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CCHR welcomes decision to retract forms 1018 but calls for measures to ensure the exercise of universal franchise

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) welcomes the announcement by Tep Nytha, Secretary-General of the National Election Commission (NEC), that the form 1018 will be discontinued but we call on the NEC and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to take steps to ensure that any system put in place to replace the form 1018 does not replicate the problems that bedeviled the form 1018.

The forms 1018 are used by commune authorities to permit people without other forms of ID to register to vote, and to vote. The forms were the subject of widespread criticism by participants and guest speakers at Forums on Elections and Democratic Space which were conducted by CCHR between September and December 2010. The criticisms that were leveled at the form 1018, which are outlined in a forthcoming report that was compiled by CCHR at the conclusion of these forums, included concerns about the absence of serial numbers and a public record of the forms issued which were said to leave the forms open to manipulation. Participants at the forums recalled instances in which they said the forms were manipulated to allow supporters of the ruling party to vote but to preclude opposition supporters from voting. After the previous election in 2008, the European Union Election Observation Monitor stated that fraudulent use of the forms 1018 was “a relatively widespread phenomenon”.

While we welcome the announcement that the forms 1018 will be discontinued, we urge the NEC and the RGC to move to ensure that an alternative system is put in place that will ensure individuals without other forms of identification are not precluded from voting. Given the fact that Senate and Commune Elections will take place in 2012, the NEC and RGC must work quickly to ensure that individuals without other forms of ID are not disenfranchised as a result of the decision to discontinue the forms 1018.

Equally, CCHR calls on the NEC and RGC to ensure that any system put in place to replace the forms 1018 does not replicate the problems associated with the forms 1018. As noted by the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL) in today's *Cambodia Daily*, the problems associated with the forms 1018 were as much to do with safeguards in place regarding the issuance of the forms as opposed to the nature of the forms themselves. In order to quell these fears, CCHR calls on the NEC and RGC to publicly outline the safeguards – including serialization and public records – that they intend to put in place to ensure that any substitute forms facilitate voting by all individuals qualified to vote, regardless of political persuasion.

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