

## Authorities Reject Concerns Over Adoption Laws

Authorities have rejected claims from civil society organizations that the resumption of adoption laws between Cambodia and Italy pose a threat to the interest of children



*Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, January 12, 2023. Kiripost/Siv Channa*

The Ministry of Social Affairs has requested four civil society organizations who raised concerns about adoption policies to contact the ministry rather than issue a statement, with a spokesman claiming the country adheres to laws and there is no abuse that harms the interests of children.

Touch Channy, a spokesman for the Ministry of Social Affairs, told Kiripost that he had not received any statement from the four civil society organizations. He added that while the law on adoption in Cambodia has been reinstated, up to now, no adoptions have taken place.

“Indeed, since there is an adoption law, we haven’t allowed any nations to adopt Cambodian children. For this adoption, Italy hasn't yet submitted an application to be an adoption agency,” he said. “So, it is not yet fully operational after we open the adoption process. If the process is complete, we follow the rules and procedures. There is no abuse that harms the interests of children.”

On Wednesday, CCHR, ADHOC, LICADHO, and ICAV called on the Cambodian and Italian governments to halt plans to reinstate international adoption. A joint statement said that Cambodia has not adopted protections that will protect the best interests of children or prevent the recurrence of serious fraud and corruption that has been noted in past international adoptions.

Although Cambodia has enacted laws governing international adoption since 2009, there is still a lack of secure protection

against the escalation of corruption and fraud that has led to fraud adoption in the past, it said.

“International adoption should not be used to evade the necessary reforms of Cambodia's child protection system. The Royal Government of Cambodia should focus on increasing access to protection and social support for families, as well as strengthening the local family care system, as well as building the capacity of social workers, both new and old,” it added.

“We hope that the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Government of Italy can immediately stop the reopening of international adoption to ensure that no Cambodian child or family is separated again.”

Channy said that Cambodia adheres to the rule that nations that want to adopt children must set up adoption agencies and work with the Cambodian National Authority. However, several nations that want to adopt have not yet implemented and enforced the law.

He added that the ministry is evaluating legal procedures and certain missing documents are still being filled up. “We have announced the reopening, but the full process is not yet available,” he confirmed.

On May 5, Cambodia and Italy agreed to continue international adoptions after it was temporarily suspended due to legal issues. International adoption between Cambodia and Italy took place between 2002 and 2011, resulting in the adoption of 795 Cambodian children to Italy. A total of 257 were female.