



CALD Statement No. 1 S. 2019

CALD strongly condemns the arrest warrant issued against Cambodian opposition leaders

The Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) strongly condemns the recent arrest warrants issued against the eight leaders of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and considers this as definitive proof of continuing and worsening political persecution. The CNRP leaders named in the arrest warrants include CNRP Acting President Sam Rainsy, CNRP Vice Presidents Mu Sochua and Eng Chhai Eang, and former Members of Parliament Long Ry, Men Sothavarin, Ou Chanrith, Tok Vanchan, and Ho Vann.

These party leaders were charged with “plotting and incitement to commit offences in Cambodia and in other places on January 20, 21, 22, 25, 26 and 27 in accordance with Articles 453, 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code.” The dates mentioned in the charge sheet largely coincided with the series of US meetings held by the CNRP where Sam Rainsy was selected as “acting president”.

CALD is alarmed by the timing of the release of the arrest warrants, especially as they came only a month after Cambodian Prime Minister said in a leaked private message to government officials: “We must completely destroy all members of the opposition... We cannot let them stay alive. We cannot forgive these traitors. We cannot let them return to compete in the 2022 and 2023 elections. I will not compromise.” The prime minister’s outburst, it appears, happened after the European Union (EU) announced the 18-month process of withdrawing Cambodia’s access to its preferential Everything But Arms (EBA) agreement over “a deterioration of democracy [and] respect for human rights”.

CALD is deeply concerned about the systematic political intimidation being used by the Hun Sen government to eradicate all traces of the CNRP. The Party was dissolved in November 2017 with 118 of its leaders politically banned for five years and its over 5000 commune seats distributed to other parties; casting doubts on the validity and fairness of the July 2018 general elections.

CALD believes that the continued and intensifying political persecution of the government is detrimental to the peace and security of the country and may result in further damage to its struggling economy.

CALD, an alliance of liberal and democratic political parties in Asia of which the CNRP is an active member, stands firm on its liberal and democratic ideals, though they are currently challenged and threatened by authoritarian and illiberal forces.

CALD upholds the right for the Cambodian people to have an alternative voice in government - an opposition that will strengthen the principle of checks and balance and provide a more inclusive decision-making in governance.

CALD is calling on all democratic governments and signatories of the Paris Peace Accords to fulfill their obligations in ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights, democratic principles and the holding of periodic free, fair and just elections.

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