INTRODUCTION

This edition of the Sithi Project bi-monthly newsletter, the fifth to date, highlights two new features on Sithi.org: a map of acid attacks from 2009 to 2012 and a data analysis of women’s political representation at the commune level. Both of these features highlight the gap between commitments by the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) to address certain issues and the reality on the ground – a reality which results from a lack of concrete measures to implement those commitments.

ENDING IMPUNITY FOR ACID VIOLENCE

CCHR’s Project to End Acid Violence in Cambodia strives to address the culture of impunity that surrounds acid violence, which often results in victims not receiving the physical, psychological and legal assistance they require. Acid violence typically arises from personal resentment, family dispute, jealousy or infidelity. Acid is legal and cheap, and it is not difficult to transport yet causes irreversible physical and psychological damage to the survivors of acid attacks.

The above graph compares CCHR’s data – taken from public sources – and data collected by the Cambodian Acid Survivors Charity (CASC). CASC works with survivors of acid violence, including many who have not informed the authorities or the media of the attacks because they fear retaliation. Thus, the number of attacks recorded by CASC is significantly higher than the number of attacks reported in the news during the same time frame, which illustrates the extent to which the public at large remains unaware of the true extent of the problem. Indeed, experts assert that the “dark number” of unreported acid attacks in Cambodia might be equal to the number of reported attacks.

Despite the adoption of a comprehensive law designed to address the problem of acid violence, the majority of acid attacks in Cambodia never get to court. This is partly due to the fact that many survivors do not report the offense to the authorities because they know that the law is not enforced and the perpetrators often escape justice. Many survivors also

On 25 June, CCHR released a new map on acid attacks. The map provides information on cases of acid attacks that occurred in Cambodia between 2009 and 2012. There are no official statistics concerning acid attacks in Cambodia; the information on the map – 35 total cases – is gathered from Khmer and English news media and relevant publications. Because acid is a messy weapon and one attack can often harm multiple people, these 35 reported attacks resulted in 59 victims. Over half of the reported cases occurred in Phnom Penh with 19 attacks and 31 victims.
do not report the attacks because the public often blames the victims for the attack, rather than the perpetrators, leading survivors to feel ashamed and responsible for the attack. The inertia of the judiciary and the indifference the survivors experience everyday contribute to the legitimization of acid violence.

A culture of impunity will continue to surround acid violence in Cambodia as long as the law is not supplemented with concrete guidelines for implementation and systematic enforcement of the law. Read more about ending the cycle of impunity here.

**ANALYZING WOMEN’S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION**

Despite commitments by the RGC to increase women’s political representation, recent Commune/Sangkat Council elections in June 2012 demonstrate that there is still much to be done to achieve those goals. In line with the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals (“CMDG”), women’s political representation should reach 25% at the commune level and 30% in the National Assembly and Senate by 2015. However, during the June elections, women were only elected to 2,308 seats, or 17.79% of total seats, which is only a slight improvement from the 2007 elections, during which women were elected to only 14.6% of commune council seats.

CCHR analyzed both the candidate lists and the election results – using the election data supplied by the National Election Committee – and found that there are a number of issues besides the overall results being far from the CMDG targets. Particularly problematic is the fact that the positions women were elected into were overwhelmingly in the lower ranks of councils, with only 95 women countrywide being elected to the most senior position of Commune Chief.

Similarly, there were wide discrepancies between political parties, with some of the smaller parties achieving very low female representation. For instance, the Cambodian People’s Party (“CPP”) achieved the most representatives with 21.5% of their seats going to women, while the opposition parties have far lower percentages, with the Sam Rainsy Party (“SRP”) achieving only 11% and with two out of the seven parties that won seats in these elections having no women representatives at all.

With women comprising more than half of the population, there is still a long way to go to achieve equal representation of women at all levels of politics. These election results demonstrate that there is still a need for concerted efforts by both the Royal Government of Cambodia and political parties to promote women in politics. While there is a clear need for national legislation requiring specific quotas of women on candidate lists, the lack of such legislation should not stop individual parties from undertaking initiatives to increase the level of female representation within their own parties.

The full data analysis – which includes candidate list and election result data by province and by party – is available here.

**ABOUT THE SITHI PROJECT**

Sithi means ‘rights’ in Khmer. The Sithi Project aims at increasing awareness and understanding of human rights – especially civil and political rights – and their status in Cambodia.

**CONTACT**

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