

UN Human Rights Council puts Cambodia under scrutiny ahead of 2018 elections

(Bangkok/Geneva, 29 September 2017) In passing its biannual resolution on Cambodia today, the UN Human Rights Council took the additional step of authorising the UN to prepare a report on the country in the next six months, ahead of the July 2018 elections. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is expected to submit this report to the Council during its March 2018 session.

On Wednesday, the UN Special Rapporteur on Cambodia, Rhona Smith, informed the 36th session of the UN Human Rights Council that efforts to undermine democratic institutions have reached an unprecedented level in Cambodia. She warned that the country was heading towards a precipice and concluded that the credibility of the July 2018 General Elections are under threat in the current environment. This view was reflected by several States and civil society groups who spoke after the Special Rapporteur.

‘While the resolution fails to fully reflect the seriousness of calls made by the Special Rapporteur and civil society, Cambodia should see the OHCHR report in March as an opportunity to urgently ensure that it complies with democratic norms,’ says R. Iniyana Ilango of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA).

‘We are concerned by the unprecedented increase in attacks and restrictions on civil society, media and the opposition in the aftermath of the commune elections in June. The Government has adopted a series of repressive laws and amendments to existing laws, and in recent months, used its tax system to constrain civil society and media as part of a broader campaign to silence critical voices ahead of next year’s general elections,’ says Ahmed Adam of FORUM-ASIA.

‘It is clear that if Cambodia does not act without delay to lift current restrictions on human rights, it will soon face strong international opprobrium,’ says John Samuel, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. ‘It should begin by: immediately releasing land rights defender Tep Vanny; dropping all charges against the four staff of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) and the Deputy Secretary-General of the National Elections Committee; and ending all arbitrary legal action aimed at stifling civil society and the media.’

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.

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