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Asia - Cambodia

"Professionalism" questioned

Government tries to intimidate Radio Free Asia and Voice of America

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Reporters Without Borders and [Cambodian Center for Independent Media](#) (CCIM) accuse the Cambodian government of trying to intimidate independent reporters when it invited journalists from US-funded *Radio Free Asia* (RFA) and *Voice of America* (VOA) to a closed-door meeting with cabinet officials about their "professionalism."

The purpose of the meeting on 10 October was "to strengthen the quality of professionalism" of their reporting, government spokesman Phay Siphon said, but- among many discussed points- it focussed on two issues on which the government has been widely criticized, the [death of environmental activist](#) and fixer Chut Wutty and the long [jail term passed on radio journalist Mam Sonando](#).

"The professionalism of these journalists was criticized only because they covered the almost [unanimous criticism of Mam Sonando's sentence](#) and the outrage voiced by many civil society representatives about the decision to abandon the investigation into Chut Wutty's death," Reporters Without Borders and CCIM said.

"We condemn all the threats against RFA and VOA and attempts to meddle in their activities since the start of the year. We also reiterate our outrage about Mam Sonando's conviction and the decisions taken in the investigation into Chut Wutty's death, two cases that are likely to have a major impact on media freedom."

Reporters Without Borders and CCIM added: "We urge the government to radically change its attitude to the media, which has already impaired freedom of information in Cambodia."

The meeting with government officials to which RFA and VOA journalists were summoned was closed to the public. US embassy representatives were the only other people who attended.

VOA Khmer service chief Chris Dechard said after the meeting: "VOA Khmer will continue broadcasting and reporting in the same objective and professional manner we have done for more than five decades (...) It is those citizens who are our audience. They deserve quality news that they can trust."

The judge in charge of the investigation into Chut Wutty's murder announced on 4 October that the enquiries would not be pursued any further and the main suspect, Ran Boroeth, who was in the same forest as the victim on the day he was killed in April, would be released. A Phnom Penh court sentenced Mam Sonando, the 71-year-old owner of independent radio *Beehive*, to 20 years in prison on 1 October on charges of "insurrection" and "inciting the use of arms against the state" in connection with a supposed uprising in the southeastern province of Kratie in mid-May.

RFA and VOA have been the targets of various violations of freedom of information since the start of the year. In September 2011, VOA [was threatened with contempt of court proceedings](#) for allegedly revealing confidential information.

Cambodia is ranked 117th out of 179 countries in the [2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

