

July 12, 2023

MEDIA RELEASE

**UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP ON ARBITRARY
DETENTION DEMANDS IMMEDIATE AND UNCONDITIONAL
RELEASE OF U.S./CAMBODIA DUAL NATIONAL AND HUMAN
RIGHTS ACTIVIST THEARY SENG**



WASHINGTON, D.C. and GENEVA, SWITZERLAND – Today, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (“Working Group”) published its [judgment](#) on its website that U.S./Cambodia dual national and human rights activist [Theory Seng](#) has been arbitrarily detained in violation of international law and demanded her immediate and unconditional release. Theory’s case was submitted to the Working Group by Perseus Strategies, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, and Freedom House, all of which represent her *pro bono*. Theory was imprisoned and sentenced to [six years in prison](#) on June 14, 2022, after being convicted of “conspiracy to commit treason” and “incitement to create gross chaos impacting public security” [alongside dozens](#) of activists and political opposition leaders. Her actual crime – making two posts on Facebook critical of Hun Sen, Cambodia’s strongman dictator. She has been imprisoned ever since in a remote region of Cambodia. This judgment comes just before Cambodia’s national election being held on July 23rd, which has already been widely [condemned](#) by the international community for excluding the main opposition Candlelight Party.

Theory is a [lifelong](#) human rights activist. Her parents were [murdered](#) by the Khmer Rouge, and she was imprisoned in Cambodia as a young child. As a Cambodian Genocide survivor and refugee, she escaped and was brought to the U.S., where she grew up in Michigan and later obtained her B.A. at Georgetown University and her J.D. at the University of Michigan Law School. She [returned](#) to Cambodia in 2004 to found two NGOs aimed at human rights and civic engagement.

Her [sham mass trial](#) received [an “F” grade](#) from the American Bar Association’s Center for Human Rights and the Clooney Foundation for Justice’s TrialWatch Initiative. You can see a two-minute video summarizing their findings [here](#). [President Biden](#) and [Secretary Blinken](#) each directly raised Theory’s case with Hun Sen, urging her release. And many other prominent U.S. officials, such as Under Secretary of State [Uzra Zeya](#), USAID Administrator [Samantha Power](#), [Ambassador W. Patrick Murphy](#), and former State Department Spokesman [Ned Price](#) have all urged Theory's urged release from unjust imprisonment. Full details of Theory’s arrest, trial, and detention are [available here](#).

The Working Group found Theory’s detention arbitrary for several reasons, highlighting both the regime's "political motivation" and that mass trials like Theory’s “are incompatible with the interests of justice.” The Working Group also noted that Theory's detention “is situated within a wider crackdown on freedom of expression,”

and that the due process violations she faced were “designed to intimidate her into silence.”

“After receiving her education in the United States, Theory returned to Cambodia, where for decades she has courageously been an outspoken advocate for human rights and democracy, despite the great risk she faced for doing so," said Jared Genser, Theory's international counsel He further explained: "She is a Cambodian and American hero whose detention is a travesty of justice, and she deserves the world’s support."

Kerry Kennedy, international counsel, and President of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights asserted: “Imbued with a moral compass that never waivers, Theory Seng is a hero of human rights, democratic reforms, and justice. Over a decade ago, Theory led the RFK Human Rights education program in schools across Cambodia, training the next generation of defenders. Her voice, fearless and mighty, was then and is today vital to freedom. In concert with the recommendations of the Working Group, Theory Seng must be immediately released."

“Theory Seng’s case is emblematic of the many people jailed in Cambodia for exposing human rights abuses, advocating for free expression, and calling for free and fair elections,” said Margaux Ewen, director of Freedom House’s political prisoner’s initiative. “The Working Group’s judgment comes at a critical time. As democracy and internet freedom are under threat globally and in Cambodia, we need the international community’s support of brave individuals like Theory Seng – and the rights for which they fight.”

* * *

For more information, please contact

Jared Genser

jgenser@perseus-strategies.com



Copyright © 2023 Perseus Strategies, All rights reserved.

This is a distribution list for the case of Theary Seng, a Cambodian-American human rights lawyer and democracy advocate sentenced to six years in prison in Cambodia on politically-motivated treason charges. Perseus Strategies represents Theary as her international pro bono legal counsel, working with RFK Human Rights and Freedom House.

Our mailing address is:

Perseus Strategies
1802 Vernon Street, NW #1046
Washington, DC 20009-1217

[Add us to your address book](#)

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#)


