

MEDIA RELEASE

July 17, 2023

**AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONER IN CAMBODIA THEORY SENG
LAUNCHES TEN-DAY HUNGER STRIKE
AFTER UNITED NATIONS CALLS FOR HER IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Washington, D.C. – Theory Seng announced from Preah Vihear Prison that she has started a ten-day hunger strike to demand her release and that of other political prisoners, as well as draw further international attention to the deteriorating human rights and democracy situation under the Hun Sen regime. Today marks five days since the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention made public its judgment that Theory’s detention was arbitrary, politically motivated, and in violation of international law. Nevertheless, she and many others remain detained in inhuman conditions.

Theory is a U.S.-Cambodia dual citizen and human rights icon in Cambodia. After her parents were [murdered by the Khmer Rouge](#), she escaped and came to the U.S. as a child. She bravely returned to Cambodia after graduating from Georgetown University and Michigan Law School and founded two organizations aimed at civic engagement and [justice for survivors of genocide](#). She became a high-profile critic of Hun Sen, the country’s strongman dictator, and has been targeted for her advocacy. In a [sham mass trial](#) alongside 60 political opposition leaders, she was [detained](#) and [convicted](#) on June 14, 2022 for “conspiracy to commit treason” and “incitement to create social disorder” – simply for posting several Facebook posts criticizing the regime. Not only are these charges blatantly fabricated, but she also faced [a litany of due process violations](#). The American Bar Association and Clooney Foundation for Justice [rated her trial](#) with a grade of “F.”

Theory calls on the United States and the broader international community to speak out against the sheer deterioration of democracy ahead of the July 23, 2023 elections in Cambodia, which have already been widely condemned for excluding the main opposition Candlelight Party. She similarly calls on the Biden Administration to take further steps to ensure the release of all political prisoners detained in Cambodia. While [President Biden](#), [Secretary Blinken](#), and [other U.S. officials](#), have called for Theory’s release, the State Department has refused to designate her as “wrongfully or unlawfully” detained under the Levinson Act. This is critical step toward securing her release, as it would result in her case being transferred to the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens.

Commenting on his sister’s decision to begin a hunger strike, Mardi Seng stated the following: “My family is of course gravely concerned for Theory’s health and distraught that she has resorted to such desperate measures. At the same time, we also understand her frustration and her desire to speak out against these injustices. My family calls on President Biden

and Secretary Blinken to immediately designate Theory as wrongfully or unlawfully detained under the Levinson Act. Theory deserves the support of the United States and the world. Therefore, every tool should be employed to ensure her swift and unconditional release.”

Jared Genser, Theory’s international pro bono counsel added “I am, of course, deeply concerned for her health and welfare. That said, Theory’s hunger strike serves as a powerful and peaceful act of resistance to highlight both the severe oppression of the political opposition in Cambodia and that the forthcoming elections will be neither free nor fair.”

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