

**Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:** Ravina Shamdasani

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## Briefing note on Cambodia

We are concerned about the human rights environment around the elections that were recently held in Cambodia without the dissolved main opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). This left a significant proportion of the population without chosen representation, causing concern for their rights to political participation. People were reportedly intimidated or paid to vote, and civil society organizations faced harassment in the run up to the election. Seventeen popular websites were blocked around election day. There were further restrictions placed on the freedom of expression of individual voters and political opponents who called for a boycott or announced their intention to abstain from voting in the election, including through threats, fines and legal action. We urge the Government to refrain from taking legal action in such cases. Under human rights law, the right to freedom of expression protects calls for a boycott in a non-compulsory election.

Now that the official results of the national elections have been announced on Wednesday, we call on the Government to create an environment for open and inclusive political debate that allows all voices in Cambodia to be heard.

We urge the Government to release political opponents, journalists, human rights defenders and ordinary citizens who have been detained for exercising their human rights, in particular their right to freedom of expression. We also call on the Government to lift the ban against opponents taking part in political activity, and protect and expand space for civil society. Respect for human rights and a vibrant civil society that has the space to debate even complex and controversial issues are essential ingredients if the conflict of the past is to be avoided, and if development is to be peaceful and sustainable.

**ENDS**

*For more information and media requests, please contact Ravina Shamdasani - + 41 22 917 9169 / [rshamdasani@ohchr.org](mailto:rshamdasani@ohchr.org) or Liz Throssell - + 41 22 917 9466 / [ethrossell@ohchr.org](mailto:ethrossell@ohchr.org)*

*2018 is the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are urging people everywhere to **Stand Up for Human Rights**: [www.standup4humanrights.org](http://www.standup4humanrights.org).*