

Statement on human rights situation and political trends in Cambodia

Monday 11 December 2017, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 22 November 2017).

Statement on Cambodia

22 November 2017

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, members of social/people's movements, academia, and individuals express our deepest concerns over the deterioration of the relationship between the Cambodian Government and Cambodia civil society and press/media, in particular over human rights situation and political trends in Cambodia. In a robust democracy, freedom of expression and association, dissenting views between the public and state agencies, and criticism of public officials should not be perceived as threats to Executive power and repressed through any means.

We are alarmed at the ongoing escalation of media repression (both online and print media), the usage of regressive laws such as the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGOs) and Union Law to harass, intimidate, and silence civil society organizations. We condemn the criminalization of dissent by manipulating the various laws in their use and interpretation, leading to arbitrary imprisonment of activists, human rights defenders, community leaders, political activists, politicians, parliamentarians, socio-political analysts and others whose views differ from the ruling regime. We find it outrageous that the foreign conspiracy rhetoric which associates "The Colour Revolution" to "Overthrow the Government" sentiment has been used to go after anyone who challenges the current systemic problems and seeks to improve human rights protection and fulfillment, breach the gap between rich and poor and address inequality, and participate in discourses to build a nation where all can live with dignity, wisdom, and harmony.

We especially call attention to the following forms of harassment and repression:

1. The use and manipulation of regressive laws, particularly the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO) to harass, intimidate and silence civil society. A number of NGOs working on electoral reform, human rights, and environmental and land rights were closed and/or suspended, or have been under threat of being closed down or their registrations withdrawn. These NGOs are the National Democracy Institute (NDI), Mather Nature, Equitable Cambodia, Samakum Theang Thnauts. The LANGO is being used to de-activate and limit human rights and other related advocacy work. A concern among CSOs in Cambodia is the demand by the Cambodian government that all registered NGOs and associations should submit organization financial and narrative reports, as well as detailed banking information; the LANGO requires the submission of confidential private documents, such as donor reports, bank account details, and financial statements.

2. The criminalization and arbitrary imprisonment of civil society activists, human rights defenders, community leaders, parliamentarians, and those who express dissent with government policies. Parliamentarian Kem Sokha, President of Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), was arrested without warrant in the middle of the night on 3 September 2017, and is being investigated for 'treason.' Tep Vanny from the Boeung Kak Lake community was sentenced to one

year in prison on 15 August 2017, for defending her community members, following their forced eviction from their homes in Phnom Penh. Dem Kundy and Hun Vannak from the environment rights group Mother Nature were arrested while filming sand dredging-related activity in Koh Kong province[1] and sent to jail prior to a court trial. Their arrests occurred two days after Mother Nature posted online a video highlighting potential smuggling of silica sand to Taiwan on social media Facebook page[2]. Dr. Kem Ley was gunned down in July 2016, and the investigation of his death has failed to meet the minimum requirements of transparency and independence. In February 2017, political commentator Mr. Kim Sok was charged with defamation and incitement for having stated that the Cambodian government was involved in the killing of Mr. Kem Ley. Mr. Kim Sok has been held in Pre-trial detention since then. Such actions show the Cambodian government and the country's democratic and justice systems in extremely poor light.

3. Control and repression of online and print media and the shutting down of press and media institutions. A number of reliable press/media organisations were closed and/or stopped airing due to various reasons. In late August 2017, Cambodian authorities ordered the closure of 32 FM radio frequencies across 20 provinces. The shutdown particularly hit stations relaying independent Khmer-language news: Radio Free Asia (RFA), Voice of America (VOA) and the Cambodian non-profit, Voice of Democracy (VOD) were all taken off the air[3]. In July 2017, Cambodia Daily announced closure of its office after 24 years of operation. They were ordered to choose: whether pay USD 6.3 million income tax by September 4th, 2017 or to close their business.

In all democratic societies, citizens and the public play a crucial role to ensure checks and balance among the country's Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary. These checks and balance include enabling vulnerable populations to have voice and access their due rights and protection, ensuring the interests of the wealthy do not undermine those of the poor, and facilitating robust public debate about policies, laws, development, the environment, etc. As a result, some level of tension between governments and civil society, academics and press/media organizations are to be expected and even considered healthy.

Thus we urge the Cambodian government to:

1. Free and drop all the charges against social activists/human right defenders without any conditions.
2. Reform the juridical system. It must be independent and just.
3. Stop using jurisdiction/court system against those who hold dissenting views and defend peoples' rights.
4. Address the issues crucial to local communities and people: justice must be given to communities and all those who lost their lands.
5. Allow the local media to reopen their operations.
6. Stop all forms of harassment and intimidation of, and threats to local communities, activists and human rights defenders, including from the military.
7. Lift the suspension on NGOs and allow them to operate again.
8. Amend the Law on Association and Non-Governmental Organizations, and Trade Union's Law.
9. Release all political and other prisoners of conscience.

Endorsed by:

1. SUARAM, Malaysia
2. Progressive Voice
3. Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network (SACSN)
4. Asia-Pacific Solidarity Coalition (APSOC)
5. Focus on the Global South (FGS)
6. Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau (WLB)
7. Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), Philippines
8. Network for Transformative Social Protection (NTSP), Asia
9. PATAMABA, Philippines
10. Global Social Justice, Belgium
11. Partido ng Manggagawa (PM), Philippines
12. Asia-Pacific Network for Food Sovereignty (APNFS)
13. Human Rights Online Philippines (HROnlinePH)
14. Buhay na may Dignidad para sa Lahat (DIGNIDAD) Movement, Philippines
15. MARUAH, Singapore
16. ALTSEAN-Burma (Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma)
17. MADPET (Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture)
18. Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), India
19. Sustainability and Participation through Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL), Philippines
20. People's Empowerment Foundation, Thailand
21. Ecologistas en Acción, Spain
22. Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), France
23. Building and Wood Workers International (BWI)
24. North South Initiative, Malaysia
25. Migrant CARE Indonesia
26. Empowering Singaporeans
27. KPRI (Confederation of Indonesia People Movement)
28. Stiftung Asienhaus, Germany
29. Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation - Malaysia
30. Bangladesh Krishok Federation
31. Sawit Watch, Indonesia
32. Migrants Rights Council, India
33. Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM)
34. NGO Forum on ADB
35. Yayasan Perlindungan Insani Indonesia (YPHI)
36. Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), Nepal
37. Committee for Asian Women (Malaysia)
38. RAEBIA. TIMOR-LESTE
39. Sarawak indigenous peoples land rights network(TAHABAS)
40. Association for Law, Human Rights and Justice (HAK Association) of Timor-Leste
41. Foundation for Women (FFW) Thailand
42. Integrated Community Development Foundation (ICDF-Myanmar)
43. PN-BESI, Timor Leste
44. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), South Korea
45. Htoi Gender and Development Foundation
46. Kachin State Women Network
47. MAP Foundation (Migrant Assistance Program - Thailand)
48. Fresh Eyes - People to People Travel, UK
49. TRIPNET (Tanintharyi River and Indigenous People's Network)

50. Gitib, Mindanao, Philippines
51. Mindanao People's Peace Movement (MPPM), Philippines
52. International Accountability Project

Individuals

1. Hari Roka, General secretary , Nepal Alternative Research Society(NARS)
 2. Ichiyo Muto,Yokohama, Japan
 3. Seema Mustafa, New Delhi, India
 4. William Nicholas Gomes, Human rights Defender and Freelance Journalist, UK
 5. Corazon Valdez Fabros, Philippines
 6. Han Hui Hui, Singapore
 7. Birgit Daiber, The Common Good of Humanity Network
 8. Achin Vanaik (Retd. Professor, University of Delhi), India
 9. Xisto Martins, RAEBIA, Timor-Leste
 10. Boris Kagarlitsky, Russia
 11. Praveen Jha, Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India
 12. Kalle Sysikaski, The Finnish Peace Union, Finland
-