

World Report 2025 - Cambodia

In 2023, Hun Sen, who had been prime minister since 1985, handed over the premiership to his son Hun Manet. Cambodia remains a single-party state with fixed and controlled elections, with the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) controlling all state institutions, including the judiciary. The Cambodian government continues to harass and prosecute critics of the government, [including those outside the country](#). It also tightly restricts the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Flawed Elections

In the run-up to the [February Senate elections](#), Cambodian authorities in January arrested four opposition officials and members. Opposition politicians [reported](#) intimidation and threats plus bribes and other unlawful inducements from government officials to withhold their support from opposition candidates. Following the elections, the Senate voted to approve [Hun Sen](#), who remains CPP head, to be Senate president.

In April, the authorities arrested six opposition activists on baseless charges related to the preparation of candidate lists for Cambodia's May local elections. Rong Chhun, an adviser to the National Power Party, is facing up to six years in prison if convicted on [politically motivated charges](#).

No Reform

Prime Minister Hun Manet had [promised to strengthen democracy and rule of law](#), yet his government has tightened restrictions on fundamental freedoms, intensified persecution of dissidents, and [increased criminal penalties](#) for peaceful dissent in 2024.

In May, Cambodia appeared before the Human Rights Council in Geneva for its fourth [Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#). Since its last review in 2019, the government has [failed](#) to make progress on the recommendations it accepted. Instead, Cambodian authorities continued to harass critics, including in the months leading up to the UN review.

In his [July end of mission statement](#), the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia noted that the government did not accept many of the most needed areas for reform recommended during the UPR, "especially to open up civic and political space and release political/human rights detainees."

Threats and Arrests Against Opposition

Authorities continued to target opposition politicians and dissidents both inside Cambodia [and in Thailand](#) for advocating for human rights and democracy. On several occasions, Hun Sen [issued public threats against the CPP's critics](#).

In January, the Phnom Penh Appeal Court [denied opposition leader Kem Sokha's](#) request to review the terms of his home detention at the start of his appeal against his treason conviction. Prior to his conviction in 2023, Sokha was held in pretrial detention for two years, which the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared was "[arbitrary](#)" and "politically motivated." A group of [UN human rights experts also stated](#) that they "have strong grounds to believe that the treason charge against Mr. Sokha is politically motivated." Sokha's appeal was still pending at time of writing.

Since May, at least 11 notable opposition party members from all three main opposition political parties have been charged, convicted, or had their convictions upheld on politically motivated grounds, including [Sun Chanthy](#), [Phou Sovantha](#), [Seam Pluk](#), [Teav Vannol](#), [Ouk Sovannhorn](#), [Tok Dara](#), [Boun Sarom Chaem Savoeun](#), [Thach Setha](#), [Mer Seng Hor](#), and [Rong Chhun](#).

In February, Thai police arrested three opposition activists in Bangkok—Chorn Sokoeurn, Chorn Chany, and Pheap Chan Sophea—ahead of Hun Manet’s visit to Thailand. Hun Manet [expressed his gratitude](#) to then Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin for his commitment not to allow people to perpetrate “harmful activities” against neighboring countries.

The same month, Thai authorities detained three former Candlelight party members—Kung Raiya, Phorn Phanna, and Loem Sokha—who had fled to Thailand for fear of political persecution. The Cambodian government has repeatedly attempted to [silence and intimidate exiled critics and dissidents in countries such as Thailand and Japan](#).

Harassment and Targeting of Trade Union Leaders and Labor Activists

[Cambodian](#) government-aligned unions began harassing and threatening legal action against the labor rights organization Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights ([CENTRAL](#)) and its leadership following the group’s [report on freedom of association violations](#) in Cambodia. In September, 18 apparel, footwear, and travel brands sourcing from Cambodia issued a [statement](#) urging the Cambodian government in “the strongest possible terms” to immediately cancel the audit of CENTRAL led by the Ministry of Interior.

[Chhim Sithar](#), president of the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees of NagaWorld, was released from prison in September after completing her full two-year sentence on charges of incitement. The [politically motivated charges](#) arose directly from Sithar and her union’s work defending workers’ rights.

Restrictions on Freedom of Expression and Media

The authorities [arbitrarily arrested](#) at least 94 people since late July for publicly criticizing the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle Area (CLV), a development plan by the three countries established in 2004 to facilitate cooperation on trade and migration. At least 59 of those arrested remain unlawfully detained and wrongfully charged for peacefully expressing their views.

In September, UN experts [called](#) for the suspension of Cambodia’s newly issued Charter for Professional Journalism and raised concerns about the scope of its application, stating that the charter fails to provide remedies for when media makes factual errors. The charter also includes vague clauses that can be utilized to further unjustly stifle freedom of expression and critical journalism by media in the country.

In September, Cambodian authorities [arrested and charged](#) Mech Dara, an [award-winning](#) journalist, in an apparent reprisal for his investigative reporting on government officials’ involvement in human trafficking and cybercrimes. He was later released on bail following international outrage regarding his case, but only after making an apparently [forced confession](#) admitting to his alleged crimes.

Indigenous Rights and Environmental Defenders

Indigenous communities in Cambodia struggle to be recognized and gain communal land titles due to an onerous and complex process under Cambodian law.

The Cambodian government and [Wildlife Alliance](#), who have been jointly carrying out a major carbon-offsetting project in Cambodia, did not adequately consult with Indigenous communities resulting in their harassment, arrest, and jail time for foraging or farming in “protected” areas. To date, no binding benefit-sharing agreement has been signed with communities.

Predatory lending practices within Cambodia’s microfinance sector have also harmed Indigenous peoples, by targeting their land for profit. The International Finance Corporation’s (IFC) Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman office found in its appraisal of microfinance lenders in Cambodia that there were “[preliminary indications of harm](#)” to borrowers and violations of IFC performance standards, including their impacts on Indigenous communities, such as reduced consumption of food, forced land sales, child labor, and debt-related suicides.

In July, the Phnom Penh Capital Court convicted [10 activists](#) from Mother Nature, [an award-winning](#), youth-led Cambodian environmental group. The activists face between six to eight years in prison for their peaceful efforts to protect Cambodia’s environment. In June, a court [upheld](#) the conviction of an environmental activist and human rights defender for defamation, insult, and incitement to commit a felony.

Online Scam Centers

According to the UN human rights office, online scam centers that enslave at least [100,000 people](#) in Cambodia continue to operate with impunity, despite [government claims](#) that officials have raided suspected locations. In September, the US government announced [sanctions](#) on Cambodian tycoon Ly Yong Phat, his conglomerate L.Y.P. Group Co., O-Smach Resort, and three hotels owned or controlled by Ly for their role in serious human rights abuses related to forced labor and scam operations.