



មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលសិទ្ធិមនុស្សកម្ពុជា
CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

For immediate release: 07 April 2011

PRESS RELEASE

Cambodia: Restrictive Draft NGO Law an Urgent Cause for Concern

London 07.04.11: The draft Cambodian Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations is advancing to the latter stages of the legislative process. If adopted - which is speculated to occur in the upcoming days - the Law will severely restrict the freedom and independence of NGOs within Cambodia. ARTICLE 19 and the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) urgently appeal to bi-lateral and multilateral governments and institutions to condemn this Law and to call upon the Cambodian government to stop its formalisation process.

“The coming days are critical for democracy in Cambodia. Once the NGO law has advanced to the Council of Ministers and National Assembly, the possibility for the local community, NGOs, and the international community to influence change will significantly diminish. The time is running out for pressure to be placed upon the Cambodian government to absolve this law,” says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

The draft NGO Law contains a number of vague and problematic provisions, including a requirement for all NGOs to register with the government before they are allowed to “operate any activity” and imposes burdensome, overly-bureaucratic registration procedures. It is feared that this requirement and the lack of an appeal process if a registration application is rejected, could be abused to arbitrarily shut down and criminalise NGOs and other associations that are critical of the government. Furthermore, NGOs risk having their activities suspended or completely invalidated if they fail to submit annual reports to the government on time. The law also states that foreign NGOs must have a “representative office” in Cambodia, and must “reach an agreement” with relevant government ministries and sign an Memorandum of Understanding with the Foreign Ministry.

“Should this law pass as it is currently formulated, the survival of each and every NGO in Cambodia will be at the whim of the government. Emboldened by the legitimacy that they believe a law gives to abusive behaviour, the government is likely to use the NGO law to silence its people and to tighten its control on their day to day lives. The international community needs to act now or Cambodia will continue in its march away from democracy and towards autocracy,” said Ou Virak, President of CCHR.

NGOs are platforms through which people can have their voices heard. The NGO law severely threatens freedom of expression and freedom of association by denying the Cambodian people and non-governmental organisations a space to gather and discuss the issues most urgent and relevant to

the people. The Cambodian government's lack of genuine consultation with the civil society in drafting this law reveals its complete disregard of the role of civil society as one of the three pillars of democracy.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information, please contact: the communications team at ARTICLE 19, at communications@article19.org or call +44 20 7324 2500, Ou Virak, President of CCHR, at ouvirak@cchrcambodia.org or +855 12 40 40 51.
- The second draft of the NGO Law is available in English and Khmer at the CCHR hosted Cambodian Human Rights Portal at: http://sithi.org/temp.php?url=view_law.php&&id=184
- ARTICLE 19 and CCHR published a joint statement in February 2011 highlighting the latest freedom of expression setbacks affecting the country including the draft NGO Law. The statement can be downloaded here: www.article19.org/pdfs/press/cambodia-freedom-of-expression-in-crisis.pdf