currently in detention and cease the misuse of the Penal Code to prosecute journalists for their legitimate work.
5. End all forms of harassment against media outlets and journalists reporting on issues of public interest—such as land rights, access to natural resources, and government accountability—which are often unjustly labeled as "sensitive."
6. Increase funding support for independent media and civil society organizations that provide protection and emergency assistance to journalists at risk.

This joint declaration is endorsed by:

1. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
2. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
3. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
4. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
5. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
6. Cambodian Female Journalists Network (CFJ)
7. Communication and Media Promotion Organization (CMPO)
8. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
9. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
10. Partnership for Environment and Development Organization (PED)
11. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
12. Gerakan Media Merdeka (Geramm-Malaysia)
13. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)
14. Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI)
15. National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP)
16. Association Journalist Timor Leste (AJTL)
17. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)