

# Urgent Appeal to Free the Five Imprisoned Mother Nature Cambodia Activists



**H.E. Hun Manet**

Prime Minister

Kingdom of Cambodia

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

4 June 2026

## **Urgent Appeal to Free the Five Imprisoned Mother Nature Cambodia Activists**

Dear Prime Minister Hun Manet,

We are deeply concerned about the five young human rights defenders of Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC) – Long Kunthea, Yim Leanghy, Thun Ratha, Phuon Keoraksmey, and Ly Chandaravuth (MNC5) – convicted in July 2024, and now serving six to eight years in prison. They promptly appealed their sentences. However, the appeals court hearing has been significantly delayed.

The MNC5 are incarcerated in prisons in overcrowded and harsh living conditions, separated from each other and spread out all across Cambodia, hundreds of kilometers away from their families and legal counsel. The 74 NGOs who have signed this letter sincerely request you take immediate action to ensure the unjust convictions of these five activists are reversed either prior to or at their upcoming appeals court hearing in Phnom Penh, and that their freedom is restored. Unfortunately, we recently learned the appeals court inexplicably postponed the appeals court date set for June 2, 2026, and has not yet set a new date for the hearing.

Since 2012, the award-winning MNC group has led peaceful environmental conservation campaigns reaching millions, creatively using social media to effectively raise public awareness about issues threatening Cambodia's fragile environment. Their focus includes raising awareness and calling for peaceful action about issues such as deforestation, sand dredging in rivers and coastal marine areas, water and soil pollution, hydropower dam construction and destruction of urban wetlands. Many of these issues involve the importance of good governance since they have been found to be linked to corruption and revenue losses to the state.

The five activists have peacefully advocated for environmental protection in Cambodia by expressing their views and exercising their rights to peaceful public assembly in line

with UN human rights conventions ratified by Cambodia. The MNC5 have consistently worked with local communities affected by harmful environmental practices in both urban and rural regions, such as in Phnom Penh and on the Koh Kong Krao island, helping ensure that impacted communities are given the opportunity to have their voices heard in discussions on government- and private sector-led developments. We believe that the Royal Cambodian Government could benefit from communicating and collaborating with NGO leaders such as the five MNC activists, rather than punishing them.

As you know, government officials prosecuted the MNC5 based on charges of “plotting” against the government under article 453 of the criminal code. Article 453 defines plotting as consisting of “a resolution agreed upon by two or more persons to commit an attack where the resolution was put into effect by one or more material actions.” In the statutory definition used in mainstream Khmer–English compilations of the criminal code, an “attack” is explicitly tied to “acts of violence” that are liable to endanger state institutions or violate the integrity of national territory. However, the five have maintained their actions were all strictly non-violent, and we see no indication the MNC5 have ever advocated use of violence. At their first instance trial, which several international, diplomatic observers attended, prosecutors failed to provide any credible evidence that the five had undertaken any material action involving violence or its advocacy, which is necessary for a conviction of “plotting” according to law. Yet the court inexplicably maintained that the “facts” of the case were consistent with written reports provided by the authorities, and convicted the MNC5 nonetheless. We believe this is a clear failure of justice which should be reversed as soon as possible by the appeals court.

In the case of Yim Leanghy, prosecutors based the charge of insulting the King (criminal code article 437) on unlawful surveillance and a secretly taken video recording of a private Zoom call. Under Cambodian criminal procedure, such a video is considered illegal evidence, and therefore should not have been admissible in court. Moreover, we understand that during that conversation, Yim Leanghy actually opposed involving the King (who he referred to in the discussion as Ong Preah Mahakasat, an honorific title) in any type of campaign or action, raising questions about why he was convicted of insulting the King. We would also like to emphasize that throughout the trial hearings, the prosecution struggled to prove their case, relying on circumstantial evidence and inferences rather than hard facts.

Lawyers for the MNC5 filed an appeal of the convictions on July 22, 2024. The significant delay of the MNC5’s appeals court hearing, now postponed to an uncertain future date, raises serious concerns about their right to a fair and speedy trial as provided for in article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Cambodia. We note that no explanations have been provided by judicial officials about the reason for the continued delay in scheduling the appeals court trial.

Since their imprisonment, the MNC5 were denied bail or early release four times. The most recent denial was in March 2026 by the Supreme Court. The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) has assessed that the significant delay of the defendants’ appeal trial combined with the repeated denials of bail resulted not only in the violation of their right to be tried without undue delay and liberty but also undermined their right to the presumption of innocence.

As Cambodia is preparing to host the 20th Francophonie Summit in Phnom Penh in mid-November 2026, the international spotlight will naturally be focused on the country's actions, international commitments and the upholding of those obligations. In this context, we call on you to recognize that civil and political rights, environmental protection, and climate action are central to the global challenges addressed at the summit.

**In this spirit, we urge you to take proactive steps leading to the release of these five young environmental leaders ahead of the Francophonie Summit, if not earlier.**

We thank you for your consideration of our views and look forward to hearing from you. To convey your response, please contact Ines Gavrilut at email: [ines.gavrilut@bmf.ch](mailto:ines.gavrilut@bmf.ch)

Sincerely,

01. Accountability Counsel
02. African Coalition for Corporate Accountability (ACCA)
03. Agent Green
04. Amnesty International
05. Asia Democracy Network (ADN)
06. Asia Human Rights and Labour Advocates (AHRLA)
07. Asia Indigenous Peoples Network on Extractive Industries and Energy (AIPNEE)
08. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
09. Association of Women for Awareness & Motivation (AWAM), Pakistan
10. Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (Masum), India
11. Biofuelwatch
12. Bruno Manser Fonds, Switzerland
13. Bytes For All, Pakistan
14. C4 – The Center to Combat Corruption and Cronyism, Malaysia
15. Cambodia Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
16. Cambodia Human Rights Task Force (CHRTF)
17. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
18. Centre for Environmental Law & Community Rights (CELCOR), Papua New Guinea
19. Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia
20. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
21. Climate Rights International (CRI)
22. Comité Schone Lucht, Netherlands
23. Community Resource Center (CRC), Thailand
24. Defence of Human Rights, Pakistan
25. Earth Thrive
26. Earthrights International
27. Ei Polteta Tulevaisuutta, Finland
28. Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA)
29. Equitable Cambodia
30. Fortify Rights
31. Forum Ökologie & Papier
32. Friends of the Earth – Asia Pacific

33. Friends of the Earth – England, Wales and Northern Ireland
34. Friends of the Earth – Japan
35. Friends of the Earth – South Africa
36. Global Forest Coalition (GFC)
37. GRAIN
38. Groundwork
39. Human Rights Watch
40. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders / World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)
41. International Legal Initiative Public Foundation (ILI), Kazakhstan
42. International Rivers
43. Japan Innocence & Death Penalty Information Center
44. Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (JATAN)
45. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law
46. Kenya Human Rights Commission
47. Keruan, Sarawak, Malaysia
48. Korean House for International Solidarity
49. Leefmilieu
50. Legal Awareness Watch Pakistan (LAW)
51. LICADHO
52. MADPET - Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture
53. Manushya Foundation
54. Mining Watch Canada
55. People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF), Thailand
56. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)
57. Platforma Pentru Adaptare Climatica
58. Programme Against Custodial Torture & Impunity, India
59. Persatuan Amal Progresif
60. Public Association Dignity, Kazakhstan
61. Pusat Komnas, Malaysia
62. Redemption Pakistan
63. Rettet den Regenwald (Rainforest Rescue), Germany
64. Right Livelihood
65. RimbaWatch, Malaysia
66. Save Cambodia, USA
67. SAVE Rivers
68. Snow Alliance
69. TAPOL, Indonesia
70. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR)
71. The Borneo Project
72. Think Centre, Singapore
73. Verde Curat, Romania
74. World Rainforest Movement