

公益社団法人 日本外国特派員協会

## **The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan**

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### ***FCCJ STATEMENT ON THE DETENTION OF MECH DARA***

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The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan is deeply concerned about the arrest, and subsequent charging and detention of Mech Dara, an award-winning Cambodian journalist.

Dara is one of Cambodia's best known investigative journalists, and a recipient of the U.S. State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report Hero Award for his work exposing "pig butchering" scam centres operating in Cambodia. He received the award directly from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Dara's arrest comes after nearly all independent media outlets in Cambodia have been closed or silenced amid the steady weaponization of laws and regulations aimed at curbing free speech.

He was charged on Tuesday with incitement under Article 494 and 495 of the country's Criminal Code for social media posts he made on Sept. 20, 23, 26, 28 and 29. The charges carry a maximum prison sentence of 2 years and are a clear attempt to silence a brave journalist whose investigative journalism has routinely called for accountability in cases of human rights violations. Dara is being held at the Kandal Provincial Prison.

Dara was arrested at a checkpoint as he was driving with relatives on a highway in southwestern Cambodia on Sept. 30. This followed Facebook posts he made about environmental damage at a rock quarry that officials denounced on Monday as causing "social disorder."

The FCCJ joins with organisations including the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand in calling on Cambodian authorities to assure the international community of his safety. It also calls on embassies in Phnom Penh, concerned governments and international organizations to bring pressure to bear on the Cambodian government to ensure transparency and due process.

The Freedom of the Press Committee