

10 November 2017

Cambodia: Moeun Tola summoned and questioned over false embezzlement accusations

On 7 November 2017, labour rights defender **Moeun Tola** was questioned at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court in relation to accusations that he misappropriated funds meant for the funeral of Dr. Kem Ley, a political analyst murdered on 10 July 2016. In September 2017, Pich Sros, the leader of the Cambodian Youth Party, a party popularly considered as supportive of the current administration, filed a complaint against him and two other civil society members for alleged embezzlement.

[Moeun Tola](#) is a human rights defender and the Executive Director of the **Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)**, an NGO which supports Cambodian labourers by providing them with legal aid, and other appropriate means, to demand transparent and accountable governance on labour and human rights issues.

On 7 November 2017, at 9am, Moeun Tola appeared at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court where he was questioned by the Prosecutor for two and a half hours. Civil society representatives, union leaders and media representatives gathered in front of the court to express their support and solidarity during his interrogation. The human rights defender was questioned in relation to his role as a member of the funeral committee of Dr. Kem Ley, who was a close friend of his.

On 22 September 2017, Phnom Penh Deputy Prosecutor Koch Kim Long signed a summons for Moeun Tola along with Pa Nguon Teang, the Head of the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) and activist monk But Buntenh, both of whom also took part in the fundraising campaign for Dr. Kem Ley's funeral. The summons resulted from a criminal complaint filed on 8 September 2017 by the President of the Cambodian Youth Party, Sros Pich, against the three individuals, whom he accused of embezzling donations for Dr. Kem Ley's funeral arrangements. The summons cites the alleged crime of "Breach of Trust", which carries a prison sentence of between 6 months and 3 years, and a fine of 1 million to 6 million Riel (€215 to €1,290), according to Article 392 of the Cambodian Criminal Code.

In the run up to the 2018 national elections, the situation has worsened for human rights defenders in Cambodia, along with civil society members, independent media and political opponents. Crackdowns on the rights to freedom of expression and information have intensified, and many independent media outlets have been forced to close or have been taken off air. On [15 September 2017](#), the Ministry of Interior announced that environmental group **Mother Nature Cambodia** was stricken from the official registry of NGOs. Two of its members were arrested and are still detained as of 9 November 2017.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the legal proceeding initiated against human rights defender Moeun Tola, which it believes is solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate work for human rights in Cambodia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Cambodia to:

1. Immediately halt the judicial procedure initiated against human rights defender Moeun Tola, as it is believed that it is solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Take measures to ensure that government officials or other public figures refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights defenders;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Cambodia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.