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**Contribution of Reporters Without Borders (a non-governmental organisation with  
special consultative status) about press freedom in CAMBODIA**

**Introduction: Overview of press freedom situation**

Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has been in power since 1985, can count on the support of the majority of the broadcast media. Only a few radio stations are critical of him and the highly-politicised written press struggles to maintain its role of challenging authority.

Cambodia boasts 11 TV stations but not one of them is genuinely independent. The Aspara, group which owns one television and one radio station, is owned by Hun Sen's daughter. Bayon Television is directly controlled by the party of the head of government while TV3 and TV5 are respectively controlled by the Phnom Penh municipality and the armed forces. Only Cambodian Television Network gives occasional airtime to opposition figures.

Radio Sombok Khmum (Beehive FM 105) plays an important role in the media landscape. It rents its aerial to the main Cambodian opposition parties and to Radio Free Asia (RFA), whose Khmer service readily broadcasts challenging news. The head of government in 2007 accused the deputy editor of RFA's Phnom Penh bureau, Um Sarim, of being "offensive" and working for an "aggressive" radio station. The prime minister ordered all TV channels to show the altercation to demonstrate to TV viewers the extent of the "insolence" of RFA. Um Sarim left the country for several days.

Ahead of legislative elections in July 2008, the ruling party has tightened its grip still further on electronic media. Hun Sen has already said that he plans to stay in power for another 20 years.

In May 2007, the publication of a report on deforestation by the organisation Global Witness, provoked a raft of incidents in relation to the press, including the temporary closure of Cambodge Soir, harassment and death threats against three journalists who wrote about the issue. The report highlighted the responsibility of people close to the head of government in

large-scale illegal logging. Journalists on Radio Free Asia, one of the very few media to have seriously investigated deforestation, were threatened by an unknown interloper at their station's studios in Phnom Penh.

Also in 2007, Lem Piseth, of Radio Free Asia, received a death threat after investigating deforestation in Kompong Thom province in central Cambodia. In his report, he said that he was followed by soldiers and police. Phon Phat, of the Khmer-language newspaper Chbas Ka, was also threatened for the same reasons. His house was set on fire after he had been threatened with reprisals. His reports had implicated businessman Meas Siphon in illegal deforestation.

The killing of opposition journalist Khim Sambo and his son was never seriously investigated. Several journalists and human rights activists have obtained credible information from people close to Khim Sambo that the police chief, Hok Lundy, was involved in the murder of Khim Sambo who wrote for Moneakseka Khmer ("Khmer Conscience"), an opposition Khmer-language daily, and his 21-year-old son in Phnom Penh on 11 July. They were murdered two weeks before general elections.

Khim Sambo often wrote about corruption and nepotism in the ruling Cambodia People's Party. But one story in particular, which he wrote under the pseudonym of Srey Ka, has caught the attention of journalists and human rights activists who have studied in the case. Less than two weeks before his murder, Khim Sambo wrote a detailed report about a "senior police official" who was not named but was easily identifiable to loyal readers of the newspaper.

Since then, Hok Lundy died in an accident. But the investigation on Khim Sambo' killing never produced any clear result.

### **Government steps to improve the situation**

The authorities of Cambodia have taken some steps to improve respect for press freedom:

In 2006, the parliament passed a law to decriminalise defamation. This decision made Cambodia one of the very few Asian countries to stop imposing prison sentences for libel or slander. But Prime minister Hun Sen publicly reminded journalists that they risked heavy fines if they attacked him.

### **3. Working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**

There are many NGOs in Cambodia. Some human rights NGOs, including press freedom ones, are frequently raising the violations of freedom of expression.

### **4. Recommendations**

1. Open the TV and radio market to independent operators, and allow community radios.
2. Create an independent commission of enquiry into the July murder of opposition journalist Khim Sambo.
3. Abolish the sections of laws inherited from the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) that punish for one-year prison sentences for putting out "false news".

*The information in this report was gathered and checked by Reporters Without Borders, which has a network of correspondents in 130 countries and partner organisations in about 20.*

*There are countries where journalists can spend years in prison because of a word or a photo that offends. Reporters Without Borders has been working tirelessly to defend press freedom since 1985 because it believes that imprisoning or killing a journalist eliminates a vital witness and threatens everyone's right to be kept informed.*

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