



Joint Statement

“The Access to Information Law Boosts Investments and Economic growth in Cambodia”

Cambodia’s civil society organizations (CSOs) call on the Royal Government and the National Assembly to quickly adopt a new Access to Information Law, in line with international standards, and to ensure the Cambodian citizens’ right information, in order to enhance transparency and accountability, improve public services and address the challenges that exists in several areas.

After more than a decade from the first drafting of this critically important bill, Cambodians are still concerned about their right to access public information, as both national and sub-national authorities seem reluctant or unable to disclose or disseminate information, also due to limited resources, despite international and national principles call the public administration's attention to fulfilling its role and responsibilities in disclosing information.

In any modern nation, and particularly those aspiring to reach the status of middle income developed countries, public information is one of the keys to success.

The Public needs information to monitor the works of its representatives, at all levels, and the private sector needs information to shape business strategies, draft long-term plans and take decisions related to investments. Without transparency and access to documents, budgets, public contracts and solid financial data, no serious company, small, medium-sized or large, foreign or domestic, would commit the resources that are much needed for the growth of our Country.

A modern Law on Access to Information, reflecting the recommendations of the society’s legal and business experts, and adhering to internationally-recognised standards, is therefore one of the requirements for any credible national development strategy. Procrastination ill serves the common goal of a modern Cambodia, on its trajectory to excel in the Region.

The spread of COVID-19 demonstrated the importance of the Royal Government’s role in actively implementing disclosure of information in the health sector. More recently, the RGC disclosed some data about national development projects, marking an important contribution to the promotion of access to information in Cambodia. However, the process of providing and receiving information on other public services is still lagging behind, affecting people’s rights and benefits, in particular on key issues like major development projects, national public procurement procedures and contracts, as well as economic land concessions, land issues and forced evictions, and other disputes directly involving the rights and welfare of many citizens.

The CSOs and Youths recognize the Royal Government's efforts to promote access to information, especially at the sub-national level, through programs enhancing good governance at the grassroots level, the social accountability framework, democratic development, and One Window Service. The Government's commitment to starting the process of drafting the Law on Access to Information has been highly appreciated by civil society organizations. During the 5th meeting with local journalists on 11 January 2023, Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen - then Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia - committed to the passing of Access to Information Law "in 2024 or 2025", and in any case during the 7th parliamentary mandate.

On the occasion of the celebration of the 2024 International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) under the theme "The Access to Information Law boosts Investments and Economic Growth in Cambodia", the CSOs' Access to Information Working Group (A2I WG) would like to propose the following recommendations to Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei HUN Manet, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia and to the Royal Government:

- Accelerate the legislative process on the Access to Information Law in accordance with international standards, to be completed in 2024 or 2025.
- Clearly identify in the Access to Information Law the type of information that is deemed "confidential".
- Instruct State ministries and departments and Governmental units to disclose public information, especially service fees, procedures for receiving services, and deadlines by law at the national level, economic land concession contracts, major development projects, national public procurement projects, land issues, forced evictions, and other disputes.
- Strengthen and establish mechanisms to pay special attention to disseminating information to all types of media to ensure that citizens, youth, people with disabilities, and indigenous peoples have access to information.
- Protect all citizens who disclose and share public information or any information that serves the public interest.
- Widely disseminate information on the right to information and encourage people, especially young people, to participate in the search for public information, related to communities' daily life.
- Create a better environment for the participation of citizens, especially young people, in the development process of Cambodia.

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