

To His Excellency Khieu Kanharith,
Minister of Ministry of Information

Phnom Penh,
5 February 2021

Open Letter: Journalists Call on Government to Clarify Latest Directive to the Press

Dear Excellency,

We, the undersigned media organizations and associations, the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM), the Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), and Overseas Press Club of Cambodia (OPCC) express our deep concerns over the latest directive barring journalists from covering “police investigations”, which could restrict the rights of journalists to cover news in Cambodia.

Phnom Penh Municipal Police chief Sar Thet announced a new directive to officers on 21st January, posting online that journalists must be banned from filming, recording and live-streaming active police investigations of criminal activities, as well as identifying suspects or their location, and officers fulfilling “other duties”. Those who violate this directive will face legal action, the directive adds.

Three days before this directive was announced, Information Minister Khieu Kanharith admonished all journalists for taking photos and covering news related to authorities’ activities “in prohibited areas”, claiming that authorities can arrest those journalists.

The meaning of this directive remains vague and broad, which could lead to the restriction of journalists’ freedom of publication, as protected under Article 41 of the Constitution and the 1995 Law of the Press. Therefore, we, the media organizations and associations, after receiving requests from our member journalists, call on the government to explain and clarify this directive clearly to ensure that the rights and freedoms of journalists, as guaranteed both in Cambodia’s constitution and under international law, are not restricted.

In recent months, multiple journalists have experienced harassment and been told by authorities to stop photographing, recording and broadcasting live during protests and other events in which police were on duty.

The undersigned organizations have been made aware of at least one incident in late January in which authorities, during an interaction with journalists following a roadside dispute, cited the Information Minister's recent comments.

We encourage all journalists to uphold journalistic professionalism and to respect the code of ethics.

We call on the government to explain clearly this latest directive, discard all unnecessary orders, laws and directives that inhibit journalists' work, and ensure that all journalists can exercise their rights to report freely and without fear.

Yours Sincerely,

Undersigned Media organizations and associations:

1. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
2. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
3. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
4. Overseas Press Club of Cambodia (OPCC)

CC:

- Samdech Krolahom Sar Kheng, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Ministry of Interior