

Honing in on what's important to women

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has been paying special attention to matters critical for women in all areas of its work



Photo: OHCHR Cambodia

Participants of a conference for women in the judiciary co-organized by OHCHR pose for a picture

Be Kimyeang from the remote province of Steung Treng hasn't really participated in many trainings, or at least not in as many as she would have liked. And when she did, she was too intimidated by the overwhelming number of men in the room - she found it hard to speak up and fully participate in workshops. This is why she was particularly pleased when, in November 2014, she was invited to attend a conference for female judges and prosecutors from across Cambodia, which was organized by the Ministry of Justice, with support from OHCHR and UN Women.

The conference saw 50 female judges and prosecutors learn about better law implementation, with special emphasis on domestic and international legislation relating to gender-based violence and gender equality, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Because the number of women in Cambodia's judiciary remains extremely low – 13% as of February 2015, according to government statistics – the conference also allowed the participating women to exchange their experiences and ideas about how to boost female representation in the justice sector. The discussions and relationships forged during the meeting led the participants to call for the establishment of a female magistrates' network, and the judges and prosecutors present requested a follow-up event to discuss how to take this idea further.

This is not the sole example of OHCHR's commitment to issues that matter to women. OHCHR mainstreams gender in all its areas of work. The most notable and recent examples include improving the treatment and conditions of women in prison, looking at the specific impact on women of land and housing disputes, and assisting women in seeking accountability for sexual violence committed during the Khmer Rouge regime. To this end, between 2011 and 2013, OHCHR, through the UN Voluntary Fund for the Victims of Torture, supported the Cambodia Defenders Project (CDP) – a non-governmental organization which investigated forced marriages and rape under the Khmer Rouge regime and provides legal representation to female civil parties in cases before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia.

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"I never attended such a conference before. Because there were only women in the room we all had an opportunity to speak and to share ideas about how to implement the law better."

Be Kimyeang
Judge at the First Instance Court
Steung Treng Province