



**CCHR MEDIA COMMENT – Phnom Penh, 23 August 2013**

**CCHR condemns the disruption by the authorities of public forum organized by CCIM**

[The Cambodian Center for Human Rights \(“CCHR”\)](#) condemns the disruption of the public forum on elections organized by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (“CCIM”) in Battambang on 22 August 2013 as reported in *The Phnom Penh Post* today (Friday, 23 August 2013). The authorities cracked down on the forum, preventing participants from entering the private house where it was taking place. They claimed that the forum was not permitted by law, as the organizer had not asked for authorization in advance. No such authorization for the organization of public trainings and forums is required under Cambodian law.

The right to freedom of assembly is guaranteed under Article 41 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia and under Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the “ICCPR”), ratified by Cambodia in 1992. Under both laws, the right to freedom of assembly may be subject to some restrictions for the protection of public order, national security, public morals and the rights and freedoms of others. In this case, there is no evidence that restrictions of the assembly – the public form organized by CCIM – were justified on any of the above grounds. The crackdown by the police was a disruption of public order in and of itself. The actions of the authorities are therefore in violation of the right of Cambodian citizens to freedom of assembly. Through effectively silencing the forum organizers and participants, the authorities also acted in violation of the citizens’ rights to freedom of expression, which is protected under Cambodian domestic and international law – Article 41 of the Constitution and Article 19 of the ICCPR.

The disruption by the authorities of public forums and meetings organized by non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) in Cambodia is a regular occurrence. On 27 July 2012, CCHR organized a joint training session on land rights with local partner the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Organization (“ADHOC”) in Ratanakkiri province, which was disrupted by local authorities claiming that CCHR and ADHOC had failed to obtain permission for the workshop. By law it is not required that organizers ask permission to hold such trainings and CCHR had in fact notified the authorities in advance out of courtesy. The joint training was eventually canceled due to safety concerns as the situation quickly escalated when one of the police officers arrived on the scene with an M-16 assault rifle. Some months later, on 24 September, the governor of Lomphat district, Ratanakkiri province tried to prevent CCHR from holding a public forum in his district, once again claiming that CCHR did not have a valid permission letter, despite the lack of legal justification for this claim.

**In response to this case, CCHR Freedom of Expression Project Coordinator Ramana Sorn states:**

*“Such disruption by the authorities of NGO events is not new in Cambodia. The aggressive crackdown on public forums and trainings not only constitutes a grave violation of the rights to freedom of assembly and expression but also disrupts public order and increases the risk of violent clashes – what the authorities profess that they are attempting to prevent. National authorities must ensure that local counterparts are aware of the laws in place and the rights of their constituents in order to avoid such incidents in the future.”*

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Notes to the 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 throughout Cambodia.

CCHR is a member of International Freedom of Expression Exchanges (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression. CCHR is also a member of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) SOS-Torture Network.

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 and the 2013 winner of the Communication for Social Change Award, awarded by the Centre of Communication and Social Change at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.