

MEDIA RELEASE

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**CAMBODIAN-AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONER THEARY SENG MARKS
FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF ILLEGAL DETENTION IN CAMBODIA**

Phnom Penh & Washington, D.C. — This Sunday, on June 14, 2026, Cambodian-American dual citizen, lawyer, and human rights advocate Theory Seng will mark four years since her illegal [conviction and detention](#) in Cambodia. This anniversary comes amid a significant thaw in U.S.-Cambodia relations, creating a rare opportunity for President Trump to press for her release and the release of all political prisoners in Cambodia.

There is significant concern for Theory's long-term health and well-being. For her three-year anniversary in [June 2025](#), Theory undertook her fourth hunger strike in three years, losing nearly 15 percent of her body weight in just eight days and suffering life-threatening health complications. The severity of her condition prompted family members and supporters, including Robert and Ethel Human Rights Center President [Kerry Kennedy](#), to participate in relay-style [fasts](#) in solidarity. She previously undertook hunger strikes in [November 2022](#), [July 2023](#), and December 2023, the last resulting in her hospitalization.

Theory is one of Cambodia's best-known democracy and human rights activists. A Cambodian-American lawyer and [survivor](#) of the Khmer Rouge genocide, despite being imprisoned as a young girl with her later-murdered mother, she was [convicted](#) in a [sham mass trial](#) on June 14, 2022 for "conspiracy to commit treason" and "incitement to create social disorder" – simply for criticizing Hun Sen and his authoritarian 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, calling for her immediate and unconditional release. The American Bar Association and Clooney Foundation for Justice [graded](#) her trial an "F." Theory remains imprisoned in Phnom Penh, and her appeal has been indefinitely delayed since December 2023.

The anniversary comes as Washington and Phnom Penh [deepen engagement](#) across a range of issues. Over the past year, the two countries have increased cooperation through a [reciprocal trade agreement](#), lifted [arms restrictions](#), expanded commercial flights under the [U.S.-Cambodia Open Skies Agreement](#), resumed [development aid](#), and the [nomination](#) of the first U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia in two years. At the [38th ASEAN-U.S. Dialogue](#) in Jakarta last week, Cambodia publicly reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening ties with the U.S. and expanding its regional engagement.

Hun Manet has sought to position Cambodia as a constructive regional partner through support of the U.S.-backed [Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord](#) and the United Nations-backed [maritime dispute-resolution process](#) with Thailand. Cambodia's [inaugural membership](#) in President Donald Trump's Board of Peace further reflects Hun Manet's effort to diversify Cambodia's international partnerships beyond China amid growing concerns over [transnational scam networks](#) and [financial liquidity](#).

With bilateral relations warming, the U.S. must ensure that human rights and the release of political prisoners remain central to deeper engagement with Cambodia.

There is much that can be done now through bilateral diplomacy led by the White House, along with designation of Theory as “unlawfully or wrongfully detained” under the [Levinson Act](#), which would transfer her case to the [Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs](#) to coordinate efforts for her release. While serving as a U.S. Senator, now Secretary of State Marco Rubio [called](#) for Theory’s “immediate release” and her designation as a “wrongfully detained American”; now it’s time to follow through.

Jared Genser, Theory’s international pro bono counsel, echoed concerns about her health and welfare. He further noted: “While former [President Joe Biden](#) and [Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#) urged Theory’s release, they ultimately failed to get her out of prison. We have seen that President Trump has repeatedly prioritized the return of wrongfully detained Americans overseas and call on him to take decisive action to secure Theory’s release.”

Brian Tronic, Freedom House’s Director of the Fred Hiatt Program to Free Political Prisoners, shares: “Theory is an American citizen who has been imprisoned simply for posting on Facebook. Every day she remains detained is a travesty of justice. The Cambodian Government should release her immediately and unconditionally.”

The Foley Foundation, known for its work advocating for American political prisoners abroad, adds “Theory Seng’s imprisonment for her peaceful advocacy of free elections in Cambodia violates fundamental principles of liberty and justice. Her case – punishing protected speech and denying due process – meets the criteria for wrongful detention under the Robert Levinson Act. She must be released immediately.”

Four years after her imprisonment, Theory’s case remains a test of whether Cambodia’s growing engagement with the U.S. and international community will be matched by meaningful improvements in political freedom and rule of law.

We encourage supporters to share messages of solidarity and raise awareness of Theory’s case on June 14-15th. Supporters are encouraged to use the hashtag **#FreeTheory** on social media to join the call for her release.

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