Cambodia: The Official Launch of the First Online Human Rights Portal

Posted By Sopheap Chak On 26 July 2010 @ 18:32 pm In Cambodia,Cyber-Activism,East Asia,English,Human Rights,Technology for Transparency Network,Weblog | 1 Comment

Sithi.org [1], a Cambodian human rights portal that aims to crowdsource and curate reports of human rights violations, officially launched on July 22, 2010 with participation from various institutions including embassies, international and local NGOs, media and university representatives.

Over the past year, the site has developed rapidly. A number of reports of human rights violations [2], relevant legal instruments [3] and publications [4] have been made available on the site. This expansion of information has been accompanied by an increase in the number of visitors — from 8,000 to over 33,000 in the six months since the site was documented for the Technology for Transparency Network [5].

Information available on Sithi has been quoted and used in critical analysis and assessment for human rights and development. "Reports prepared by other NGOs on The Rights of Indigenous People [6] submitted to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination used two maps from Sithi.org to outline the extent of land problems facing indigenous people in Cambodia,” said Chor Chanthyda, Project Coordinator of Sithi, during her launch presentation. She adds that Economics Today [7] also used Sithi's development trend maps [8] in reporting problems with land concessions.

There was much useful feedback from the participants concerning the site navigation, users' contributions, and security for those who contribute cases.

Despite this remarkable success, there is much room for discussion and improvement if the site is to reach its goal of raising more awareness about human rights abuses through collaborative advocacy. Though Sithi originally planned to allow the public to report and submit instances of human rights violations, only trusted NGO partners are currently permitted to participate in order to ensure data verification. Secondly, though the number of visitors is on the rise, the site is still not widely known. Finally, the site has been difficult to navigate, something the organization has attempted to address over the past year. During the launch, the team encouraged NGOs and individuals to suggest changes that would make the site even more user-friendly and to provide advice on creating a plan to train NGOs on how to contribute cases. Sithi's future plans include developing a more user-friendly platform and improving local language accessibility so that the site can maximize its potential benefit to Cambodian society.

Article printed from Global Voices in English: http://globalvoicesonline.org


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