

= Mam Sonando =

Mam Sonando (Khmer : ម៉ាម សោន៉ាណូ ; born February 13 , 1942) is a Cambodian radio journalist with French dual citizenship . He is the owner and director of Phnom Penh 's Beehive Radio , which the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) described in 2012 as " one of Cambodia 's few independent news outlets " . He also acts as a political commentator for the station .

Sonando has been imprisoned three times on charges related to his reporting : a 2003 arrest for " inciting riots " , a 2005 arrest for defamation , and a 2012 arrest for insurrection . His twenty @-@ year prison sentence for the latter was protested by human rights groups , and US President Barack Obama expressed concerns about the case in a meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen. The sentence was overturned by an appeals court in March 2013 , and Sonando was instead given a five @-@ year suspended sentence on charges of causing civil unrest .

= = Biography = =

Mam Sonando was born on February 13 , 1942 in a small district called Kampong Siem in Kampong Cham Province , Cambodia . His father , Mam Soth , was a lawyer . His mother Eam Ouch was born in Battambang province . Sonando traveled to Paris in 1964 for school . He attended the Vaugirard State Technical College of Photography and Cinematography , in Paris , France , from 1969 to 1970 . In 1973 , he received a bachelor 's degree with major in sociology and cinematography and audio visuals , at the Paris XV University .

He left Cambodia again in 1975 to avoid the rule of the Khmer Rouge , remaining in France until 1993 . That year , he returned to Cambodia and acquired a broadcasting license for a new station which he named Beehive Radio . He used the station to advertise a new political party , the Beehive Democratic Society Party , and stood in the 1998 parliamentary election . According to the Asia Times , his campaign only won him " a reputation as an eccentric , spouting Buddhist philosophy , pleas for democracy and a personal campaign for attention . " After failing to be elected , Sonando dissolved his party , but continued broadcasting on Beehive Radio as an independent journalist .

Sonando is the owner and director of Beehive Radio . In 2012 , Human Rights Watch described Beehive Radio as " a key platform for promotion of human rights and democracy in Cambodia " . The station is one of the few to address controversial topics , including " Cambodian civil society , the fight against HIV / AIDS , maternal mortality and human trafficking , campaigns for women 's rights and gender equality , political and economic transparency , equitable and sustainable development , labor rights , environmental protection , the rule of law , and electoral education and election monitoring . " It also carries programming by Radio Free Asia , Voice of America , the Cambodian Center for Human Rights , and Radio France Internationale .

The station is funded by a combination of advertising and private donations . Some companies have declined to advertise with Beehive Radio due to its occasionally controversial reporting and political stances . Sonando also refuses to run advertisements for " vice " products , including cigarettes .

= = 2003 arrest = =

In January 2003 , riots broke out in Phnom Penh after a Cambodian newspaper incorrectly reported that a Thai actress had stated Angkor Wat properly belonged to Thailand . On 29 January , the Thai embassy was burned , and hundreds of Thai immigrants fled the country to avoid the violence . During the riots , a caller to Beehive Radio claimed incorrectly that Cambodian embassy officials were killed in Bangkok . On 31 January , Sonando was arrested and accused of " relaying false information " , " inciting discrimination " , and " inciting crime " . He stated to reporters , " They blame me for broadcasting an opinion of a listener which turned out to be untrue . But if I have to go to jail to allow people to express their opinion I am happy . "

Sonando was formally charged in court on 1 February ; ten days later , he was released on bail . The charges never came to trial .

= = 2005 arrest = =

Sonando was arrested again on 11 October 2005 after reporting on Prime Minister Hun Sen 's treaty with Vietnam settling the two nations ' border dispute ; the report included a discussion with a French @-@ based expert who criticized Hun Sen 's concessions . Sonando was charged with " criminal defamation " , " disseminating false information " , and " incitement " . On 3 November , he was denied bail .

Sonando 's arrest was criticized by the United Nations and the European Union . A coalition of 70 Cambodian civil society organizations also pushed for his release . CPJ condemned the arrest as part of a " broad crackdown on freedom of expression " , and Amnesty International named him a prisoner of conscience .

In late January 2006 , Sonando was granted bail ahead of a visit by US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill . Hun Sen described the release as a " gift " to the visitor . The charges against Sonando were dropped before the end of the month .

= = 2012 arrest = =

In mid @-@ 2012 , Beehive Radio reported on an International Court of Justice complaint against Prime Minister Hun Sen blaming him for the 2010 Phnom Penh stampede , in which 347 people were killed . The report sparked a new series of disputes between Sonando and Hun Sen. On 26 June 2012 , Hun Sen called for Sonando 's arrest while Sonando was out of the country , accusing him of heading a separatist plot in Kratié Province to break it away from the rest of the nation . From 15 to 17 May , the province had been the site of a protest against evictions for a new rubber plant that residents accused of " land @-@ grabbing " . On the final day of the protests , soldiers opened fire on a crowd of families , killing a 14 @-@ year @-@ old girl . Though Sonando returned during the 2012 ASEAN meeting , he was not arrested until 15 July , a few days after its end .

Hun Sen accused Sonando of attempting to create a " state within a state " , and Sonando was formally charged with " insurrection " and " inciting people to take up weapons against state " . The charges carried a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison . Secessionist charges were also brought against several community activists from the province .

According to Ou Virak of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights , Sonando was then imprisoned in a cell shared with 17 other people , leaving him " half a square meter [5 square feet] to sleep in " . On 22 July , he was moved to a prison hospital on account of illness .

Sonando 's arrest quickly generated domestic and international criticism . A coalition of 22 Cambodian rights groups , known as the Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee , called on the government to free Sonando " to save the country 's reputation " . Members of Beehive Radio and the Association of Democrats protested in front of Phnom Penh 's royal palace on 23 July .

CPJ called for Sonando 's immediate release , stating that Hun Sen had " a well @-@ worn history of leveling unsubstantiated anti @-@ state charges against journalists to stifle criticism of the administration . " Human Rights Watch said that " Sonando 's arrest on the heels of [US Secretary of State Hillary] Clinton 's visit is a brazen signal that Hun Sen thinks that the US wants his cooperation on other matters so much that he isn 't afraid to lower the boom on his critics " . Amnesty International again named Sonando a prisoner of conscience , " held for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression " . The International Federation for Human Rights and the World Organisation Against Torture issued a joint statement noting that they were " gravely concerned " about the charges and calling for Sonando 's immediate release . Reporters Without Borders described the arrest as " like a parting slap to all those who attended last week 's ASEAN summit in Phnom Penh . As soon the diplomats leave , the authorities arrest dissidents . " The Ireland @-@ based NGO Front Line Defenders included him on the short list for its 2013 Human Rights Defender at Risk award .

On 1 October 2012 , Sonando was found guilty by a Phnom Penh court . He was sentenced to twenty years ' imprisonment and fined 10 million riel (US \$ 2 @,@ 500) . In November , US

President Barack Obama raised concerns about the case during a meeting with Hun Sen. French Prime Minister Jean @-@ Marc Ayrault also called for Sonando to be released .

An appeals court overturned Sonando 's conviction on anti @-@ state charges on 14 March 2013 , finding that there had been no evidence to convict him . The court instead gave Sonando a five @-@ year suspended sentence on charges that he had been involved in the Kratié unrest . A crowd of hundreds of Sonando supporters gathered outside the courthouse to hear the verdict . Amnesty International called the ruling " a positive step for freedom of expression in the country " , but added that " Mam Sonando should never have been imprisoned in the first place , and the convictions that stand appear baseless . " Sonando was released from prison on 15 March , the day after the ruling . Following his release , Sonando stated his intention to clear his name of the remaining charges .

= = 2014 protest = =

In January 2014 , Mam Sonando organized a mass demonstration , which demanded the government to expand his radio reach and open a TV station . The Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith denied the permission for the expansion but Mam Sonando told reporters the denial is unconstitutional . Protesters clashed with police on January 28 , injuring at least 9 of the demonstrators . In response to the violence , Human Rights Watch calls for the United Nations to pressure the Cambodian government . Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House have also condemned the violence .

= = Personal life = =

Sonando is married to Den Phanara . He is a devout Buddhist who constructed a Buddhist temple beside his radio station , and is an avid fan of jazz .