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Cambodian Center for Human Rights

CCHR MEDIA COMMENT – Phnom Penh, 8 May 2015

CCHR reiterates its call for an open consultation on NGO law

[The Cambodian Center for Human Rights](#) (“CCHR”) strongly regrets the decision – reported by *The Cambodia Daily* on 8 May 2015 (‘Secret Draft of NGO Law Arrives at Council of Ministers’, p.3) – to send the draft Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (“LANGO”) to the Council of Ministers, signaling that no further consultation would likely take place between civil society and the executive. In a joint statement dated 7 April 2015, nearly 300 local and international civil society organizations expressed their concerns over the lack of transparency in the legislative process and called once again for public consultation. It is regrettable that despite these efforts to seek constructive dialogue, the government has reiterated its intention to speed up the adoption of the draft LANGO without further genuine consultation with civil society actors.

The 2011 draft LANGO contained provisions that would undermine the ability of national and international civil society actors to carry out their work without interference. CCHR recalls that in 2011, Prime Minister Hun Sen reportedly stated that the adoption of the LANGO would be delayed for two years, to allow the government and civil society organizations to work together on a mutually acceptable draft. Nevertheless, no consultations have been held since then. In the past, civil society organizations have worked in partnership with the government in order to find common solutions. In complete contrast to this constructive approach, a government spokesman, Mr. Phay Sihan, reportedly said that the “when [the draft] reaches the National Assembly, then the people [will] have the chance to review that one.” Concerted efforts to increase transparency in the legislative process are necessary and possible, as shown by the recent consultations on Access to Information and Environmental Impact Assessment laws. It is to be hoped that the National Assembly will demonstrate a similar attitude in the coming weeks. CCHR reiterates that a democratic government should stop and consult with civil society.

CCHR Executive Director Sopheap Chak commented:

“Cambodia is a country where crucial laws continue to be adopted without adequate public consultations, as proved by the recently passed electoral and judicial reform laws. Despite the supposed commitment of the government to a transparent and participatory democratic process, including the publication of draft laws, genuine consultations with civil society and a legislative agenda in line with public interests, the reality is very different. Unfortunately, the

fostering of a civil society that is fully engaged in public life, including during the legislative process, is not a priority for the government unless it serves its political goals, and this has serious consequences for the development of genuine democracy in Cambodia. Steps should be urgently taken in that direction, as recommended during the second Universal Periodic Review of Cambodia and in the recently released Concluding Observations of the UN Human Rights Committee.”

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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 World Organization Against Torture (“OMCT”) SOS-Torture Network; the International Freedom of Expression Exchanges (“IFEX”), the global network for freedom of expression; the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (“SEAPA”); and the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (“CIVICUS”).

The Cambodian Human Rights Portal 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 for Communication and Social Change at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.