



CALD Statement No. 10, S. 2020

The Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) Women's Caucus strongly condemns the violent dispersal of the protest led by the "Friday Women of Cambodia" last 4 September 2020 in Phnom Penh. The protesters were objecting against the arrest and continuing detention of several Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) members in the infamous Prey Sar prison facility for politically motivated charges.

Seng Chanthorn, wife of activist and CNRP member Sun Thun, was rushed to the hospital due to internal injuries after authorities from the Prampi Makara district threw her to the ground in an attempt to break the "Black Friday" campaign held in Phnom Penh.

The Friday Women of Cambodia, whose husbands have been detained by the government, organizes a weekly peaceful protest to fight against the continuing injustices and human rights abuses inflicted upon the members of the opposition party.

CNRP members have long been subjected to a series of brutal crackdown under the strongman rule of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. The government's clampdown on free speech and assembly amidst the health crisis is only the latest in the series of political persecution endured by members of the opposition. Most of the detained CNRP members were arrested for allegedly spreading "fake news, defamation and exaggeration of information" in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The violent dispersal of peaceful protests by women further attests to the fact that the Hun Sen government continues to silence all types of dissent, and freedom of expression and of assembly in general. Its continuing crackdown on opposition members highlights the government's misguided priorities that sacrifice the welfare of the Cambodian people at the altar of political power.

The CALD Women's Caucus calls on the Hun Sen government to fully respect the fundamental rights of Friday Women of Cambodia to peacefully assemble and express their legitimate grievances. Moreover, we demand that the members of the police forces involved in violent dispersals of peaceful protesters be charged and tried accordingly. We also appeal to the authorities to release without condition, and drop all the charges against, arrested opposition party members and other political detainees.

Finally, we fervently call on the international community to remain vigilant and lend a voice of support to unmask the worsening Cambodian political situation, as evidenced most recently by the treatment of Friday Women of Cambodia. The level of violence employed against these peaceful women protesters should not have a place in modern society.

For the CALD Women Caucus :

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Chairperson, CALD Women's Caucus
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