

## JOINT STATEMENT

### “IMMEDIATELY RELEASE AND DROP CHARGES AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENT DEFENDER, MR. KOET SARAY”

Phnom Penh, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024

We, the youth, local communities, unions, associations, and local civil society organisations mentioned below are deeply disappointed by the arrest of Mr. Koet Saray, the President of the Khmer Student Intelligence League Association (KSILA).

Note that Mr. Koet Saray was arrested by plainclothes police officers in Phnom Penh and sent to the Phnom Penh Capital Court at 2:45pm on April 5, 2024, while he was working at the office. Mr. Koet Saray, the President of the Khmer Student Intelligence League Association (KSILA), was arrested and sent to Phnom Penh Capital Court without clarification of the exact charge or notice to his family. The arrest was made on the order of Mr. Seang Heang, Deputy Prosecutor of the Phnom Penh Capital Court, on April 5, 2024 under the charge of **incitement to commit a felony or to disturb social security**. According to a press release issued by the Phnom Penh Capital Court Prosecutor's Office, he faces an additional charge of **committing a misdemeanor after sentencing for a misdemeanor**, and was sent to pre-trial detention at Prey Sar Prison during the afternoon of April 7, 2024.

Mr. Koet Saray's detention by the Phnom Penh Municipal Authority is a continuation of the silencing of the right to freedom of expression and the oppression of human rights and environmental defenders, which are severe violations of the fundamental rights stated in the Constitution. Saray's interview to the media—particularly his opinions on land rights abuses taking place in Preah Vihear province—is an expression of his concerns for people's livelihoods and a call to urge the authorities to solve the problems taking place there. Sharing his opinion should be seen as helping the authorities solve issues, rather than incitement. In addition, the arrest before Traditional Khmer New Year further deprived him of his right to freedom of association with his family members, which all Cambodians consider to be an important family occasion.

Please be reminded that on September 6, 2020, Mr. Koet Saray, a former monk, was also arrested and defrocked by the authorities for advocating for the release of union leader Rong Chhun. He and 13 other youth and former social defenders were charged and convicted by the Phnom Penh Capital Court of incitement under Articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code. Mr. Koet Saray was sentenced to 20 months in prison, with six months of his sentence suspended. He was released on November 5, 2021. The conviction and sentence of Mr. Koet Saray and eight other human rights defenders were upheld by the Supreme Court in May 2023.

We, the youth, local communities, unions, associations, and local civil society organisations call on the Phnom Penh Capital Court to drop all charges and free human rights and environmental defender Mr. Koet Saray immediately and without any conditions, and to open the space for freedom of expression to all Cambodians who work for social justice.

We call on the authorities to respect and open the space for freedom of association, respect for human rights and the rights of human rights defenders, and to promote freedom of expression, in order for all Cambodians to participate in the development of our nation.

#### **Endorsement From:**

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| 1. Khmer Student Intelligence League Association                  | KSILA   |
| 2. Independent Democratic Association of the Informal Economy     | IDEA    |
| 3. Partnership of Environment and Development                     | PED     |
| 4. Cambodian Youth Network  | CYN     |
| 5. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights | LICADHO |
| 6. The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association         | ADHOC   |
| 7. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights                  | CENTRAL |
| 8. Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation                  | CFSWF   |

9. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia	COMFREL
10. Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees of NagaWorld	LRSU
11. Federation of Trade Unions for Tourism Employees of Cambodia	CTWUF
12. People for Development and Peace- Center	PDP-Center
13. Youth Resource Development Program	YRDP
14. The Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability	CISA
15. Cambodian Institute for Democracy	CID
16. Cambodian Center for Human Rights	CCHR
17. Cambodia Alliance for Trade Union	CATU
18. Federation Union of Free and Independent	FUFI
19. Youth Education for Development and Peace	YEDP
20. Cambodian Informal economic workers association	CIWA
21. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW	NGO- CEDAW
22. Federation of Independent Trade Unions	INTUFE
23. Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia	FTUWKC
24. Gender and Development for Cambodia	GADC
25. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition	CHRAC
26. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut	STT
27. Mother Nature Movement Cambodia	MNC
28. Prey Lang Community	Stung Treng
29. Stueng Khsach Sa Forestry Resource	Kampong Chhnang
30. Trapeang Chan Forestry Community	Kampong Chhnang
31. Prey Lang Community	Preah Vihear
32. Trapeang Chour Community	Kampong Speu
33. Reaksmei Sameakki Community	Kampong Speu
34. AmLeang Community	Kampong Speu
35. 197 Land Community	Koh Kong
36. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community	Koh Kong
37. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community	Kampong Chhnang
38. Srae Prang Land Community	Tboung Khmum
39. Community to Protect Nature	Pursat
40. Phnom Krom Community	Siem Reap
41. Ta Ni Land Community	Siem Reap
42. Land Community	Pailin
43. Boeung Pram Community	Battambang
44. Andong Trabek Land Community	Svay Rieng
45. Samaki Chek Meas Community	Svay Rieng
46. Prey Lang Community	Kratie
47. Prey Lang Community	Kampong Thom
48. Thnaot Chhum Land Community	Pursat
49. Kouy Indigenous Community	Preah Vihear
50. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community	Banteay Meanchey
51. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community	Oddar Meanchey
52. Samaki Romeas Haek Community	Svay Rieng
53. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith	Preah Vihear
54. Samrong Tbong Community	Phnom Penh
55. Tonlung Community	Tboung Khmum
56. Mean Chey Land Community	Svay Rieng