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Cambodia: Free journalist from two-decade prison sentence

The Cambodian authorities must free prisoner of conscience and government critic Mam Sonando, Amnesty International said ahead of his appeal hearing tomorrow in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh.

The 71-year-old was sentenced to 20 years in prison on 1 October 2012 for anti-state offences including instigating "insurrection".

"Mam Sonando's 20-year prison sentence was inexplicable and baseless, with no evidence presented at the trial that he initiated a violent uprising against the government," said Rupert Abbott, Amnesty International's Researcher on Cambodia, who attended the original trial and verdict hearing.

"Rather, he has been imprisoned simply for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and must be freed immediately and unconditionally."

Additionally in breach of the right to freedom of expression, some of his supporters have been told by local authorities to remove Mam Sonando Justice Calendars from display outside their homes. The calendars, which show the number of days Mam Sonando has been imprisoned, are a local campaigning tool by Cambodian activists.

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

His prosecution appears to stem from a speech made by Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen on 26 June 2012, in which he accused Mam Sonando and members of the Association of Democrats of being behind a plot for Pro Ma village in Kratie province to secede from Cambodia.

The Prime Minister's 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.

"Mam Sonando's case is indicative of an extremely worrying trend: the Cambodian courts are being used to silence human rights defenders, particularly in the context of conflicts over land ownership and forced evictions," Abbott said.

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 assembly.

Further information

["Cambodia: Journalist sentenced to 20 years in prison"](#), Amnesty International Urgent Action, 21

February 2013.

[“Cambodia: Summit leaders should push Cambodia on human rights failures”](#), Amnesty International Op-ed, 18 November 2012.

[“Cambodia: Baseless conviction of government critic reflects shrinking space for free speech”](#), Amnesty International Press Release, 1 October 2012.