

“Cambodia at a crossroads”: UN expert calls on Government to choose path of human rights

PHNOM PENH (14 March 2018) – The UN expert on the human rights situation in Cambodia has expressed serious concerns about restrictions on the media, freedom of expression and political participation ahead of a national election in July, calling on the Government to choose the path of human rights.

“Cambodia is at an important crossroads and must embrace human rights as they are indispensable in sustaining hard-earned peace and development,” said Rhona Smith at the end of her fifth visit to the country.

“Restricting Cambodians' voices could ultimately threaten the very stability that the Government and the people have worked hard to build. Freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly should be protected and developed, not restricted, in a liberal multi-party democracy as guaranteed by the Constitution of Cambodia.”

Smith cited worrying developments in recent times, including the closure of local radio stations and a national newspaper, the dissolution of the main opposition party and the reallocation of its seats, the imprisonment of political opponents and human rights activists, the use of new laws to curtail freedoms, political participation and civil society activities.

“For many Cambodians who voted in the 2013 national and 2017 local elections, their representatives' seats are now occupied by those they did not vote for or even know. This raises serious concerns about political participation rights,” said Smith, who urged the authorities to “urgently reverse the current course of actions” and lift the blanket ban on 118 politicians participating in politics.

“The right to political participation and freedom of expression are of particular importance during electoral processes, and the authorities have a responsibility to ensure that individuals, political parties and the media can operate without being threatened or sanctioned.”

Smith also expressed grave concern about reports of shootings on 8 March in Kratie province over a land dispute. “I have been following the situation closely, raising my concerns directly when meeting with Government officials and called for a prompt and independent investigation.

“Again, incidents like this underline that all civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights are interconnected and equally important. Human rights should never be

sacrificed. The root causes of tensions must be addressed and disputes must be resolved in a peaceful and consultative manner,” she said.

The UN human rights expert also welcomed increased budget allocation for social sectors to promote economic, social and cultural rights.

“I encourage the Government to continue its investment in health, social security and education and to work across ministries and at all levels of Government to ensure these services are available, accessible, appropriate and of high quality for all Cambodians. No one should be left behind, as promised in the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda,” Smith said.

ENDS

To read the full end of mission statement of the Special Rapporteur | <http://bit.ly/2pobjHB>

Professor Rhona Smith (United Kingdom) was appointed as [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia](#) by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2015.

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*This year, 2018, is the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are urging people everywhere to **Stand Up for Human Rights**: www.standup4humanrights.org.*