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## **Cambodia: Journalist's release from prison a step in the right direction**

A Cambodian court's decision to overturn anti-state convictions and a two-decade prison sentence against a prominent journalist is a positive step for freedom of expression in the country, Amnesty International said.

Mam Sonando, 72, the owner of one of Cambodia's few independent radio stations, was first convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison in October 2012 on charges of "insurrection". Amnesty International considered him a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned simply for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

But today the Appeal Court in Phnom Penh overturned the more serious convictions against Mam Sonando. Instead, he was given a five-year prison sentence for offences including "instigating illegal clearing and occupation of forest." He has already been in prison for eight months and the rest of his sentence is suspended. He will be released this week.

"We welcome Mam Sonando's imminent release, which is a step in the right direction for freedom of expression in Cambodia," said Rupert Abbott, Amnesty International's Researcher on Cambodia who attended today's appeal verdict hearing.

"But Mam Sonando should never have been imprisoned in the first place, and the convictions that stand appear baseless.

"The introduction of new charges at such a late stage raises concerns about the fairness of the proceedings, while the suspended sentence may be designed to silence Mam Sonando."

"However, we have to hope that today's decision to release Mam Sonando represents a halt to the assault on freedom of expression, in a year when Cambodia will hold national parliamentary elections."

Notes to editors

For background, see "Cambodia: Free journalist from two-decade prison sentence", Amnesty International Press Release, 4 March 2013.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/cambodia-free-journalist-two-decade-prison-sentence-2013-03-04>

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