

Joint Civil Society Statement: Calling for halt to information warfare and the protection of civilian amidst Cambodia-Thailand Conflict



06 August 2025 (Jakarta) - We, civil society organisations across Southeast Asia, united under the South East Asia Collaborative Policy Network (SEA CPN) and the ASEAN Regional Coalition to #StopDigitalDictatorship, call for the de-escalation of the Cambodia–Thailand conflict and urge for the urgent establishment of a physical ceasefire and prioritise the protection of civilians, uphold human dignity and work towards a just and lasting peace. In line with this, we strongly call on both states to immediately halt all forms of information warfare, particularly coordinated information operations in the digital space.

Since political tensions between the two countries escalated in mid-2025, we have observed the spread of disinformation and hate speech across social media platforms in both countries aimed at fueling ultra-nationalist sentiment and hostility toward the other. These narratives have been widely circulated on popular platforms such as Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, TikTok, and X, in Khmer, Thai, and English. These narratives have intensified during the ongoing conflict, with some even being directly disseminated by public officials and military representatives of both governments. Some narratives are powered by artificial intelligence, making the public even more confused about the validity of the information. This has led to information disorder, growing distrust, and increased animosity among netizens in both countries.

We stress the imperative for all relevant actors, the Governments of Cambodia and Thailand, and social media companies in fulfilling their responsibilities, as well as the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression in the report titled *Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression During Armed Conflicts*. Disinformation, propaganda, and advocacy to incite discrimination, violence, and hostility have the potential to cause detrimental impact on human rights, democracy, and the peace process. Disinformation has incited hate speech which often led to physical harm, which may

violate Article 20 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and should be addressed in accordance with the Rabat Plan of Action. This environment has further dehumanised the conflict, increased animosity, and fostered xenophobia, particularly impacting Cambodian migrant workers, students in Thailand, and women, children, the elderly and displaced civilians in both countries. A prolonged state of tension and militarisation is also often used as justification for disproportionate digital rights restrictions, such as internet shutdowns, criminalisation, and censorship.

We underscore the urgent need for neutral, unbiased, fair, and independent media reporting on the Cambodia–Thailand conflict. It is essential that journalists uphold the highest standards of journalistic ethics and refrain from contributing to disinformation or hate speech. The media must play a constructive role in conflict-sensitive reporting by ensuring a diversity of sources and amplifying underrepresented voices, especially from Cambodia, where press freedom has been dismantled. Following the closure of independent news outlets, Cambodian narratives have been systematically suppressed, resulting in an imbalance in regional media coverage. Media outlets must avoid sensationalism that fuels public division and nationalist fervor. We call on international and regional media to exercise caution, rigorously verify facts, and commit to balanced storytelling that centers the human impact of the conflict on civilians, rather than reinforcing state-led political agendas.

In light of these concerns, and with the increasing spread of disinformation and hate speech on social media, we call on:

1. The Governments of Cambodia and Thailand must cease all information warfare and operations intended to deepen hostilities between their populations, and to ensure that public communications by state officials are based on verified and accurate information. They must also ensure the humane treatment and prompt repatriation of prisoners of war in accordance with international humanitarian law, including the safe return of Cambodian personnel currently detained by Thai authorities;
2. Social media companies, particularly Meta, Bytedance, Google, and X must implement effective and proportionate content moderation protocols amid the ongoing crisis, including intensified monitoring of Khmer-, Thai-, and English-language content related to the two countries, without compromising freedom of expression and legitimate political discourse;
3. Journalists and media outlets must commit to neutrality, accuracy, and balanced reporting, especially when covering cross-border tensions. They should amplify voices of underrepresented communities to correct existing media imbalances, and avoid sensationalism or nationalist narratives that exacerbate conflict and dehumanise civilians;
4. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) must play a constructive role in mediating the crisis and easing tensions between Thailand and Cambodia. Beyond promoting vague ideals of ‘neutral information governance,’ ASEAN should deploy a regional fact-finding delegation, composed of media experts, civil society representatives, and digital rights watchdogs, to monitor, document, and report on the role of information operations in escalating tensions. This team should produce public briefings and policy guidance, to help promote sustainable peace,

evidence-based interventions, and regional cooperation to prevent the recurrence of such conflicts.

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About the South East Asia Collaborative Policy Network (SEA CPN)

SEA CPN is a network of civil society organisations in Southeast Asia consisting of DAKILA, Foundation for Media Alternatives, Front Line Defenders, Human Rights Online Philippines, ICT Watch, KRYSS Network, Legal Initiative for Vietnam, Manushya Foundation, Movement Against Disinformation, Open Culture Foundation, Open Net Korea, Out of the Box Media Literacy, Public Virtue Research Institute, PurpleCode Collective, SAFEnet, Security Matters, and Thai Netizen Network.. This network aims to promote internet freedom by developing the capacity of CSOs to engage and have a dialogue with ICT companies (tech companies, ISPs, and telcos), governments and ASEAN. This network was established in March 2023 in response to the commonality of internet freedom issues and problems in South East Asia countries that have been identified. These include online censorship, mass surveillance, disinformation and Influence Operations (IO), attacks on human rights defenders, spyware, red-tagging, online gender-based violence (OGBV), and others. To achieve its goal, the network is committed to developing the capacity of the network members to engage with the targeted actors, ensure well representation of South East Asia's CSOs in the network, form a unified framework and agenda, and establish a meaningful engagement and dialogue with the targeted actors. Contact SEA CPN through sea_cpn@protonmail.com.

About the ASEAN Regional Coalition to #StopDigitalDictatorship

The ASEAN Regional Coalition to #StopDigitalDictatorship, envisioned in 2020 by Manushya Foundation, is a Global Majority collective consisting of ALTSEAN-Burma, Bumi Setara (Equal Earth), Cambodian Center for Human Rights, ELSAM, Foundation for Media Alternatives, ILGA Asia, Manushya Foundation, The Rohingya Maiyafuinor Collaborative Network, SAFEnet, Viet Tan, and Women's Peace Network.

The Coalition takes into account intersectional feminist perspectives, fearlessly sharing our truths, with particular focus on Global Majority voices and Class Struggles: Women, LGBTIQ+ folks, youth, democracy defenders, and marginalised communities such as indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and religious minorities (including the Rohingya people and Malayu Muslims). Learn more: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/stop-digital-dictatorship-campaign>. Contact our Secretariat: WeAreManushyan@manushyafoundation.org.