



Cambodian Civil Society Working Group Commemorates the 67th Anniversary of International Human Rights Day Under the theme “Promoting Freedom of Expression”

Today, on 10 December 2015, civil society organizations in Cambodia are celebrating the 67th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) under the theme of “*Promoting Freedom of Expression*” in Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia.

In addition to the public, we have invited the President of the National Assembly Samdech Akeak Moha Ponhea Chakrei Heng Samrin, Minister of Information H.E Khiev Kanharith, foreign diplomats of the European Commission, ambassadors of Japan and the United States, and the country representative of UN OHCHR in Cambodia, to join us in marking this important event.

On this historical day, civil society in Cambodia would like to express its deepest gratitude to human rights defenders and activists around the world, especially to those in Cambodia who have dedicated and devoted their lives to the protection of human rights and have been imprisoned.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the UDHR on December 10, 1948. The UDHR sets out a broad range of fundamental human rights and freedoms to which all men, women and children throughout the world are entitled without distinction as to race, color, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, political opinion, social status or origin, wealth, sexual orientation and others.

We, the civil society organizations, commemorate International Human Rights Day to simultaneously show our support for the UDHR, while expressing our concerns over the ongoing restrictions and violations of fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression. We wish to join in solidarity with the human rights advocates, activists, and institutions that are defending human rights throughout Cambodia.

According to Article 19 of the UDHR¹ and Article 41 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia in 1993², the Royal Government of Cambodia is bound by law to respect and protect freedom of expression, as one of fundamental rights afforded under domestic and international law.

While we recognize the government's positive efforts to reform a number of development sectors (education, public health, revenue mobilization and local governance) and bodies by appointing a new spokesman from the opposition party in the National Assembly and gradually increasing wages of armed forces, civil servants and garment workers.

However, we are extremely concerned about the continuous repressions of fundamental freedoms,

¹ States that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

² States that “Khmer citizens shall have freedom of expression, press, publication and assembly. No one shall exercise this right to infringe upon the rights of others, to effect the good traditions of the society, to violate public law and order and national security.”

including freedom of expression in relation to several laws that have recently been enacted, including the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO), the election laws, and the Telecommunications Law. These laws have been passed with little to no consultation with civil society or relevant stakeholders. Similarly, the pending and worrisome Trade Union Law and Cybercrime Law will be probably passed without proper consultation. Close examination reveals the ability of these laws to narrowly restrict fundamental freedoms, including the rights to freedom of expression.

Our first line of defense is to extensively document the ongoing human rights violations in Cambodia. At present, there are numerous violations occurring throughout the country, including physical and judicial harassment over critics of the government - most recently evidenced by the attacks against the two opposition law makers in front of the National Assembly; violations of land rights, including the violation of indigenous peoples' rights regarding their collective land and forests; a lack of adherence to fair trial standards; and a continued systematic abuse of labor rights.

In light of such on-going human rights abuses, we strongly urge the Royal Government of Cambodia, the National Assembly, the Senate, and the courts to consider the following measures:

- Establish an effective mechanism for the clarification of LANGO, in order to provide more space to exercise freedom of expression, which will benefit not only civil society but also Cambodian society as a whole by allowing the promotion of human rights through training and workshops;
- Amend the election laws to ensure that freedom of expression and assembly are fully protected for civil society organizations to engage fully in the election process without interference from the authorities;
- Integrate comments and input from civil society before adopting further laws, and in particular review the Trade Union Law to ensure the protection of workers' rights, and improve their working conditions and standard of living, and the Cybercrime Law to protect freedom of expression and Internet rights;
- Put an end to the judicial harassment of human rights defenders, opposition politicians, trade unions, and activists;
- Release unconditionally all land, environmental and political activists and human rights defenders who have been imprisoned due to their activisms and political activities;
- Hold accountable perpetrators who have committed violations of human rights against journalists, opposition lawmakers, garment workers and trade unionists; and
- Commit to fulfilling Cambodia's obligations to protect human rights and establish effective mechanisms to provide remedy for victims when violations occur;

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