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Thailand/Cambodia: Shocking extradition decision by Thai judiciary

Amnesty International is extremely alarmed by the Thai judiciary's decision to grant the Cambodian authorities' request to extradite Sok Yoeun, a refugee recognized by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, back to Cambodia.

"Two Thai television stations were tipped off by fax that a court hearing on his appeal against extradition would be held today but Sok Yoeun's own lawyer was not even formally informed" said Amnesty International. "His return to Cambodia where he would face an unfair trial and possible torture is a violation of both Thai domestic law and a fundamental principle of international law."

"Sok Yoeun's case is clearly highly political and normal judicial procedures have apparently not been followed," added the organization.

"This verdict is a rebuke to the UN and demonstrates Thailand's disregard for decisions taken by UNHCR," stated Amnesty International.

Sok Yoeun can now be deported within days. However, there are fears that following a similar case, he might be removed from his Thai prison much faster than this, possibly within 24 hours.

"Following this worrying development, Amnesty International is making a last-minute appeal to the Thai authorities to respect Sok Yoeun's advanced age and ill health and permit him to rejoin his wife and children who have been resettled by UNHCR in a European country."

Background

The Cambodian authorities have accused Sok Yoeun, who is a member of a Cambodian opposition party, of being responsible for a 1998 rocket attack, which Prime Minister Hun Sen claimed was aimed at him. This allegation is widely believed to be unfounded. Two other opposition party activists were arrested in Cambodia in connection with the attack, and were held incommunicado in the Military Detention Facility in the capital, Phnom Penh for six months. They were released in March 2000, after the investigating judge failed to find any evidence against them. They have since fled Cambodia and were resettled in another country. Sok Yoeun himself fled Cambodia in September 1999.

Sok Yoeun was arrested on 24 December 1999 after a Thai politician complained that Thailand was harbouring a Cambodian "terrorist". Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen, issued a public demand at the time for Sok Yoeun's return to Cambodia. He was initially sentenced to six months' imprisonment for entering the country illegally. Since this sentence expired on 26 June 2000, he has remained in detention pending the outcome of a request for his extradition to Cambodia. This request was made under an existing extradition treaty that does not allow for the extradition of persons accused of political offences.

Public Document

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