

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0100/06

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to the Commission

Subject: Arrest and persecution of opposition members, journalists, trade unionists and refugees in Cambodia

In January 2006 Prime Minister Hun Sen's regime launched a new campaign of repression in Cambodia. The authorities arrested the founder of the Cambodian Human Rights Centre, Kem Sokha, and two other human rights activists, Yeng Virak and Pa Nguon, on defamation charges.

The 18-month prison sentence imposed for defamation in December 2005 on Sam Rainsy, a member of the Cambodian parliament and leader of the only opposition party, was passed 'in absentia' under procedures contrary to all the principles of the rule of law.

Mam Sonando, the owner and director of the only independent Cambodian radio station, Radio Behive 105, and Rong Chhun, leader of the teachers' union, were arrested in October 2005 – also for defamation – and are both awaiting trial.

The liberal parliamentary Cheam Channy has been in detention since 9 August, sentenced to seven years' imprisonment as part of Prime Minister Hun Sen's campaign to criminalise the opposition.

Since 4 August, no fewer than 74 Vietnamese asylum seekers belonging to the Kmer Khrom ethnic group have been entrusted by the local UNHCR office to the Cambodian authorities and risk being sent back to Vietnam, where they are likely to face further persecution.

The UN Special Representative, Yash Ghai, said, in a statement to the International Herald Tribune on 9 January 2006, that the situation had 'all the hallmarks of the beginning of a totalitarian regime'.

Western embassies in Cambodia, Human Rights Watch, the UNPO, Amnesty International and the Transnational Radical Party have – so far unsuccessfully – condemned this repression and other abuses such as the violence against Montagnard refugees and their forced repatriation to Vietnam, in a context of endemic corruption. Meanwhile, Hun Sen is clearly continuing to ignore his country's international undertakings with respect to democracy and human rights, while being heavily dependent on aid from European and democratic countries.

– Does the Commission not consider the above events to be a blatant violation of democratic principles and the basic human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with reference to Article 1 of the Association Agreement between the European Community and the Kingdom of Cambodia?

– Will the Commission state whether or not it has brought to the attention of the joint committee, provided for in Article 14 of the Cooperation Agreement, the above information, with a view to taking appropriate action to guarantee the right of defence and basic freedoms of opposition members, the press and other representatives of civil society in Cambodia?