Cambodia Stepping Backward in Rights: Monitor

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Monday, 03 August 2009

Cambodia is taking steps backward in its pursuit of human rights and democracy, as attacks on journalists and politicians continue, a rights monitor said Thursday.

Defamation cases against Sam Rainsy Party parliamentarians Mu Sochua and Ho Vann, as well as opposition journalists were “a step backward that we are really concerned about,” Ou Virak, president of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, told “Hello VOA.”

The government has made it hard for democracy and rights activists to hold demonstrations to express their opinions or dissent, he said, allowing instead mainly social, economic or health assemblies.

“Nowadays it is really hard to organize any demonstration that the government is not happy with,” he said.
Those restrictions combined with people’s trauma from the Khmer Rouge, wars and economic hardships contributed to low turnout for demonstrations, he said.

Meanwhile, the Sam Rainsy Party has announced it will shift its strategy away from street demonstrations and court cases against the government.

“I hope that this strategy change is part of an understanding with each other, or an exchange by the opposition policy for [Cambodia’s] betterment other than what is being done by the government,” he said.

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