



To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the UN Human Rights Council

Geneva, 20 August 2015,

***Re: Addressing the deteriorating human rights situation in Cambodia and ensuring that the United Nations retains its protection role and monitoring capacity in the country***

Your Excellency,

We urge your delegation to address the deteriorating human rights situation in Cambodia by supporting a resolution, at the 30<sup>th</sup> regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (14 September-2 October 2015), that highlights patterns of serious violations and calls on the Cambodian Government to put an end to such violations and to abide by its domestic and international legal obligations. The resolution should also extend the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia.

We remain deeply concerned about the serious and systematic human rights violations in Cambodia and on-going impunity for perpetrators. More than 20 years after the 1991 International Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Conflict, by which Cambodia and 18 other signatory States committed themselves to protecting and promoting human rights in Cambodia and UN-organized democratic elections in 1993, the country risks falling deeper into a pattern of institutionalized human rights violations, including political violence. In the run-up to local and national elections scheduled for 2017 and 2018, the Cambodian Government of the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, has taken steps to further restrict Cambodian citizens' rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and to limit the political opposition's ability to meaningfully engage in policy-making. Additionally, the government has taken measures to prevent civil society organizations from operating freely and independently. The last two years have witnessed the hasty and secretive preparation and adoption of legislation that unduly restricts human rights and fundamental freedoms. There has also been an increase in the use of lethal and other excessive force against peaceful protests and occasionally violent social unrest, as well as instances of judicial harassment and unwarranted legal attacks against human rights defenders, community activists, trade unionists and political opposition members and their supporters.

In his last report to the Council,<sup>1</sup> former UN Special Rapporteur Mr. Surya P. Subedi warned that Cambodia stood “at a crossroads.” Since then, the government has neither taken steps to implement key recommendations made by Mr. Subedi and his predecessors nor carried out institutional reforms that will be key to ensuring stability based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. On the contrary, through its monopoly

1 A/HRC/27/70 (15 August 2014). See list of reports of UN Special Rapporteurs on Cambodia: [ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?m=107](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?m=107)

control over not only political positions in the government but also the entire civil service, the CPP has consolidated its partisan hold on the armed forces, the police, the judiciary and all state institutions, using them to step up its attacks on independent and opposition voices.

In the face of these mounting human rights concerns that flout the spirit and purposes of the 1991 Agreement and UN engagement in the country since, the Human Rights Council should adopt at its upcoming 30<sup>th</sup> session a resolution that:

- **Raises substantial issues of concern, including violations of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression; threats to, and attacks against, human rights defenders; the lack of independence of the judiciary; violations of land and housing rights; the erosion of fundamental democratic principles and institutions; and ongoing impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses;**
- **Calls on the Cambodian Government to put an end to these serious violations, abide by its domestic and international human rights obligations, and implement key legal and institutional reforms that UN bodies and mechanisms have highlighted as priorities;**
- **Extends the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur for a period of at least two years, with monitoring and reporting powers<sup>2</sup> in addition to advisory services;**
- **Calls on the Cambodian Government to fully cooperate with the current Special Rapporteur, Ms. Rhona Smith,<sup>3</sup> as well as with other UN human rights bodies and mechanisms; and**
- **Calls on the Cambodian Government to establish a time-bound action plan for the implementation of recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur and by previous mandate holders, as well as by UN bodies and mechanisms, including treaty monitoring bodies, thematic special procedures of the Human Rights Council, and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).**
- **We also call upon your Government to express its support to the renewal of the mandate of the OHCHR country office in Cambodia, and to underline the importance of the complementarities between the work of the Special Rapporteur and the OHCHR country office.**

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Such a resolution will reaffirm the UN's historical responsibility to support the Cambodian people's quest for justice, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In the words of the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for human rights in Cambodia, Mr. Yash Ghai, "Cambodia is unique insofar as the international community has played a central role since the peace agreements in rebuilding the country and its institutions, with the aim of establishing a regime based on respect for human rights and the rule of law."

The international community, which has invested significant resources and efforts in Cambodia since the 1991 Agreement, should not allow Cambodia to drop any lower on its list of priorities at a time when the

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2 While Human Rights Council resolutions on Cambodia have been adopted under agenda item 10 ("Technical assistance and capacity-building") in the last few years, in practice mandate holders have interpreted their mandate broadly so as to be able to conduct full monitoring work in addition to providing advisory services to the Cambodian Government. In addition, they have benefited from the work and support of the OHCHR country office in Phnom Penh, which has also been able to conduct in-depth documentation and monitoring work. Irrespective of bilateral negotiations between the government and OHCHR regarding the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on an OHCHR country office (the current MoU ends early 2016), any resolution adopted by the Council under its agenda item 10 and extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur should be phrased in a way that allows for continued broad interpretation of the latter, so as to include advisory services (technical assistance and capacity-building), monitoring, public reporting, and follow-up to the implementation of previous UN recommendations.

3 The new UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Ms. Rhona Smith, was appointed in March 2015. So far, she has not been able to carry out an official visit to the country (see annex).

country's human rights situation is worsening. The Human Rights Council should respond to Cambodia's mounting human rights crisis by sending a signal to the government showing that the Council intends to continue to closely monitor and address the situation. As the main UN body in charge of promoting and protecting human rights, the Human Rights Council should not stand idly by as the Cambodian Government further restricts the human rights of its citizens, uses the security forces and judicial system as tools for repression, limits the ability of the political opposition to operate, and attempts to stifle and control a vibrant and independent civil society that is the mainstay of support for human rights and democratic elections.

**We therefore urge your delegation to support a Human Rights Council resolution that addresses the serious human rights issues outlined above and in annexes, and extends the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia for a period of at least two years, in order for the Council to retain its protection role and monitoring capacity.**

We thank you for your attention to these pressing issues and are available to provide your delegation with further information as required.

Sincerely,

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)  
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia)  
Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)  
Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)  
Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)  
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation  
Civil Rights Defenders  
International Commission of Jurists  
International Service for Human Rights  
Human Rights Now  
Human Rights Watch  
World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)

## **ANNEX 1: Summary of key human rights developments in Cambodia since the last Human Rights Council resolution**

Since the last resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on Cambodia ([A/HRC/RES/24/29](#), September 2013), the human rights situation in the country has deteriorated markedly, and the Cambodian Government has launched a full-fledged attack against human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>4</sup>

### **Worsening crackdown on peaceful assemblies and attacks on freedom of association**

The July 2013 general election saw the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) officially be awarded 55 seats in the National Assembly (against 68 awarded to the CPP). However, credible allegations of the CPP's involvement in widespread electoral fraud triggered a series of mostly peaceful protests that were met by law enforcement authorities with various levels of repression.

Cambodian authorities have increasingly used violence against protesters, including opposition supporters, trade unionists and garment industry workers, as well as human rights monitors and journalists observing the protests. On 2-3 January 2014, after protracted nation-wide demonstrations calling for wage increases in the garment industry and sit-ins by opposition supporters in Phnom Penh's "Freedom Park," the government dispatched police and gendarmes to suppress strikes and social unrest among workers on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. At least four persons were killed, one disappeared, and more than 20 suffered bullet wounds as a result. Soldiers also detained more than 20 persons, including workers, monks and human rights defenders. In instances where protests turned violent, law enforcement officials used unnecessary and disproportionate force. In other instances, they used government para-police to crackdown on and commit acts of violence against peaceful protesters. On one occasion, this provoked protester counter-violence in which para-police were injured. Men and children arrested and charged for acts allegedly committed in relation to the protests were convicted and received suspended sentences of imprisonment following unfair trials.<sup>5</sup>

Immediately after the 2-3 January repression, authorities intensified their crackdown on opposition supporters and independent voices and instituted a sweeping ban (which lacked legal basis) on public gatherings in Phnom Penh. This blanket ban was without regard to considerations of necessity and proportionality, contrary to the government's constitutional provisions and international obligations.<sup>6</sup>

In July 2015 the Cambodian National Assembly adopted the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO<sup>7</sup>). This law, which has now been promulgated, contains undue restrictions on the rights to freedom of association and of expression, excessive penalties, and grants the national and local authorities' vast powers over the registration and de-registration of associations. Once registered, all associations will be required to operate under a vaguely defined obligation to maintain "political neutrality." The LANGO legalizes the control and censorship of activities undertaken by domestic and international associations and NGOs. The restrictions it provides for go well beyond the permissible limitations allowed by international human rights law, violate Cambodia's constitutional provisions, and serve no legitimate purpose. The LANGO was adopted after a secretive drafting process which lacked basic elements of consultation with civil society organizations and other stakeholders.<sup>8</sup> Comparable secrecy shrouds the government's

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4 See among others [www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia](http://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia); [www.hrw.org/asia/cambodia](http://www.hrw.org/asia/cambodia); [www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/cambodia](http://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/cambodia)

5 See International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), *Injustice in Cambodia* ([www.icj.org/injustice-in-cambodia](http://www.icj.org/injustice-in-cambodia)).

6 Article 35 of the Cambodian Constitution grants all citizens the right to "participate actively in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation." Article 41 guarantees the rights to freedom of expression, of the press, of publication and of assembly, while Article 42 guarantees the right to establish associations and political parties. Article 31 incorporates international human rights norms into the domestic legal order.

7 See analysis of the dangers of LANGO: [www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/cambodia-the-dangers-of-lango](http://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/cambodia-the-dangers-of-lango)

8 Amnesty International *et al.*, "Cambodia: Withdraw Draft Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations," 22 June 2015 ([www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa23/1909/2015/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa23/1909/2015/en)); see also ICJ, "Cambodia: approved NGO law poised to hobble the work of civil society" ([www.icj.org/cambodia-approved-ngo-law-poised-to-hobble-the-work-of-civil-society](http://www.icj.org/cambodia-approved-ngo-law-poised-to-hobble-the-work-of-civil-society)), "Cambodia: the ICJ condemns Senate's approval of draft Law on Associations and NGOs" ([www.icj.org/cambodia-the-icj-condemns-senates-approval-of-draft-law-on-associations-and-ngos](http://www.icj.org/cambodia-the-icj-condemns-senates-approval-of-draft-law-on-associations-and-ngos)); ISHR, "Cambodia: Withdraw LANGO and Ensure Genuine Civil Society Participation"

drafting of a new Trade Union Law that threatens to impose new and unwarranted limits on workers' freedom of association.<sup>9</sup>

### **Violations of, and threats to, the right to freedom of expression**

The Cambodian Government has also drafted a Cybercrime Law and a Law on Telecommunications which, if passed in their current form, would grant the government significant power over information outlets as well as Cambodian citizens' computers and electronic devices. The draft Cybercrime Law prescribes jail terms and fines for vaguely defined offenses, such as publishing content that slanders or undermines the government's integrity, incites or instigates the general population, or generates insecurity and instability. The draft Law on Telecommunications gives the government discretionary authority to take over and shut down internet service providers. These moves go hand in hand with the ongoing intimidation, threats and harassment of government critics, human rights defenders and journalists, including through the use of legislation on defamation and incitement to initiate legal proceedings against human rights defenders, trade unionists, opposition supporters and other critical voices.<sup>10</sup>

### **Retaliation and attacks against human rights defenders**

Human rights defenders remain in a difficult situation.<sup>11</sup> They are subjected to intimidation, threats and harassment, often in the form of legal harassment that results in their arbitrary detention for the exercise of their legitimate human rights activities. One recent example is the legal harassment of Mr. Ny Chakrya, Head of the Human Rights and Legal Aid Section of NGO the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), who is being investigated and faces imprisonment after he raised questions about judicial conduct in connection with the arrest and trial of villagers involved in a land dispute.<sup>12</sup>

### **The judiciary's lack of independence**

Successive Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Special Rapporteurs have consistently highlighted how Cambodia's judiciary lacks independence and does not guarantee individuals' right to a fair trial. In July 2014, three long-overdue fundamental laws on the judiciary<sup>13</sup> were enacted in the face of widespread condemnation of their provisions. These laws, passed by the National Assembly at a time when only the CPP had taken its seats, and without any public consultation or credible debate, legitimized the government's control over all aspects of the judiciary, including the assignment of judges and cases and the promotion of judges – placing them under the control of the executive branch.<sup>14</sup>

Repeated events have demonstrated the government's increasingly apparent use of Cambodia's judiciary as a tool of repression. In July 2014, seven opposition MPs were detained on baseless charges of “leading an insurrection” after they participated in a protest on 15 July 2014 calling for an end to the abovementioned blanket ban on public gatherings and tried to prevent crowd violence provoked by para-police suppression.

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([www.ishr.ch/news/cambodia-withdraw-lango-and-ensure-genuine-civil-society-participation](http://www.ishr.ch/news/cambodia-withdraw-lango-and-ensure-genuine-civil-society-participation)); OMCT and FIDH, “Cambodia: Constitutional Council Must Reject Problematic Provisions of the Law on Associations and NGOs,” 28 July 2015 ([www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/statements/cambodia/2015/07/d23280](http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/statements/cambodia/2015/07/d23280)).

9 Human Rights Watch, “Cambodia: Proposed Union Law a Rights Disaster,” 7 June 2015 ([www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/07/cambodia-proposed-union-law-rights-disaster](http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/07/cambodia-proposed-union-law-rights-disaster)).

10 See for instance LICADHO, *Going Offline? The Threat to Cambodia's Newfound Internet Freedoms* ([www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports.php?perm=205](http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports.php?perm=205)); ADHOC, *The Right to Remain Silenced: Expressive Rights in the Kingdom of Cambodia* ([www.adhoc-cambodia.org/?p=4668](http://www.adhoc-cambodia.org/?p=4668)); FIDH, *Cambodia: A Mounting Human Rights Crisis* ([www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/fidh\\_briefing\\_note\\_-\\_cambodia\\_20.09.2012\\_final-2.pdf](http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/fidh_briefing_note_-_cambodia_20.09.2012_final-2.pdf)).

11 CIVICUS, *Civil Society in Cambodia: Existing Under a Shadow* ([www.civicus.org/index.php/en/resources/2073-civil-society-in-cambodia-existing-under-a-shadow](http://www.civicus.org/index.php/en/resources/2073-civil-society-in-cambodia-existing-under-a-shadow))

12 FIDH and OMCT, “Cambodia : Ongoing Judicial Harassment Against Mr. Ny Chakrya, Head of the Human Rights and Legal Aid Section of ADHOC,” 22 July 2015 ([www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/cambodia-ongoing-judicial-harassment-against-mr-ny-chakrya-head-of](http://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/cambodia-ongoing-judicial-harassment-against-mr-ny-chakrya-head-of))

13 Namely the Law on the Organization and Conduct of the Supreme Council of the Magistracy, the Law on the Statute of the Magistrac and the Law on the Organization of Courts.

14 Human Rights Watch, “Cambodia: Withdraw Fundamentally Flawed Judiciary Laws,” 3 May 2015 ([www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/03/cambodia-withdraw-fundamentally-flawed-judiciary-laws](http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/03/cambodia-withdraw-fundamentally-flawed-judiciary-laws))

They were released on bail after a few days, but the charges leveled against them have not been dropped.<sup>15</sup> On 21 July 2015, 11 opposition members and supporters were sentenced to prison terms for equally baseless charges of “participating in an insurrectionary movement” – some of them were sentenced to up to 20 years in prison for “leading an insurrectionary movement” – for their involvement in the same originally peaceful protest.<sup>16</sup>

### **Land grabbing and forced evictions continue unabated**

Violations of land and housing rights and forced evictions in Cambodia have been widely documented over the years. Today, more than half the country's arable land is in the hands of private investors, and most land concessions have been granted without due process, including respect for the rights of the concerned persons to be consulted and to challenge administrative and judicial decisions pertaining to their eviction.<sup>17</sup> The practice of land grabbing and expropriation, in particular through the granting of economic land concessions (ELCs) by the government to private investors, has affected 60,000 new people since the beginning of 2014. Following allegations of widespread and systematic land grabbing conducted by the Cambodian ruling elite, a communication has been submitted to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court alleging that crimes against humanity have been committed.<sup>18</sup>

### **Ongoing impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses**

The culture of impunity for human rights violations and abuses remains a pressing issue that has been highlighted by various UN experts, including most recently by the UN Human Rights Committee, which reviewed Cambodia in March 2015. The Committee expressed concern about the fact that “no one has been held accountable for the extrajudicial killings, allegedly mainly perpetrated by the army, police and gendarmerie, in Cambodia since the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements.”<sup>19</sup> Emblematic cases – in a non-exhaustive list – include violence committed in relation to protests (see above), the killing of journalists (11 have been killed with impunity since 1994), the assassination of Mr. Chea Vichea, Head of the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC) in 2004 and, most recently, the killing of Cambodia's most prominent environmental activist Mr. Chut Wutty and of 14-year old Ms. Heng Chantha during a military operation against protesting displaced villagers (2012). No thorough, independent investigations have been conducted and no one has been held accountable with regard to these cases.<sup>20</sup> Since 1991, more than 300 people have been killed in politically motivated attacks.<sup>21</sup>

### **Lack of meaningful engagement with UN human rights bodies and mechanisms**

While at face value Cambodia has an acceptable record of engagement with the international human rights system when compared to other States in Southeast Asia (in terms of ratifications, special procedure visits,

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15 FIDH and OMCT, “Cambodia: 11 imprisoned peaceful protesters must be freed”, 21 January 2015, [www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/16818-cambodia-11-imprisoned-peaceful-protesters-must-be-freed](http://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/16818-cambodia-11-imprisoned-peaceful-protesters-must-be-freed)

16 Human Rights Watch, “Cambodia: Exonerate 11 Wrongly Convicted Activists,” 21 July 2015 ([www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/21/cambodia-exonerate-11-wrongly-convicted-activists](http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/21/cambodia-exonerate-11-wrongly-convicted-activists))

17 For an overview, see FIDH, *Cambodia: Land Cleared for Rubber, Rights Bulldozed* ([www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/Land-cleared-for-Rubber-Rights](http://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/Land-cleared-for-Rubber-Rights)); ADHOC, *A Turning Point? Land, Housing and Natural Resources Rights in Cambodia in 2012* ([www.nachdenkseiten.de/upload/pdf/ADHOC-A\\_Turning\\_Point\\_Land\\_Housing\\_NRM\\_2012.pdf](http://www.nachdenkseiten.de/upload/pdf/ADHOC-A_Turning_Point_Land_Housing_NRM_2012.pdf)), *Whose Land?* ([www.adhoc-cambodia.org/?p=5556](http://www.adhoc-cambodia.org/?p=5556)); LICADHO, *On Stony Ground: A Look Into Social Land Concessions* ([www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports.php?perm=208](http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports.php?perm=208))

18 [www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/cambodia-60-000-new-victims-of-government-land-grabbing-policy-since?var\\_mode=calcul](http://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/asia/cambodia/cambodia-60-000-new-victims-of-government-land-grabbing-policy-since?var_mode=calcul)

19 Concluding observations available at: [daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/082/72/PDF/G1508272.pdf?OpenElement](http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/082/72/PDF/G1508272.pdf?OpenElement) (see para. 11).

20 In the case of Mr. Chea Vichea, suspects (whom relatives and friends of the victim, as well as all independent judicial and human rights observers, considered to be scapegoats) had been arrested and sentenced, but were eventually acquitted.

21 See Human Rights Watch, “*Tell Them That I Want to Kill Them*”: *Two Decades of Impunity in Hun Sen's Cambodia* ([www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/13/tell-them-i-want-kill-them/two-decades-impunity-hun-sens-cambodia](http://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/13/tell-them-i-want-kill-them/two-decades-impunity-hun-sens-cambodia))

reviews by treaty bodies, etc.), it has largely failed to engage with UN bodies and mechanisms in good faith. All successive SRSGs and Special Rapporteurs have been subjected to smear campaigns and derogatory remarks by government officials. For instance, Mr Yash Ghai (2005-2008) was accused of being “deranged” and a “long-term tourist” by Prime Minister Hun Sen. On several occasions, including during the pre-election period in 2012-2013, government officials refused to meet with Mr. Surya P. Subedi (2009-2015), accusing him of lacking professionalism and independence and of supporting the opposition. The new Special Rapporteur, Ms. Rhona Smith, who was appointed in March 2015, has so far been unable to carry out an official visit to Cambodia, mainly because of government officials' lack of willingness to meet with her.

Cambodia's last review by the UN Human Rights Committee (March 2015) did not provide any evidence of substantive progress on issues of concern that had previously been highlighted by the Committee – including gender equality and gender-based violence, impunity, excessive use of force by law-enforcement officials, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, fair trial, independence of the judiciary, and freedoms of expression and assembly.

During the adoption of the report of the Working Group on its second Universal Periodic Review (UPR), in September 2014, Cambodia set a deplorable precedent by “un-accepting” recommendations that it had previously accepted during its UPR review (January 2014), demonstrating its increasing defiance of the international human rights system.

## **ANNEX 2: Most recent developments: the first half of August 2015**

Since the beginning of August 2015, the Prime Minister<sup>22</sup> and other government authorities have launched a campaign of vilification of and threats against human rights-oriented NGOs, such as ADHOC, LICADHO, and a grouping of women’s rights advocates. LICADHO has been accused of disseminating false news about land disputes,<sup>23</sup> while the women’s advocates stand accused of political bias simply for raising concern about the Prime Minister’s use of what they considered a vulgar term for women.<sup>24</sup> With the promulgation of the LANGO on 12 August 2015, such allegations can be a pretext for shutting down associations and NGOs and can be used in conjunction with earlier legislation to prosecute people for their actions in defense of human rights. The authorities have also begun to insist that grassroots civil society activities can no longer be carried out unless those involved have been registered with the government in advance in accordance with LANGO provisions and thus received government permission to operate.<sup>25</sup> This has been coupled with the announcement of strict government implementation of a ban on “political propaganda” activities on the premises of educational institutions.<sup>26</sup>

The increasingly intimidating atmosphere has prompted some NGO officials to advocate that civil society suspend public criticism of the government. Despite lifting the arbitrary ban imposed in January 2014, the government continues to prevent and obstruct freedom of peaceful assembly, especially, but not only, in rural areas, falsely claiming that non-violent gatherings about issues of community concern require prior government permission.<sup>27</sup> The authorities have even excluded local groups and affected people from participating in government-sponsored public meetings.<sup>28</sup>

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22 “Prime Minister Accuses NGOs of Stage Managing Protesters,” Cambodia Daily, 4 August 2015 ([www.cambodiadaily.com/news/prime-minister-accuses-ngos-of-stage-managing-protesters-90590](http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/prime-minister-accuses-ngos-of-stage-managing-protesters-90590))

23 “Gov’t Still Disputing Licadho Land Grab Report,” 2 August 2015 ([www.khmertimeskh.com/news/13962/gov---t-still-disputing-licadho-land-grab-report](http://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/13962/gov---t-still-disputing-licadho-land-grab-report))

24 “Ministry Slams NGOs for Criticism of Prime Minister,” Cambodia Daily, 7 August 2015 ([www.cambodiadaily.com/news/ministry-slams-ngos-for-criticism-of-prime-minister-91093](http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/ministry-slams-ngos-for-criticism-of-prime-minister-91093))

25 “Kratie Families Feel Effects of NGO Law,” Cambodia Daily, 17 August 2015 ([www.cambodiadaily.com/news/kratie-families-in-land-dispute-feel-effects-of-ngo-law-91796](http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/kratie-families-in-land-dispute-feel-effects-of-ngo-law-91796))

26 “Campuses ‘Reminded’ of Ban on Political Activities,” Khmer Times, 12 August 2015 ([www.khmertimeskh.com/news/14344/campuses---reminded---of-ban-on-political-activities](http://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/14344/campuses---reminded---of-ban-on-political-activities))

27 “Ten B. Kak Activists Dispersed by Police,” Phnom Penh Post, 7 August 2015 ([www.phnompenhpost.com/national/ten-b-kak-activists-dispersed-police](http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/ten-b-kak-activists-dispersed-police)); “M’kiri Indigenous Rally Blocked,” Phnom Penh Post, 10 August 2015 (<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mkiri-indigenous-rally-blocked>)

28 “Fishermen Kept From Sand Dredging Forum,” Cambodia Daily, 5 August 2015 ([www.cambodiadaily.com/news/fishermen-kept-from-sand-dredging-forum-90760](http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/fishermen-kept-from-sand-dredging-forum-90760))

The prospect of large-scale industrial action<sup>29</sup> to protest the adoption, without proper consultation with the labor sector, of a draft Trade Union Law that would impose new restrictions on trade union activities, raises the spectre of renewed use of excessive and sometimes fatal force against workers.

A series of criminal investigations and prosecutions launched in August are indicative of an ongoing need for close scrutiny to guard against escalating CPP partisan misuse of government agencies and the courts to violate human rights. Cases of concern include both those of members of the opposition CNRP, among them a Senator arrested without lifting his parliamentary immunity in advance of his arrest and detention,<sup>30</sup> and those of activist members of civil society, among them Buddhist monks<sup>31</sup> and land rights<sup>32</sup> and environmental campaigners.<sup>33</sup>

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29 “Thirty Unions Call on Labor Ministry to Rethink Draft Law,” Cambodia Daily, 15 August 2015 ([www.cambodiadaily.com/news/thirty-unions-call-on-labor-ministry-to-rethink-draft-law-91748](http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/thirty-unions-call-on-labor-ministry-to-rethink-draft-law-91748))

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