PRESS RELEASE
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THE CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WELCOMES THE NEWLY APPOINTED UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR AND IMPLORSES THE GOVERNMENT TO ENGAGE AND COMPLY

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) would like to extend warmest welcomes to Mr. Surya Subedi, the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Cambodia, upon his arrival in the Kingdom. Furthermore we would like to take this opportunity to call on the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia to engage with the new Special Rapporteur in a spirit of co-operation and respect for the human rights of the people of Cambodia.

Mr. Subedi’s predecessor, Professor Yash Ghai, recently resigned from the position citing the frequent and numerous personal attacks he was subjected to by the Government as well as the attitude of disdain with which his recommendations were generally met. During his three years as Special Rapporteur, Professor Ghai endured repeated condemnation and public humiliation from government officials, including Prime Minister Hun Sen. In his 2008 written statement to the 9th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, Professor Ghai recounted how the prime minister referred to him as a deranged person and an animal. Furthermore, Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith made racial attacks on Professor Ghai, who is Kenyan, calling Kenyans savages. The contempt with which Professor Ghai was treated during his three years of service to Cambodia is an embarrassment to the country, an insult to the position and the man and an affront to human rights. It is imperative that the Government abandon this approach and adopts a new strategy involving fruitful dialogue with Mr. Surya and the expeditious implementation of his recommendations.

Equally importantly, the CCHR implores Mr. Surya Subedi to be frank and forthcoming in his critique of the human rights situation in Cambodia. The Special Rapporteur is uniquely positioned to provide unbiased and thorough criticism on human rights issues in Cambodia and to make meaningful recommendations. It is the role of the Special Rapporteur to address the serious human rights concerns of the country and an overly-diplomatic approach is not appropriate for this task. Thus, a reversion to soft diplomacy out of deference to the government would be detrimental to progress in the area of human rights.

The CCHR is hopeful that the appointment of Mr. Subedi will mark the beginning of a new epoch of respect for human rights in Cambodia in which the Special Rapporteur can make candid observations and recommendations on the human rights situation in Cambodia which the Government will genuinely seek to implement.

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