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Mother Nature Cambodia

JOINT SOLIDARITY STATEMENT

Francophonie leaders must call for the immediate release of the Mother Nature Cambodia 5!

#FreeOurFriends #FreeTheMNC5



Image:LICADHO

Cambodia: Francophonie leaders must call for the immediate release of the Mother Nature Cambodia 5

12 November 2026 – Ahead of the Francophonie Summit in Phnom Penh on 15–16 November, the undersigned organisations call on visiting heads of State and Government to urge the Cambodian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release environmental human rights defenders Ly Chandaravuth, Thun Ratha, Yim Leanghy, Phuon Keoraksmey and Long Kunthea, known as the Mother Nature Cambodia 5 (MNC5). By 15 November 2026, they will have spent 866 days in arbitrary detention.

The five are members of Mother Nature Cambodia, one of the country's leading environmental groups, which has worked with local communities to protect Cambodia's forests, rivers and wildlife. In response to their peaceful advocacy and symbolic protests, the Cambodian authorities deregistered the group in 2017 and have subjected its members to deportation, harassment, intimidation, arrest and imprisonment for more than a decade.

On 2 July 2024, the Phnom Penh Capital Court convicted the five of "plotting" against the government, and Yim Leanghy also of "insulting the King", and sentenced them to between six and eight years in prison. Their lawyer appealed the same month. An appeal hearing set for 2 June 2026 was postponed indefinitely by the Phnom Penh Court of Appeal, and no new date has been set.

The undersigned organisations strongly condemn the arbitrary detention and unfair judicial treatment of the MNC5, which appear to be aimed at punishing them for their legitimate and peaceful human rights activities. In an opinion published in February 2026, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that their detention had no legal basis, was discriminatory on the grounds of their political opinions and their status as human rights defenders, and followed a trial marred by serious violations of their right to a fair trial. It concluded that *"the appropriate remedy would be to release [them] immediately and accord them an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations, in accordance with international law."* In his report to the 63rd session of the Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Tom Andrews, also raised their case and called for their release.

The undersigned organisations further express their deep concern regarding the conditions of detention of the five defenders, who are held in separate prisons far from their families. Ms. Phuon Keoraksmey, from Bavet City in Svay Rieng Province, is detained in Pursat prison, Pursat Province, a seven-hour drive from her home. Each of the five was a breadwinner, and their families are often unable to afford the journey to visit them. Such practices run counter to international standards on the treatment of prisoners, which provide that detainees should be held close to their homes and be able to maintain regular contact with their

families. According to the World Prison Brief, Cambodia has one of the most overcrowded prison systems in the world, and LICADHO reports that, at the end of 2024, 18 of the 19 prisons it monitors exceeded their official capacity, with access to food and clean water severely limited. The undersigned organisations recall that prolonged exposure to such conditions may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, which Cambodia, as a State party to the UN Convention against Torture, is under an obligation to prevent.

The Organisation internationale de la Francophonie is mandated "to promote peace, democracy and human rights." In June 2026, 74 organisations urged Prime Minister Hun Manet to release the MNC5, and renewed this call in a follow-up letter in October asking for their release ahead of the summit.

The undersigned organisations now call on Francophonie leaders attending the summit to raise the case of the MNC5 with the Cambodian authorities and to publicly call for their release.

In their exchanges with their Cambodian hosts, leaders should also press for the five defenders' appeal hearing to be rescheduled without further delay. Pending their release, they should urge the authorities to transfer the MNC5 to prisons close to their families, to guarantee their physical and psychological integrity, and to ensure that they have regular access to their relatives and lawyers, as well as adequate food, water and medical care.

Signatories:

1. Amnesty International
2. Asia Democracy Network
3. Asia Human Rights and Labour Advocates
4. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
5. Both ENDS
6. Bruno Manser Fonds
7. Cambodian Center for Human Rights
8. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
9. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
10. Equitable Cambodia
11. Fortify Rights
12. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
13. Legal Literacy – Nepal
14. Manushya Foundation
15. Mother Nature Cambodia
16. Partnership for Environment and Development Organization (PED Cambodia)

17. Psychological Responsiveness NGO, Mongolia
18. Rettet den Regenwald e.V. (Rainforest Rescue)
19. Right Livelihood
20. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)
21. WOREC Nepal
22. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders