

URGENT ACTION

IMPRISONED UNION LEADER MUST BE RELEASED

Chhim Sithar, the leader of the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees (LRSU) of NagaWorld, has been rearrested for allegedly violating her bail terms, which arise from bogus charges of 'incitement', after returning to Cambodia from Australia. LRSU members have been striking since December 2021 following mass layoffs from the NagaWorld casino. Sithar was arbitrarily arrested and charged with 'incitement to commit a felony' under articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code on 4 January 2022. After being released on bail, Sithar has been rearrested for allegedly violating bail conditions that neither she nor her lawyer were informed of. We call for the immediate release and dropping of all charges against Chhim Sithar. Chhim Sithar has been detained solely for her work defending human rights.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*Prime Minister Hun Sen
Office of the Prime Minister
Jok Dimitrov Boulevard, Phnom Penh,
Cambodia
Twitter: @PeacePalaceKH*

Your Excellency,

*I am writing to express my grave concern for the future of all workers in Cambodia after the detention of **Chhim Sithar**, the leader of the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees (LRSU) of NagaWorld. I am concerned about the arbitrary arrest of a labour union leader, the misuse of the criminal justice system, and what this means for the future of workers' rights throughout your country.*

Under international human rights law and its Constitution, Cambodia has an obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of workers and to ensure that they realise their rights to unionise and strike without fear of violent and/or legal repercussion.

It is extremely worrying to see that incitement charges brought against Chhim Sithar have not been dropped and that they appear to have been motivated because of her leadership of the LRSU and their ongoing strike actions against NagaWorld. In addition, her rearrest is greatly concerning as Sithar is accused of allegedly violating bail conditions that she had no way of knowing, because they were not provided to her or her lawyers, despite requests from her lawyers. This indicates that she was rearrested because of her ongoing work, exercising her right to freedom of speech and to freedom of association while in Cambodia and Australia.

Chhim Sithar has been detained solely for her human rights work. I therefore urge you to ensure that:

- **Chhim Sithar is released immediately and unconditionally;**
- **An independent and thorough investigation into the charges brought against her is undertaken by an objective body;**
- **Pending her release, Chhim Sithar and the other leaders of the LRSU and its membership, receive the protections afforded them under international human rights laws that Cambodia has ratified.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ms. Chhim Sithar, 34, is the second child of six siblings and has four brothers and one sister. She helps to support her 57-year-old uncle who has leukemia, her 65-year-old mother and her 33-year-old brother. Sithar has a bachelor's degree in Economic Informatics.

Sithar has worked at NagaWorld since 2007 and became the president of LRSU in 2010. On 3 January 2022, Sithar was charged with 'incitement to commit a felony' under articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code. Sithar was violently arrested on 4 January 2022, being dragged by her neck and pulled into a car by undercover police while trying to join a strike in Phnom Penh. She spent 72 days in pre-trial detention before being released on bail in March.

Sithar was rearrested on 26 November 2022 after returning to Cambodia from Australia, where she had met with other labour leaders and during which time a Human Rights Watch report was published that featured her speaking out against the Cambodian government's repressive tactics. She was arrested for allegedly violating conditions of her bail, but neither she nor her lawyers were ever made aware of any bail conditions related to travel, despite requesting such information. Sithar had previously travelled to Thailand on two occasions without issue since being granted bail in March 2022 and prior to her trip to Australia. Before being arrested, Sithar told Amnesty International:

"They told me it's not easy to fight against Naga, because they are big and have lots of money. But if no one fights the difficult fights, then how can we hold anyone accountable – and how can we hope to win the other fights?"

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 February 2023

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Chhim Sithar (she/her)