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Cambodian Teachers' Activist Attacked in Alleged Fake Traffic Accident

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Ouk Chhayavy, president of the Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA), after being seriously injured in a traffic accident she believes was an attack targeting her on August 10, 2020.

citizen journalist

Cambodian teachers' union leader Ouk Chhayavy was knocked off her motorbike outside the capital Phnom Penh Monday in what she says was an attack made to look like a traffic accident aimed at scaring her off her campaign to free jailed unionist Rong Chhun.

Ouk Chhayavy, president of the Cambodian Independence Teacher Association (CITA) was riding a motorbike in Kandal province with her husband when two men she did not recognize pulled up on a motorbike, grabbed the handlebars and pushed the couple to the ground, she told RFA.

Ouk Chhayavy had joined civil society leaders in protesting for the release of her CITA predecessor, Rong Chhun, who was arrested Aug. 1 on charges of "incitement to commit a felony or cause social unrest" for criticism of the government's handling of the country's border dispute with Vietnam.

"They pushed our bike to the ground, then they sped away. This is political intimidation because I wasn't wearing anything valuable on my body that would attract thieves," she said.

Ouk Chhayavy said she was treated at a health care clinic and was resting at a relative's home in Kandal after briefly being knocked unconscious and left bleeding from her hands, arms and face.

"I was severely hurt on my left palm and required stitches," Ouk Chhayavy told RFA's Khmer Service. "I also have swelling on my mouth and face, where I was hit hard by the handlebars."

Ouk Chhayavy has led several protests in front of the Phnom Penh courthouse calling for the arrest of Rong Chhun, Cambodian Confederation of Unions president. She has been followed by strangers wherever she goes since he was detained July 31 and formally arrested a day later.

"Despite all of this, I appeal to all Cambodians to stand up. Don't be afraid even if they want to kill me, I am still strong and demand the release of Mr. Rong Chhun and other democrats from prison," she said.

Ouk Chhayavy said she would not file a complaint because she does not trust the Cambodian justice system, but plans to notify the global teacher union federation Education International (EI), with which CITA is affiliated.

Am Sam Ath of local rights group LICADHO told RFA that his organization would investigate the alleged attack.

RFA was not able to reach Cambodian authorities for comment on the incident as of Monday evening.

Reported by RFA's Khmer Service. Translated by Sok Ry Sum. Written in English by Eugene Whong.

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