Second National Dialogue on Legal and Public Policies to Protect LGBTIQ People in Cambodia

Joint Press Release by the Co-Organizers

Phnom Penh, 27 June 2019

Today, on 27 June 2019, the Second National Dialogue on Legal and Public Policies to Protect Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) People in Cambodia took place at the Sunway Hotel in Phnom Penh. This dialogue was co-organized by the Royal Government of Cambodia’s Cambodian Human Rights Committee (CHRC) and local NGOs including Rainbow Community Kampuchea (RoCK), Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC), Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), and Micro Rainbow International Foundation (MRI Foundation).

This Second Dialogue on Legal and Public Policies to Protect LGBTIQ People in Cambodia aimed at continuing and expanding discussions between LGBTIQ community members and their government representatives in order to seek legal and policy responses to current priority issues identified by the community. The objective of this second dialogue was also to review progress on legal and public policy protections for LGBTIQ people in Cambodia since the first dialogue, which took place in May 2018, and identify the ways forward to achieving legal and policy changes to ensure equal rights for LGBTIQ individuals in Cambodia.

A total of approximately 150 participants took part in the dialogue, including representatives of relevant ministries of the Royal Government of Cambodia, members of the LGBTIQ community, their parents and other relatives, local authorities, representatives of civil society organizations, relevant private sector stakeholders, and representatives of foreign embassies in Cambodia. This second dialogue was presided over by H.E. Keo Remy, Delegate Minister to the Prime Minister and President of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee (CHRC), accompanied by H.E. Nhean Sochetra, General Director of the Department for Social Development of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA). Honorable speakers representing the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Identification of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, and the Ministry of Education, Youth & Sport (MoEYS) and the CHRC also joined this dialogue.

During the dialogue, three main priority issues identified by LGBTIQ communities were discussed:

1. **Marriage and Adoption rights for Rainbow Families:** Discussion on legal and policy reforms related to rainbow families, aiming to identify methodologies for achieving marriage equality and family protections for LGBTIQ persons.

2. **Discrimination at School and the Workplace:** Discussion on legal and policy reforms required to end discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression in schools and in the field of employment.

3. **Domestic Violence against Lesbian and Bisexual Persons and Transgender Men:** Discussion on legal and policy reforms needed to end violence and discrimination in the family context.

Most government representatives agreed to further discuss the issues raised within their ministries and continue dialogue with communities and civil society. Several ministries,
including MoWA and MoEYS, also committed to include LGBTIQ rights as part of their awareness raising activities at the sub-national level.

Furthermore, during the dialogue, H.E. Keo Remy announced that the Royal Government of Cambodia accepted all of the recommendations specifically related to the protection of LGBTIQ individuals’ rights received during the third Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a United Nations mechanism. These include recommendations related to the enactment of legislation allowing marriage equality for rainbow couples, laws and policies explicitly prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, and enabling legal gender recognition. By accepting these recommendations, the government has made a political commitment to implement the necessary measures before the next review, which is planned to be held in 2023. “As civil society and communities, we welcome this important commitment by the government. We look forward to continuing our dialogue and cooperation with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of these recommendations and guarantee equal rights for LGBTIQ individuals in Cambodia.” – Ms. Heng Cheyleaphy, Programme Team Manager at RoCK.

“We are very pleased to see that this second dialogue was attended by even more government officials than the first one in 2018, thereby building further understanding between relevant ministries and our communities. We understand that changing legislation can be a slow process, and is also deeply interlinked with cultural perceptions, yet it is possible. As communities and civil society, we are ready to play our part to support the development of laws and policies that respond to the needs of our rainbow citizens.” - Ms. Ly Pisey, Coordinator for RoCK.

The co-organizers hope this dialogue will form the basis of sustained engagement and collaboration between all stakeholders in order to continue working towards the development of laws and policies to strengthen LGBTIQ individuals’ social inclusiveness and guarantee respect for equal rights for LGBTIQ individuals in Cambodia.

“I have been actively advocating for the rights of the rainbow community for over ten years, and I am really happy to see many of our government representatives take part in the dialogue today. This symbolizes increased awareness among government stakeholders of the issues faced by LGBTIQ people here in Cambodia, and I am hopeful that the next generation of the rainbow community will be given the dignity and respect of fully equal rights.” - Mr. Soth Yun, RoCK community member from Takeo Province.

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