CCHR PRESS RELEASE – Phnom Penh, 8 December 2019

CCHR to host ‘My Voice My Rights’ event to showcase the Voices for Gender Equality photo exhibition and to launch CCHR’s report on: ‘The Right to Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics in Employment in Cambodia’

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) will host an event entitled ‘My Voice My Rights’ on Monday 9 December 2019 to showcase the Voices for Gender Equality (“VGE”) project’s photo exhibition of activists (“the Exhibition”), and to launch the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (“SOGI”) project’s report titled ‘The Right to Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics in Employment in Cambodia’ (“the Report”).

The Exhibition will consist of photographs and profiles of 15 inspiring Women Human Rights Defenders (“WHRDs”) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (“LGBTIQ”) activists from Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, and Preah Sihanouk. The Exhibition has been curated by CCHR’s Voices for Gender Equality project and aims to highlight the challenges faced by women and LGBTIQ individuals in Cambodia and raise awareness and support for the causes the activists advocate on behalf of. In addition, CCHR will release the photographs and profiles on our website as well. The Exhibition will also be available for public viewing at the Bophana Centre, #64 Street 200, Boeng Reang, Phnom Penh, from 16 until 31 December 2019. The available viewing hours will be 8am - 12pm and 2 - 6pm Monday to Friday, and from 2pm – 6pm on Saturdays. To celebrate the launch of the Exhibition on 16 December 2019 at the Bophana Centre, there will be an event from 4 – 6pm including a Forum Theatre performance exploring the challenges WHRDs face.

The Report is produced by CCHR’s SOGI project and is the product of both desk and field research, including 118 interviews conducted across seven provinces with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (“LGBTQ”) individuals and a representative of the Royal Government of Cambodia (the “RGC”). The findings reveal that LGBTQ individuals face discrimination on the basis of their Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (“SOGIESC”) throughout the employment cycle.

The Report highlights that despite protections provided in international law and standards, Cambodia lacks essential legal protections against discrimination on the bases of SOGIESC. This results in LGBTIQ individuals being denied the right to meaningful equality.

LGBTQ individuals face discrimination in accessing employment. A fifth of respondents said that they had been refused a job because of their SOGIE. Of those who had been refused a job because of their SOGIE, 65% reported that this had happened to them multiple times and 65% stated that they had not reported or complained about this discrimination because they did not know who to report it to or they had no hope of receiving support. 25% of respondents said that they had hidden their SOGIE during a job interview, and over half did so because they feared they would not be hired.

LGBTQ individuals face discrimination during employment in the form of exclusion and harassment. 36% of respondents said that they had experienced discrimination and bullying, such as verbal

1 CCHR was unable to interview any intersex individuals and so our field research assesses the lived experiences of LGBTQ individuals, only permitting us to draw conclusions on SOGIE, not sex characteristics.
harassment and name-calling, in the workplace as a result of their SOGIE from members of the public (61%), colleagues (45%) and more rarely their employers (6%). Over two-thirds of respondents who experienced harassment or bullying as a result of their SOGIE did not report it or complain. This is usually because they do not know who to report it to or they have no hope of receiving support. Those who do report incidents are likely to confide in friends and family or raise the issue with NGOs. Over half of LGBTQ respondents reported experiencing emotional problems as a result of discrimination in the workplace.

Despite the Government’s stated commitment to eliminating discrimination against the LGBTIQ community, the Report reveals Cambodia lacks essential legal protections against SOGIESC discrimination. 92% of respondents believe that job opportunities for LGBTIQ individuals in Cambodia are not equal to the rest of the population, and in particular for transgender people. These findings require the immediate attention of the RGC if Cambodia is to meet its international human rights obligations. CCHR calls on the RGC to follow the detailed recommendations set out in the Report. CCHR recommends legislative changes to explicitly prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of SOGIESC, as well as revising existing policies, such as the National Employment Policy, to guarantee equal opportunities for LGBTIQ individuals.

CCHR also calls on public and private sector employers to apply the OHCHR’s “Standards of Conduct for Business in Tackling Discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, & Intersex People” and introduce non-discrimination policies to ensure inclusion in the workplace by prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal employment opportunities.

**CCHR’s Executive Director Chak Sopheap comments:**
“Cambodia has made great strides in respect of LGBTIQ and women’s rights in recent years. LGBTIQ communities have gained in confidence, pride and visibility, as the movement for equal rights has grown. However, this new visibility has served to shine a light on the serious inequalities and discrimination still facing LGBTIQ Cambodians. The women’s rights movement in Cambodia continues to gather momentum yet further action from the RGC is required. It is imperative that the government takes concrete legislative and policy steps to ensure gender equality and equality of LGBTIQ individuals is achieved in Cambodia, and to prevent discrimination against these groups so they can fully exercise their human rights.”

The Report is available on CCHR’s website for download in English. A copy of the Report in Khmer will be available shortly.

For more information, please contact CCHR’s SOGI project coordinator Nuon Sidara via telephone at +855 (0) 97 9666 566 or e-mail at sidara.nuon@cchrcambodia.org; CCHR’s VGE project coordinator Lim Borin via telephone at +855 (0) 12 9042 66 or e-mail at borin.lim@cchrcambodia.org; or CCHR’s Consultant Samantha Holmes at +855 (0) 96 205 8820 or e-mail at samantha.holmes@cchrcambodia.org.

– END–

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 the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression. CCHR is also a member of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) SOS-Torture Network, Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA), and OECD Watch.

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.