

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON

Government critic and prominent journalist Mam Sonando (71) was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment by the Municipal Court in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, on 1 October 2012. He was convicted of anti-state offences, including "instigating insurrection". His appeal hearing is scheduled for 5 March.

A representative of Amnesty International attended **Mam Sonando's** trial that took place from 11 to 14 September 2012, and the verdict hearing on 1 October 2012. Although the trial appeared to be conducted quite fairly, the verdict reached was inexplicable, suggesting political interference in the proceedings. No evidence was presented that proved insurrection – a violent uprising against the government – occurred or Mam Sonando's involvement. Thirteen other defendants including community activists and villagers were also tried, three of them in absentia. They received sentences between 10 months' and 30 years' imprisonment. Mam Sonando's request for bail was rejected in December 2012, and the appeal hearing against his conviction has been scheduled for 5 March 2013.

Mam Sonando is a prominent journalist and the owner of Beehive Radio, one of Cambodia's few independent radio stations. He is also the head of the Association of Democrats, a non-governmental organization that promotes human rights and democracy.

The prosecution of Mam Sonando appears to have been prompted by a speech made by Cambodia's Prime Minister on 26 June 2012. In this speech, he accused Mam Sonando and members of the Association of Democrats of being behind what he claimed was a plot for Pro Ma village, in Kratie province to secede from Cambodia and become an independent state. The speech came soon after Beehive Radio broadcast a report about a complaint lodged in June 2012 at the International Criminal Court, that accuses Cambodia's government of committing crimes against humanity by displacing thousands of people through forced evictions.

The Cambodian authorities used the alleged secession plot as a pretext for the violent eviction in mid-May 2012 of around 1,000 families living in Pro Ma, during which security forces shot dead a 14-year-old girl. Her killing was never investigated.

Please write immediately in English, Khmer or your own language:

- Demanding the immediate and unconditional release of Mam Sonando, who is a prisoner of conscience, and that his conviction is overturned;
- Calling on the authorities to protect, respect and promote the right to freedom of expression in Cambodia.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 APRIL 2013 TO:

Prime Minister
Samdech Hun Sen
Prime Minister's Office
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: +855 23 360 666
Email: cppparty@gmail.com
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior and Deputy Prime Minister
Minister
Sar Kheng
Ministry of Interior
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: +855 23 726 052
Email: moi@interior.gov.kh
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Foreign Minister
Hor Nam Hong
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
International Cooperation
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: +855 23 216 141
Email: mfaic@mfa.gov.kh
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 226/12. Further information:

<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA23/013/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The order for Mam Sonando's arrest was issued while he was overseas. Rather than arresting him immediately on his return to Cambodia on 12 July 2012, security officials made the arrest three days later, after foreign delegates for an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Phnom Penh had left the country.

Mam Sonando has been arrested previously in connection with broadcasts by Beehive Radio station. In 2003, he was briefly detained for broadcasts concerning anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh. In October 2005, during a crackdown on freedom of expression, he was detained and charged with defamation, disinformation and incitement, along with a number of other peaceful activists and human rights defenders. He was released three months later, after a local campaign for freedom of expression and intense international pressure.

The majority of broadcasters in Cambodia are either controlled by the governing Cambodian People's Party or obliged to exercise strict self-censorship. Beehive Radio is one of the few independent radio stations and allows airtime for reports and discussion on human rights-related issues, as well as airtime for opposition politicians.

The prosecution and sentencing of Mam Sonando mark a disturbing deterioration in Cambodia's human rights situation. Since the beginning of 2012, the authorities have increasingly used harassment, spurious legal action and violence against human rights defenders and others who are peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, particularly in their efforts to save their homes and land.

Name: Mam Sonando
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 226/12 Index: ASA 23/002/2013 Issue Date: 21 February 2013