



AP Photo/Heng Sinith

MEDIA RELEASE

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AMERICAN-CAMBODIAN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER THEARY SENG CONVICTED, SENTENCED TO SIX YEARS IN PRISON

Phnom Penh, Cambodia – At the completion of her sham trial today, American-Cambodian human rights and democracy activist Theary Seng was convicted of “conspiracy to commit treason” and “incitement to create gross chaos impacting public security.” She was sentenced to six years in prison on these charges, which are clearly a political tool being used to punish Ms. Seng for her outspoken criticism of the regime of Prime Minister Hun Sen. She was immediately taken into custody and was reportedly being taken to Prey Sar Prison outside Phnom Penh, although her arrival there has not yet been confirmed.

Ms. Seng was dressed for her final court appearance as Lady Liberty, pictured above. As she told the media outside the courthouse:

I am Lady Liberty.

I am Freedom.

*I am your breath.
You cannot live well without me.
I am the colors that enrich your life.
I am the music that feeds your soul.
I am the oxygen you breathe.
This autocratic regime wants to stop you from breathing.
This autocratic regime wants to imprison freedom.
Free Freedom! Long live Liberty!*

The political process against Ms. Seng began in November 2020 as part of a broader program by Hun Sen to crush dissent and hobble the democratic opposition in Cambodia. Despite having no political party affiliation, Ms. Seng was initially charged as part of a mass trial of 41 other individuals, comprised mainly of former officials and members of the banned Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). Her trial was subsequently separated and delayed, while other opposition leaders were convicted and sentenced to prison.

From the very beginning, the judicial process against Ms. Seng has been characterized by egregious human rights and due process violations. Ms. Seng has never been presented with any information regarding the factual basis of the charges against her, making it impossible to prepare an effective defense. Furthermore, based on her co-defendants and the regime's history of misusing treason and incitement charges, she is being prosecuted solely for her outspoken criticism of the government and support of the opposition – and in particular her public support of the attempted return of CNRP leaders to Cambodia in November 2019.

“By detaining Theary on plainly fabricated national security charges, Hun Sen has violated a litany of her rights – and dealt yet another blow to Cambodia's civic space,” said Jared Genser, pro bono international counsel to Ms. Seng. “It is clear that Hun Sen feels greatly threatened by this courageous woman who speaks truth to power.” Prior to her scheduled hearing on November 26, 2020, Mr. Genser and his team at Perseus Strategies submitted an [urgent appeal](#) to the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Cambodia and the freedom of opinion and expression, highlighting the abuses taking place in Ms. Seng's case.

In recent months, Cambodia has come under intense scrutiny for its human rights record. In November 2021, United Nations human rights experts [criticized](#) Cambodia for “weaponizing” its justice system to reduce civic space and target those who stand up for human rights, expressing alarm “that the courts are again being weaponized to silence any form of dissent, including peaceful activism that is protected under the right to freedom of expression.” In October 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia [warned](#) that the country is “backsliding” away from democracy, specifically calling on the regime to “[d]rop court cases and end the detention of those who disagree with the authorities.”

We demand the Cambodia immediately and unconditionally release Ms. Seng, who is the newest political prisoner of the Hun Sen regime. We will continue working tirelessly to defend the fundamental freedoms of the Cambodian people, and we will continue to keep you updated as this situation develops.

For more information, contact:

Jared Genser

[+1 \(202\) 466-3069](tel:+12024663069)

jgenser@perseus-strategies.com

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