

UA 209/97

Fear for safety

11 July 1997

CAMBODIA
Cheng Sokna, journalist
Vutha, journalist

Cheng Sokna and Vutha, two Cambodian journalists, have been missing for several days. It is believed that they may have been arrested because of their connections with people loyal to First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, who was ousted in a violent coup over the weekend of 5-6 July 1997. Amnesty International fears for their safety if they are in custody; the organization has evidence that a deliberate campaign to silence critics of Second Prime Minister Hun Sen is taking place throughout Cambodia.

Cheng Sokna is the Director of the newspaper *Kamnet Kaun Khmer*, and is known to have had links with Hor Sok, a senior FUNCINPEC politician who was arrested and killed on 7 July. Vutha is the publisher of the newspaper *Sangruos Khmer*, another newspaper which apparently received funds from Hor Sok in the past.

Cheng Sokna was the apparent target of an assassination attempt in January 1997, when seven policemen beat up and shot his brother Leng Sam Ang, while looking for Cheng Sokna. Violent attacks on journalists critical of the government have occurred with increasing frequency in the last three years in Cambodia.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cambodia has had a coalition government since elections organized by the United Nations in 1993. The two main parties in the coalition were FUNCINPEC, led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), led by Hun Sen. In recent months the coalition has been increasingly fragile as relations between the two prime ministers has become ever more hostile. Prince Ranariddh left the country on 4 July, ostensibly for a private visit to France, though it later transpired he had been warned of forthcoming violence. CPP forces loyal to Hun Sen launched violent attacks in the capital on 5 July and fighting continued throughout the weekend. By 7 July the capital was in the hands of CPP troops. Sporadic fighting has also been reported in provincial areas in the last four days. Hundreds of FUNCINPEC soldiers and officials are believed to be in detention, and Amnesty International believes that at least nine people have been extrajudicially executed since 6 July.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/telegrams/express/airmail letters in English or French or your own language:

- asking for information on the whereabouts of Cheng Sokna and Vutha;
- urging that, if they are in detention, they be protected from any form of ill-treatment;
- asking for information about any charges that may be lodged against them, and urging that if they are detained solely for their conscientiously held peaceful political views, they be released immediately and unconditionally;
- asking for assurances that no journalist or editor from newspapers opposed to the CPP will be targeted because of their political views.

APPEALS TO:

HE Hun Sen
Second Prime Minister
Office of the Council of Ministers

Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Faxes: + 855 23 42 6134 (if voice, ask for fax)

Telegrams: HE Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Salutation: Your Excellency

HE Sar Kheng
Minister of Interior
Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Faxes: +855 23 42 6144 (if voice, ask for fax)

Telegrams: HE Sar Kheng, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Salutation: Your Excellency

HE Tea Banh
Minister of Defence
Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Telegrams: HE Tea Banh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of CAMBODIA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 August 1997.