



# Mitch McConnell

## Senate Majority Whip

### U.S. Senator for Kentucky

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#### **STATEMENT OF SENATOR MITCH McCONNELL ON CAMBODIA**

WASHINGTON, U.S. – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Mitch McConnell released the following statement today on Cambodia:

“Mr. President, I commend the Majority Leader for offering an important resolution on Cambodia yesterday that expressed concern with the systematic campaign by Prime Minister Hun Sen and the government of Cambodia to undermine democracy and the rule of law in that country.

“Scholars can argue when this campaign was initiated – after U.N.-sponsored elections in 1993 or before the coup d’etat in 1997 – but no one disputes that it culminated early this year in the arrest of human rights leader Kem Sokha and other reformers in Phnom Penh on charges of defaming the Prime Minister.

“As the resolution points out, no sector in Cambodia has been spared in this campaign.

“Opposition leader Sam Rainsy was stripped of his parliamentary immunity last year and sentenced to 18 months in absentia for defaming the Prime Minister.

“Radio journalist Mom Sonando was arrested for criminal defamation.

“Even Rong Chhum, President of the Cambodian Independent Teachers Association, was similarly charged.

“To be sure, other champions of freedom in Cambodia have suffered worse fates. Former parliamentarian Om Radsady and labor leader Chea Vichea were brutally murdered by unknown assailants. Justice remains similarly elusive for a grenade attack against a conference hosted by the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party in 1995, and a more brutal attack against a peaceful rally organized by the Khmer Nation Party – headed by Sam Rainsy – in 1997.

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“The immediate and strong condemnation of the arrest of Sokha and his colleagues by international donors and multilateral organizations, including the United Nations and the World Bank, is certainly welcomed. U.S. Ambassador Joe Mussomeli and Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Storella deserve praise for standing by Sokha throughout the crisis. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill’s trip to the region succeeded in freeing Sokha from prison, and I know he cringes at Hun Sen’s characterization of Sokha’s release as a “gift”. This may have been simply a poor choice of words, but it serves to affirm the world’s perception of Hun Sen as a Southeast Asian dictator.

“The news that Hun Sen will drop charges against Sokha and other civil society reformers is not a cause for celebration. History shows that Hun Sen is a habitual offender, and we can expect continued harassment and intimidation against those championing freedom and the rule of law.

“The international community must now turn its attention to the plight of Sam Rainsy, Cheam Channy and other political prisoners. It is time for His Majesty King Sihamoni to derail Hun Sen’s campaign by immediately pardoning Rainsy, Channy and all other political prisoners. Only then will democracy have a chance to get back on track in Cambodia.

“The challenge for Cambodia’s many donors is straightforward: hold Hun Sen and his government accountable for their actions. While this may require some soul searching by U.S. allies (particularly France, Germany, and Japan) the status quo in Cambodia serves only the interests of Hun Sen and the ruling Cambodian People’s Party. With a donor’s conference approaching in March 2006, the international community must demand a return on the significant assistance provided to Cambodia.

“Mr. President, as over \$2 billion has been invested in the democratic development of that country since the 1991 Paris Peace Accords, it is not too much for the international community to demand that the Prime Minister and his government conduct themselves in a manner that respects the constitutional rights and dignity of the people of the Cambodia.”