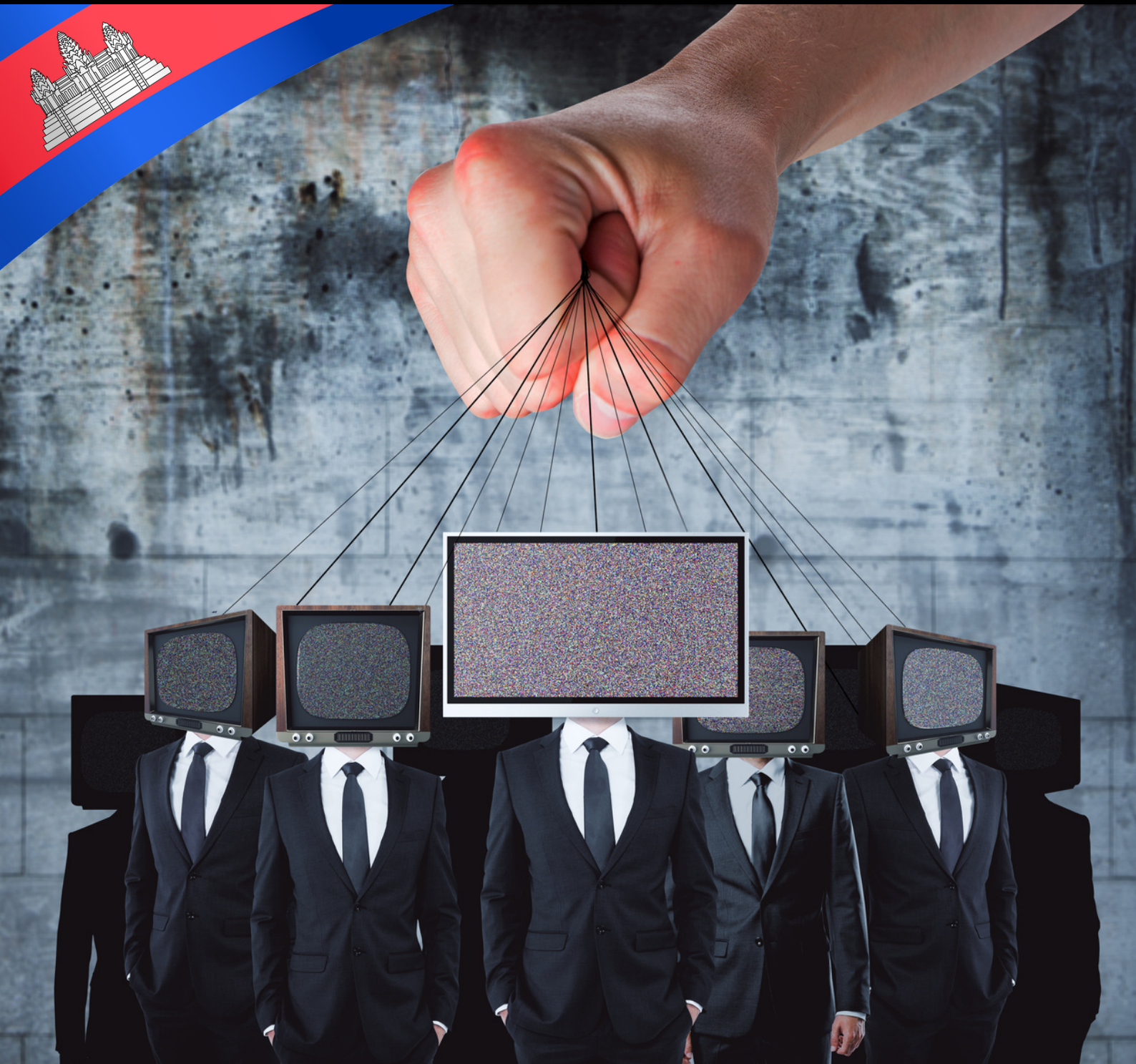




25 July 2023

JOINT SOLIDARITY STATEMENT

DEMOCRACY IN PERIL: **CAMBODIA** FACES ELECTION MANIPULATION THROUGH CONTROLLING ONLINE INFORMATION BY AN OPPRESSIVE REGIME





Joint Solidarity Statement

Democracy in Peril: Cambodia Faces Election Manipulation through Controlling Online Information by an Oppressive Regime

July, 25 2023

We, Manushya Foundation, ALTSEAN-Burma, Cambodian Center for Human Rights, ELSAM, Foundation for Media Alternatives, Free Expression Myanmar, ILGA Asia, SAFEnet, The 88 Project, and Women’s Peace Network, as the [ASEAN Regional Coalition to #StopDigitalDictatorship](#), stand in solidarity with independent media and call on the government of Cambodia to reverse its pre-election decision to block critical media websites and a public database, Kamnotra Database.[1] The Cambodian government also furthered its grip over media by also blocking two crucial critical media outlets: Radio Free Asia and Cambodia Daily.[2] We condemn the government's grip on critical media websites that provide public information and the ongoing digital dictatorship.[3] This worrying and forever-expanding grip on free information is far from new. It is embedded in an established will to undermine the right to information. For instance, in February 2023, the government had already closed the independent media Voice of Democracy. This overwhelming hold over information undermines the free press and hinders the flow of information. Ultimately, an informed citizenry is essential for the functioning of a democratic society. It enables Cambodians to exercise their rights, hold leaders accountable, and contribute to shaping the future of their nation.[4] This tight control over information dissemination aims to suppress any criticism of the government and restrict access to dissenting voices for the Cambodian population, raising concerns about the fairness and transparency of the electoral process.

We urge the Cambodian government to uphold international human rights norms safeguarding the freedoms of expression and information as enshrined in Article 19 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) and Article 19 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR). These provisions protect individuals' rights to freely express themselves, access information, and share knowledge, both online and offline.

We denounce the government’s systematic disregard for its international human rights commitments, particularly its failure to uphold people's right to access information and safeguard press freedom in the nation. These rights are not only enshrined in the Cambodian Constitution[6] but also protected by the 1995 Law on the Media. Yet, they are repetitively violated by the government.

In light of these concerns, the **ASEAN Regional Coalition to #StopDigitalDictatorship** calls on the Cambodian government to:



- Reverse the order to strike down access to the Kamnotra, Radio Free Asia, and Cambodia Daily so that the Cambodian population can have access to public information and database;
- Foster a political landscape and society where independent journalism is permitted to thrive, and recognize the need for particular protection independent outlets have, given the essential role they play in ensuring vibrant public discourse, including online;
- Reverse Cambodia's National Internet Getaway Sub-decree which requires all internet traffic to be routed through a regulatory body in charge of monitoring online activity and that constantly fails to protect Cambodian's digital rights as part of human rights;
- Put an end to the repression of the free press, journalists and whistleblowers, who are essential to the full realization of human rights in Cambodia;
- Uphold their legal international commitments by fulfilling the positive obligations incumbent on Cambodia;
- Repeal or amend laws and regulations that restrict freedom of expression and independent media, including but not limited to criminal defamation and lèse-majesté under the Criminal Code, and defamation provisions under the Press Law that governs defamation perpetrated by media outlets, to bring them in line with Articles 19 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

For more information about joining our regional campaign to #StopDigitalDictatorship in Southeast Asia, and to support our work to restore digital democracy in the region, access our online campaign at: <https://www.manushyafoundation.org/stop-digital-dictatorship-campaign>

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Endnotes:

- [1] Southeast Asia Globe, *Before elections, Cambodia blocks database of public information*, (18 July 2023), available at: <https://southeastasiaglobe.com/before-elections-cambodia-blocks-database-of-public-information/>
- [2] Radio Free Asia, *Hun Sen's government orders RFA, other news outlet websites blocked*, (17 May 2023), available at: <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/media-sites-blocked-07172023171743.html>
- [3] VOA News, *Cambodian Government Blocks News Sites Before Unopposed Election*, (17 July 2023), available at:



<https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodian-government-blocks-news-sites-before-unopposed-election-/7185151.html>

[4] OHCHR, Joint Declaration on media declaration and democracy, (2 May 2023), available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/expression/activities/2023-JD-Media-Freedom-and-Democracy.pdf>

[5] CNN, *Cambodia’s ruling party claims landslide win in one-sided election*, (23 July 2023), available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/07/23/asia/cambodia-election-result-landslide-intl/index.html>;

The Guardian, *Cambodia strongman Hun Sen set to claim landslide election victory after banning opposition*, (23 July 2023), available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/23/cambodia-strongman-hun-sen-set-to-claim-landslide-election-victory-after-banning-opposition> [6] See Article 41, 1993 Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia (with latest amendment in 2008), available at:

https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Cambodia_2008.pdf?lang=en;

1995 Law on the Media, available at:

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=42145