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CCHR calls on the National Assembly to withhold passing any new laws until the political deadlock is resolved

As the second session of the fifth mandate of the Cambodian National Assembly (“NA”) opens today – 1 April 2014 – the Cambodian Center for Human Rights ("CCHR") calls on the NA to withhold passing any new legislation until the ongoing political deadlock is resolved and until Members of Parliaments (“MPs”) of both political parties elected during the July 2013 NA elections have taken their seats in the NA. CCHR is concerned that with only Cambodian People’s Party (“CPP”) MPs sitting in the NA, draft laws will not be sufficiently scrutinized and will not represent the will of the people.

A number of new laws are currently being reviewed by the Council of Ministers and other bodies of the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) and will soon be sent to the NA for deliberation. The new laws include the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations, the Law on the Supreme Council of the Magistracy, the Law on the Status of Judges and Prosecutors, the Law on the Organization and Functioning of the Courts, the Law on Trade Unions, and the Cyber Law. Each of these laws will have far-reaching impacts on the status of human rights in Cambodia, in particular with regards to freedom of expression, fair trials rights and freedom of association and collective bargaining. During Cambodia’s second Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council on 28 January 2014, the RGC expressed its intention to pass many of these laws during the first half of 2014.

CCHR recommends that the NA wait until the political deadlock is resolved before debating and passing any new legislation, especially those which will impact human rights. Moreover, both the CPP and the Cambodian National Rescue Party (“CNRP”) should return to the negotiating table and ensure that any solution to the deadlock enables the furtherance of human rights in Cambodia. Finally, CCHR reiterates its request that the NA ensure that all drafts of new legislation are made publically available and that civil society is given sufficient time to analyze and provide feedback on the draft laws; despite having submitted several official requests for draft laws, the RGC remains reluctant to share these drafts and to engage with civil society.

CCHR Executive Director Chak Sopheap comments:

“All of these laws will have a profound effect on human rights in Cambodia. It is hard to imagine how these laws will be properly scrutinized in the absence of any political opposition in the NA and without even the full number of parliamentarians. The NA should demonstrate its commitment to human rights by withholding on passing any new laws until there are at least 120 members sitting in the NA. Meanwhile, both political parties should put human rights first and conduct negotiations in good-faith in order to get past this deadlock.”
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Notes to the Editor:

CCHR, founded in November 2002, is a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights throughout Cambodia.

CCHR is a member of International Freedom of Expression Exchanges (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression. CCHR is also a member of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) SOS-Torture Network.

The Cambodian Human Rights Portal www.sithi.org is the 2011 winner of the Information Society Innovation Fund Award in the category of Rights and Freedoms and the 2013 winner of the Communication for Social Change Award, awarded by the Centre of Communication and Social Change at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.