



MEDIA RELEASE

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**U.S.-CAMBODIAN POLITICAL PRISONER THEORY SENG
LAUNCHES HUNGER STRIKE TO MARK THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF
WRONGFUL DETENTION IN CAMBODIA**

PHNOM PENH & WASHINGTON, D.C. — Renowned human rights lawyer Theory Seng announced from Prey Sar Correction Center II in Phnom Penh that she has begun a hunger strike in advance of the third anniversary of her wrongful detention in Cambodia. This marks her fourth hunger strike since her imprisonment on June 14, 2022. In addition to demanding her release and that of the other political prisoners in Cambodia, she seeks to draw greater international attention to the deteriorating situation of human rights and democracy in the country. International counsel at Perseus Strategies, Jared Genser and Hannah Pierce-Carty, along with some of Theory's friends and family, are participating in 24-hour fasts in solidarity with her, and supporters are encouraged to join.

Theory is a U.S.-Cambodia dual citizen and a human rights icon in Cambodia. After her [parents](#) were murdered by the Khmer Rouge, she escaped to the U.S. as a child. Theory later graduated from Georgetown University and the University of Michigan Law School, then bravely returned to Cambodia to found two organizations focused on civic engagement and justice for survivors of genocide. She became a high-profile critic of Hun Sen – the country's strongman dictator – and has long been targeted for her advocacy. In a [sham mass trial](#) alongside 60 political opposition leaders, she was [detained and convicted](#) on June 14, 2022 for “conspiracy to commit treason” and “incitement to create social disorder” – simply for criticizing the regime in a series of Facebook posts. In July 2023, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published its [judgment](#) that Theory's detention was arbitrary, politically motivated, and in violation of international law. Not only were her charges blatantly fabricated, but she also faced a [litany of due process abuses](#). The American Bar Association and Clooney Foundation for Justice [rated her trial](#) with a grade of “F.” Nevertheless, she and many others remain detained in inhuman conditions. Theory has [appealed](#) her conviction, though this process has been excessively delayed.

There is significant concern for Theory's health and well-being during this hunger strike, especially given that it is her fourth since her detention. After being isolated in Preah Vihear prison following her conviction, she completed a seven-day hunger strike in [November 2022](#), coinciding with President Biden's visit to Phnom Penh for the ASEAN Summit. Her second hunger strike, lasting ten days in [July 2023](#), was undertaken to bring attention to the forthcoming elections in Cambodia and demand her unconditional release. Then, after being [transferred](#) to Phnom Penh without notice or reason, Theory undertook another ten-day hunger strike in [December 2023](#) to demand respect for her due process rights ahead of her appeal. This second hunger strike in six months resulted in a rapid deterioration of her health and ultimate hospitalization. Friends and family are deeply concerned that Theory will experience severe and long-lasting physical and mental health consequences due to the current and ongoing hunger strike.

Nearing three years in prison, Theary calls on the U.S. and the international community to speak out against the dynastic succession of power and absence of democracy in Cambodia. She further urges President Trump and his Administration to take further action to ensure her release and the release of all political prisoners in Cambodia. Theary's designation as "wrongfully or unlawfully detained" under the Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act (The Levinson Act) is a critical step toward securing her release, as it would transfer her case to the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, which can appropriately prioritize her release. Secretary of State Rubio previously [called for Theary's release and designation as a "wrongfully detained American."](#) and given the concerning context of her hunger strike, now is the time for his Department to act.

Commenting on his sister's decision to begin another hunger strike, Sina Seng expressed concern for Theary's health and is distraught that she feels she must resort to such desperate measures. He added that: "My family and I continue to support my sister's desire to speak out against these injustices. I ask that the international community speak out and help secure her release, using every tool at its disposal."

Jared Genser, Theary's international pro bono counsel, echoed concerns about her health and welfare. He further noted: "While former [President Biden](#) and [Secretary of State Blinken](#) called for Theary's release, they did not take any meaningful action to achieve that outcome and ultimately left her behind. We have seen that President Trump has prioritized the return of wrongfully detained Americans overseas and call on him to take decisive action to secure Theary's release. The first step is to urgently designate her as 'wrongfully or unlawfully' detained under the Levinson Act. My colleague Hannah Pierce-Carty and I, along with some of Theary's friends and family, will be participating in 24-hour fasts to show solidarity with her and raise awareness of the authoritarian reality faced by all Cambodians under the Hun Sen regime."

Perseus Strategies encourages others to consider participating in a 24-hour fast and to publicize their solidarity. All supporters of Theary, whether they are fasting or not, are asked to use the hashtag **#FreeTheary** on social media to join the call to action.

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