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December 3, 2018

3-34-15 Tarumi town, Suita city, Osaka prefecture

Re: Cambodia

Dear Mr. Keisuke Honda,

We write to you about your appointment as coach of the Cambodian national football team. We appreciate your willingness to volunteer your time to help Cambodia, a developing country ravished by war, dictatorship and poverty. As in many parts of the world, football is very popular in Cambodia. Perhaps one day Cambodia will succeed in building a national team that can compete on the world stage.

Human Rights Watch is an independent international organization that monitors human rights in more than 90 countries around the world, including Japan and Cambodia. We have worked on human rights in Cambodia for several decades, on issues ranging from military abuses, government corruption, labor rights, and religious freedom.

I lived in Cambodia from 1993-98 and helped start the first organized basketball league in the country since the end of the Khmer Rouge era. This was just a local league in Phnom Penh, but we developed young players, bought uniforms and created a formal structure to foster interest and the development of the game. We even organized a game against a team supported by the then First Prime Minister, who attended along with other government ministers.

As you can see, I'm a big supporter of sport in Cambodia. At the same time, it is important to recognize that under Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has been in power for 33 years, the country has fallen back into dictatorship. In July 2018, the ruling Cambodian People's Party held sham elections and took all 125 parliamentary seats after jailing the opposition party leader and banning his party. Journalists, opposition party

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members, and activists are routinely subjected to threats and harassment, including arbitrary prosecution and imprisonment.

With this in mind, we were shocked to see a photo of you with Gen. Sao Sokha, the President of the Football Federation of Cambodia and a very close associate of Hun Sen, at the August 12, 2018, press conference in Phnom Penh announcing your appointment as national coach. As detailed in our June 2018 report, "[The Dirty Dozen: A Long History of Abuses by Hun Sen's Generals](#)," Gen. Sao Sokha, Deputy Supreme Commander of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and Commander of the Royal Khmer Gendarmerie (GRK), is a notorious human rights abuser and alleged war criminal. His forces have been responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, illegal arrests, attacks on peaceful protesters, and other violations.

Sao Sokha has admitted playing a key role in Hun Sen's bloody 1997 coup d'etat as the Commander of the GRK. The then-Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Human Rights in Cambodia, Thomas Hammarberg, reported that the GRK headquarters had been used to detain, torture and execute political opponents. UN human rights investigators also found that at least 30 captured soldiers were detained and tortured by the GRK at its Kambaul gendarmerie school.

Foreign governments have long recognized Sao Sokha's responsibility for human rights violations. As an official from France, which helped establish the GRK, told us, Sao Sokha is "involved in criminal activities and violence."

The abuses in which the GRK has been implicated prompted the UN's special representative for human rights to call for the GRK to be dismantled. Human Rights Watch has called for Sao Sokha to be removed from his position, criminally investigated, and prosecuted as appropriate for human rights abuses.

An entire chapter of "The Dirty Dozen" documents Sao Sokha's human rights record. We have translated that chapter into Japanese and attach it to this letter.

You may also be aware that when Sao Sokha was appointed President of the Cambodian federation in 2006, FIFA refused to recognize his appointment because he was appointed after an illegal election. According to the [Phnom Penh Post](#), "A letter to addressed to the CFF [Cambodian Football Federation] and signed by Joseph S. Blatter, president of Zurich-

based FIFA, reads that ‘all the documents received by FIFA conclude that Article 17 of the FIFA statute has been flagrantly violated on the grounds of political interference... FIFA is not in a position to recognize the so-called election.’” Hun Sen appears to have installed Sao Sokha to replace the person who had been properly appointed and was close to Hun Sen’s political rival.

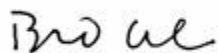
Responding to concerns from Human Rights Watch and others, in recent years FIFA has added the promotion of human rights to its governing statutes, [adopted a Human Rights Policy](#) that applies across all operations, hired a human rights director, and [established a Human Rights Advisory Board](#). Human Rights Watch engages regularly with FIFA to advise on these priorities and raise concerns.

We assume you may not have known about Sao Sokha’s record before you accepted the position as coach of the Cambodian national football team and you posed for photos with him on August 12. As a world-famous football star, we are concerned about your close relationship with a world-class human rights abuser.

We look forward to meeting with you to discuss this matter further. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Brad Adams
Executive Director, Asia Division
Human Rights Watch

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brad Adams".