



Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats

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Mu Sochua

Vice President

Cambodia National Rescue Party

Dear Madame Sochua:

On behalf of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) Women's Caucus, I would like to extend our utmost support to the brave women spearheading the "Friday Women of Cambodia." These women, whose husbands have been detained at the notorious Prey Sar prison for politically-motivated charges, are truly inspiring in their dedication and commitment to assemble every week to call on the Hun Sen government to uphold the right to fair trial of their spouses.

We in the CALD Women's Caucus would like to send our support and solidarity to the likes of Sok Bolima, whose husband Khim Pheana was detained after posting information on Facebook about COVID-19, and could be facing up to 15-20 years in jail for treason and incitement. Sok Bolima and the other members of the Friday Women of Cambodia have taken up the cudgels for their husbands and are now in the forefront of fighting injustices in Cambodia. They are doing this despite the fact that they too, like their husbands, could land in jail.

Cambodia's clampdown on free speech in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that the Hun Sen government is exploiting the health crisis to further entrench itself to power. Since most of those arrested for "fake news, defamation and exaggeration of information" were from the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), it becomes clear that the government's priority has been the crackdown on members of the opposition instead of addressing the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely affected the informal economic sector and migrant and factory workers -- majority of which are women.

Cambodian women are bearing the burden for the government's misplaced priorities during the health crisis. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that they are now leading the push back against the suppression of free speech and peaceful assembly, and the contempt for the rule of law. The example shown by the Friday Women of Cambodia is an inspiration to all those fighting for human rights and democracy everywhere -- when you fight for what is right, you fear no one.

The CALD Women's Caucus fully stands with the Friday Women of Cambodia and the CNRP in upholding the rule of law, fighting impunity and restoring democracy in Cambodia.

Sincerely,

Jayanthi Devi Balaguru

Chair, CALD Women's Caucus