



**មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលសិទ្ធិមនុស្សកម្ពុជា**  
**Cambodian Center for Human Rights**

**CCHR MEDIA COMMENT – Phnom Penh, 14 December 2012**

**Cambodian Government seeks to shut down internet cafés in Phnom Penh thereby posing a threat to internet freedoms**

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights, would like to express its grave concerns regarding the recent move by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to restrict the freedom of the internet in Cambodia. This recent move was reported by the Cambodia Daily Newspaper on 13 December 2012, in the article entitled, “Government Order May Close Many of City’s Internet Cafés”.

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications has issued a Circular dated 12 November 2012 calling for the relocation of all internet cafés located within a 500 meter radius of schools and educational institutions in Phnom Penh. A Circular is a measure endorsed by a Minister or the Prime Minister and is used to explain a point of law or to provide guidance with regards to a point of law. It is advisory in nature, and does not have binding legal force. Similar to a Proclamation, it has limited scope but can be quickly implemented. If applied, this circular would result in an almost total ban on internet cafés located in the city center, thereby unjustifiably restricting internet access to those who do not possess personal computers. Moreover, the Circular seeks to outlaw “all kinds of [internet] games”, and effectively places them on the same footing as terrorism, economic crimes, and the viewing of pornography. The penalties for the violation of the Circular include forced closures of internet cafés, the confiscation of equipment, and arrest.

This Circular bears a striking similarity to draconian cyber laws already in place in China and Vietnam, and appears to be another step to pave the way for the Government’s forthcoming Anti-Cyber Crime Law. This most recent move not only curtails the rights to freedom of expression and information in Cambodia, both of which are protected under Article 41 of the Cambodian Constitution (the “Constitution”), but also violates [UN Human Rights Council Resolution L13](#) regarding the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet.

**Responding to this recent crackdown on the internet cafes, Ramana Sorn, Project Coordinator of CCHR’s Cambodian Freedom of Expression Project, stated:**

*“The internet is very useful for people who would like to express themselves or make their voices heard. Internet penetration in Cambodia is low when compared to its neighbouring countries, partly due to the digital divide in the country. However, the internet is popular among young people who use it to express their thoughts and share information. In the past I believed that the Cambodian people were fortunate not to be subject to restrictions on internet access sanctioned by the Cambodian government, similar to*

*restrictions imposed by the governments in China, Vietnam and even Thailand. Sadly, the situation has since changed. Instead of imposing restrictions, the Cambodian government should make use of emerging technologies to engage with the Cambodian people and allow more dialogue and discussion, rather than seeking to silence opinion and dissent”.*

**For more information, please contact Ms. Ramana Sorn, via telephone: +855 (0) 17 65 55 91 or e-mail at [ramanasorn@cchrcambodia.org](mailto:ramanasorn@cchrcambodia.org) or Orla Kelly, Consultant via telephone: +855 (0) 67 72 70 25 or email at [orla.kelly@cchrcambodia.org](mailto:orla.kelly@cchrcambodia.org).**

Notes to 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 – primarily civil and political rights – throughout Cambodia.

CCHR is a member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression.

The Cambodian Human Rights Portal [www.sithi.org](http://www.sithi.org) is the 2011 winner of the Information Society Innovation Fund Award in the category of Rights and Freedoms.