19th Anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreements – A Time to Reflect and a Time to Look Forward

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights would like to take the opportunity of the anniversary of the Paris Peace Agreements, which put an end to nearly 20 years of war and violence in Cambodia, to congratulate the Cambodian people on their remarkable accomplishments over the last 19 years in working towards development, democracy and reconciliation.

The Paris Peace Agreements laid down a framework for the creation of a genuinely democratic Cambodia in which all citizens were guaranteed the full complement of fundamental human rights. Since those Agreements were signed, there can be no doubt that life in Cambodia has improved. Lasting peace has enabled an ambitious programme of economic development to take place and some of the mechanisms of a modern state to be established.

However, Cambodia remains far from realising the objectives of the Paris Agreements. The rights and freedoms which the Agreements so specifically required are now routinely breached with few, if any, consequences. Forced evictions undermine land rights and the rights of indigenous peoples, corruption and political control beset the courts and other public institutions while regular crackdowns on journalists and political opponents prevent any substantive realisation of freedom of expression. As the ruling party dismantles the fundamental pillars of democracy and moves the country towards a de facto one-party state, it seems that 19 years later many of the primary objectives of the Agreements are as far off as ever.

The Agreements place primary responsibility for establishing and protecting human rights on the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”). However, the international community too has obligations under the Agreements and is, for example, required to “promote and encourage respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cambodia”.

The anniversary is an appropriate time to remind the RGC of the commitments it undertook 19 years ago and to encourage it to make the changes needed to ensure that rights are protected and democratic governance is realised. Moreover, as Cambodia’s economy and strategic importance grows with the emergence of ASEAN, it is necessary to call on the international community to maintain a principled stance in their dealings with Cambodia and not to abandon their own important commitments for the sake of naked economic or political calculations.

For more information, please contact:

John Coughlan, Senior Legal Consultant
Tel: +855 89 58 35 90
Email: johncoughlan@cchrcambodia.org

Chak Sopheap, Program Director
Tel: +855 11 94 32 12
Email: chaksopheap@cchrcambodia.org