NGOs identify challenges in gender equality

Pech Sotheary / Khmer Times

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Women’s Affairs Minister Ing Kantha Phavi speaks at the UN. Ministry of Women’s Affairs

Civil society organisations yesterday identified physical, mental and sexual violence against women are still challenges yet to be addressed by the government.

The NGOs also said the government has not done enough to open doors for women in institutions.

Chak Sopheap, executive director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, said the promotion of gender equality in the Kingdom is making significant progress, with many women contributing to development.

Ms Sopheap said however the number of women in senior leadership government positions is less than ideal.

“We have observed in the government, the key people in leadership positions are mostly men,” she said. “The government has to put in great effort in integrating more women in major decision-making processes.”

Ms Sopheap said female activists spearheading rights issues face discrimination and misrepresentation from the authorities. She said many female activists in the field are treated as if they have no rights or freedom to carry out missions.

Bon Rachna, director of women rights group Klahan, said many women in rural areas face mental, physical and sexual violence.
“[The perpetrators] are family members or partners,” Ms Rachna said. “Cases lead to divorce.”

“The social ideology of patriarchy values men more than women in the family,” she added. “Those living in rural areas continue living in that situation.”

Ms Rachna said the government should widen access to education and disseminate information on women’s rights in rural areas, with clear guidelines, to eliminate gender violence in public institutions and the labour sector.

However, Kheng Sunhak, director-general of gender equality and economic development at the Women’s Affairs Ministry, said the government has made efforts to promote gender equality.

Mr Sunhak noted international groups recently said Cambodia has promoted women’s rights in the sectors of economy, education and politics.

“The number of female civil servants has increased to 41 percent, compared with 30 percent in previous years,” he said. “Therefore, the number of [women in government] has dramatically increased.”

“Regarding domestic violence and violence against women, it depends on men’s behaviour in the family and [law enforcement],” Mr Sunhak added. “However, we see people are more aware about this matter, and the ministry will pay attention to further education, disseminate and issue new measures to eradicate violence against women.”

Eat Sophea, a secretary of state at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, yesterday during a Women’s Day celebration at the ministry said the government recognises the importance of women in development.

Ms Sophea said the government has done plenty to promote gender equality and eliminate violence against women.

“Enhancing women’s capacity and increasing ranks in nation building are common tasks for all citizens, including men and women,” she said.