



ប្រជុំមន្ត្រីសិទ្ធិមនុស្សកម្ពុជា
CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

For immediate release – 15 February 2011

PRESS RELEASE

Cambodia: More Setbacks for Freedom of Expression

London 15.02.11: As the Cambodian government increases its crackdown on freedom of speech in the country, ARTICLE 19 and the Cambodia Center for Human Right (CCHR) are releasing a joint statement highlighting the latest freedom of expression setbacks affecting the country.

On the occasion of the official country visit by Surya Prasad Subedi, the *United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia*, both organisations are calling for an investigation into the independence of the courts and the systematic use of criminal legislation to silence voices critical of the government and the ruling party. Both organisations also urge the Cambodian government to comply with its international obligations to promote and protect the right to freedom of expression.

“Through restrictive legislations and courts, the Cambodian authorities are curtailing people’s right to speak openly, share opinions, and protest peacefully. The space for freedom of speech is increasingly shrinking which is why the international community needs to increase its monitoring of the situation,” said Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

ARTICLE 19 and CCHR outline a number of key measures undertaken by the government to undermine freedom of expression in the country. The analysis identifies the courts as one of the primary tool of oppression, with criminal charges levelled against parliamentarians, journalists and human rights defenders who speak out in criticism of the government and the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP).

In the last few months, criminal cases brought against human rights defenders and citizens in response to the expression of opinions critical of the government, indicate how laws are being used to silence dissent. In January, human right defender Sam Chankea was found guilty of defamation under the new Penal Code for comments he made regarding a firm which is involved in a long standing land dispute with local residents. The firm is owned by the wife of the Minister for Industry, Mines and Energy.

Recent and forthcoming legislation are clear signs that the rule of law is waning in Cambodia and that the government is ruling *by* law to protect the interests of a small

political and economic elite at the expense of the right to freedom of expression of all people and the freedom of those who exercise that right to speak out in criticism of the government, the ruling party and their allies.

The new Penal Code, which came into force in December 2010, contains a number of excessive restrictions on freedom of expression, while two forthcoming laws - the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (the “NGO Law”) and the Law on Trade Unions (“Union Law”) – will make it increasingly difficult for community groups, NGOs and unions to gather, thereby severely restricting their freedom and independence. Although the government has verbally agreed to review the Draft NGO Law based on recommendations from local civil society groups, there is no guarantee that the proposed changes would be reflected in the final legislation.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information, please contact: Amy Sim, Senior Programme Officer, ARTICLE 19, at amy@article19.org or call +44 20 7324 2500, Ou Virak, Executive Director of the CCHR, at ouvirak@cchrcambodia.org or +855 12 40 40 51.
- ARTICLE 19 and CCHR’s joint statement can be downloaded here:
www.article19.org/pdfs/press/cambodia-freedom-of-expression-in-crisis.pdf
- For ARTICLE 19 analysis of the Draft Cambodia Penal Code, see: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/cambodia-comment-on-the-draft-penal-code.pdf>.
- For CCHR analysis of the Penal Code, please see: [http://www.cchrcambodia.org/English/add_press_release/press_release/cchr%20press%20release%20-%20the%20penal%20code%20-%20freedom%20of%20expression%20in%20jeopardy\(101609_1255751514\).pdf](http://www.cchrcambodia.org/English/add_press_release/press_release/cchr%20press%20release%20-%20the%20penal%20code%20-%20freedom%20of%20expression%20in%20jeopardy(101609_1255751514).pdf).
- For ARTICLE 19 and CCHR’s press release on the case of Sam Chankea, see: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/cambodia-conviction-of-sam-chankea-is-an-attack-on-freedom-of-expression.pdf>.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.
- The Cambodian Center for Human Rights is a non-political, independent, non-governmental organization, which works to promote democracy and respect for human rights throughout Cambodia.