



Open Letter raising grave concerns over the Human Rights Situation in Cambodia and serious democratic threats in the upcoming 2024 Cambodia Senate Election

To:

The European Union Parliament

The United States Congress

The Parliament of Canada

The Parliament of Australia

The Parliament of United Kingdom

The Parliament of New Zealand

The Parliament of Japan

Your Honors,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, are writing to express our grave concerns about the state of human rights and democracy in Cambodia. Cambodia is continuing on its descent into authoritarianism following another electoral charade in the 2023 General Election. We urge the international community to take action before this decline is further cemented in the upcoming 2024 Senate Election.

The drastically deteriorating human rights situation in Cambodia has been well-documented by experts and civil society organizations, notably since former Prime Minister Hun Sen used the country's courts to dissolve the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in 2017. This occurred shortly after the CNRP demonstrated itself to be a real threat for Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) in successive nationwide elections.

Following a systematic undermining and repression of political opponents, including by disqualifying the main opposition Candlelight Party, the 2023 General Election resulted in a landslide victory for the CPP, securing 120 of the 125 seats in the National Assembly. Shortly

after the election, Hun Sen resigned and his son and former chief of the Cambodian army Hun Manet took over as Prime Minister.

Since then, Hun Manet has attempted to portray himself as a new start for Cambodia. However, Hun Sen's continued dominance within the CPP and the continued attacks against political opposition clearly demonstrate that this is not the case.

After Hun Manet's appointment, a dissident and his wife were [brutally assaulted](#) in broad daylight a month into Hun Manet's term. This attack shares similarities with [assaults reported earlier in 2023](#) against members of the opposition Candlelight Party where a group of men in black clothes and helmets on motorcycles assaulted opposition members with metal rods.

Meanwhile, opposition leaders continue to be prosecuted and convicted on trumped-up and politically-motivated charges. In October, Thach Setha, a vice president of the CLP, was sentenced to [three years](#) imprisonment for incitement to commit a felony and incitement to discriminate on the basis of race, religion, or nationality. The charge was based on remarks posted on social media that he made in January about then-Prime Minister Hun Sen's relationship with neighboring Vietnam. This sentence came three months after Thach Setha was sentenced to [18 months imprisonment](#) for allegedly passing fraudulent checks.

In the same month, the now-banned CNRP leaders Sam Rainsy, Mu Sochua, Eng Chhai Eang, Ho Vann, and 6 activists, were sentenced to prison terms in a case connected to social media comments made in 2021. The opposition leaders called for suspension of debt repayment during the COVID-19, while human rights activists called out high-ranking officials buying citizenship in Cyprus. Phnom Penh Municipal Court also issued an arrest warrant for the four opposition leaders, all of whom live outside of Cambodia. All [12 defendants](#) were convicted of incitement and conspiracy to commit treason.

Hun Sen himself retains his title as the leader of the CCP, and has said he will become [head of the Senate and of the Supreme Council of the King](#). He has further publicly expressed

that he would “[continue to wield influence behind the scenes](#)” and may “[retake the prime ministership](#)” in the event of instability or in-fighting.

It is evident that the upcoming Senate Election is at risk of being another electoral charade without stronger demands and actions from the international community. The current electoral landscape has effectively blocked the Candlelight Party participation, and the threat of its complete disbandment continues to loom. We have received reports that local Candlelight Party councilors have been the target of intimidation and judicial harassment from CPP commune chiefs, with many being imprisoned on flimsy grounds, resulting in intense pressure to defect to the ruling party. This situation raises serious concerns about the freedom and fairness of the upcoming Senate election slated for February 2024.

While we applaud the attention and efforts to sanction the Cambodian regime, notably through the enactment of the [Cambodia Democracy and Human Rights Act](#) by the United States of America, we urge parliamentarians to take action to advocate for any undue restrictions or requirements on political parties that prevent them from exercising their democratic right to fully participate in the upcoming 2024 Senate elections, including in the case of the Candlelight party, and continue to deny the legitimacy of the noncompetitive 2023 General Elections. Through legislative action, we implore you to strongly call out the Cambodian government to end all forms of political persecution and immediately and unconditionally release political prisoners. **It is imperative for parliamentarians of democratic countries to champion the restoration of a diverse and inclusive political landscape and to demand for an impartial investigation into violations of human rights and electoral irregularities. We also urge you to issue clear, unequivocal, and vocal statements about the ongoing election-related human rights violations.**

Cambodia, as a member of the United Nations and a party to various international agreements and treaties, has an obligation to uphold democratic values and ensure free and fair elections. Without the international community’s unwavering attention and resolute action, the people of Cambodia are at risk of falling further into the hands of an authoritarian regime.



Your Honors, together, parliamentarians across the globe can join the global community in sending a clear message to the Cambodian government that its actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. We are confident in your dedication to democratic values and trust that you will demonstrate this by extending your support to the people of Cambodia.

Yours Sincerely,

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
Asian Forum for Human Rights Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Civic Participation
Human Rights Watch