

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 15, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

We write to you to voice our concern about the arrest and continued detention of Kem Sokha, the leader of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and the deteriorating political situation in Cambodia, and to underscore the need for a comprehensive U.S. strategy to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in that country. The weakening of democratic institutions in advance of the July 2018 elections appears to be a concerted attempt to help Prime Minister Hun Sen extend his 32-year rule.

The government of Cambodia has taken a series of steps to weaken political opposition and undermine democratic institutions, human rights, and freedom of expression. The Cambodian Prime Minister on November 4, 2017, urged opposition lawmakers to defect and join the Cambodia People's Party (CPP) or face a five-year ban from politics.¹ On October 6, the Cambodian government filed a legal case to dissolve the main opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).² On September 3, the Cambodia opposition party's leader was arrested and charged with treason.³ On August 23, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation ordered the National Democratic Institute to halt operations and instructed its foreign staff to leave the country.⁴ The Cambodian government alleged in August that the independent newspaper, *The Cambodia Daily*, had failed to pay \$6.3 million in back taxes, a tax bill that forced the newspaper to close.⁵ In that same month, the Ministry of Information targeted over a dozen independent Cambodian radio stations that sell airtime to international broadcasters, including *Radio Free Asia (RFA)* and *Voice of America (VOA)*.⁶

We commend the State Department for its September 3 statement expressing grave concern over the Cambodian government's arrest of opposition CNRP leader Kem Sokha and restrictions on media and civil society.⁷ In addition, we strongly call on Prime Minister Hun Sen's government

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics/cambodian-pm-tells-opposition-to-defect-or-face-being-banned-from-politics-idUSKBN1D40BK>.

² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics/cambodian-government-files-lawsuit-to-dissolve-main-opposition-party-idUSKBN1CB0U1>.

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/05/world/asia/cambodia-kem-sokha-treason.html>.

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics-usa/cambodia-orders-u-s-funded-group-to-leave-in-new-anti-american-move-idUSKCN1B30V0>.

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/09/03/548296895/cambodia-daily-newspaper-to-close-after-24-years>.

⁶ <https://rsf.org/en/news/cambodian-government-cracks-down-independent-media-outlets>.

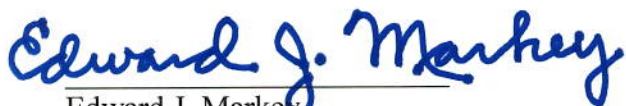
⁷ <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/10/274840.htm>.

to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Sokha, who remains in detention and is reportedly compelled to appear at a November 16, 2017, hearing before the Cambodian Supreme Court in which the dissolution of his opposition party may be considered.⁸

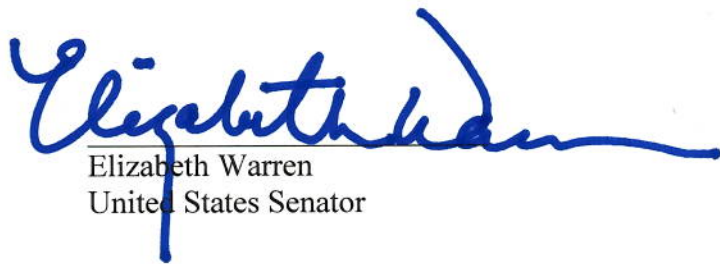
While the State Department's expressions of concern are welcome, we must do more to demonstrate to the government of Cambodia that its actions are corrosive to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Therefore, we request an update on the State Department's efforts to persuade Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling party to cease harassment and intimidation of Cambodia's main opposition party, to secure the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Kem Sokha, and to respect the freedom of the press and the rights of all Cambodians to freely and peacefully assemble, protest, and criticize the government.

Thank you for your attention and we look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress

⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/cambodia-court-denies-bail-for-jailed-opposition-leader/2017/10/31/05b366f4-be12-11e7-9294-705f80164f6e_story.html?utm_term=.67ac217cef8f.