

URGENT ACTION

GOVERNMENT CRITIC DETAINED

Government critic Mam Sonando, aged 71, was arrested at his home in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, on 15 July. He has been charged with offences against the state and if convicted faces a long prison sentence. He is a prisoner of conscience.

The day after he was arrested, **Mam Sonando** was taken to Phnom Penh Municipal Court for questioning. After a few hours he was charged with six offences, including "insurrection" and "inciting people to take up arms against the authorities". He is held in Phnom Penh's CC1 Prey Sar Prison, awaiting trial. His lawyer's request for bail was rejected, and he has lodged a second request.

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

The charges against Mam Sonando stem from a speech made by the prime minister on 26 June, in which he accused the radio station owner and members of the Association of Democrats of being behind what he claimed was a plot for a village in Kratie province to secede from Cambodia and become an independent state. The Cambodian authorities had used this as a pretext for the violent eviction in mid-May of around 1,000 families living in that village, during which the security forces shot dead a 14-year-old girl.

The real reasons for Mam Sonando's arrest seem to be the popularity of the Association of Democrats and his radio broadcasts. The prime minister's 26 June speech came soon after Beehive Radio broadcast a report about a complaint lodged at the International Criminal Court that accuses Cambodia's government of committing crimes against humanity by displacing thousands of people through forced evictions. Amnesty International therefore considers Sonando a prisoner of conscience, held for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

Since Mam Sonando's arrest, members of the Association of Democrats have been harassed, briefly detained and prevented from collecting thumbprints for a petition calling for his release.

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

- Demanding that the authorities release Mam Sonando immediately and unconditionally;
- Calling on them to stop harassing members of the Association of Democrats and others carrying out peaceful activities in support of Mam Sonando;
- Demanding that the authorities respect, protect and promote the right to freedom of expression in Cambodia.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 SEPTEMBER 2012 TO:

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

Minister of Interior and Deputy Prime Minister
Sar Kheng
Ministry of Interior
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Fax: + 855 23 426 585
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 insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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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, 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 his 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. It gives airtime for reports and discussion on human rights-related issues and to opposition politicians.

The arrest and charges against 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 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

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