

Cambodia: UN expert alarmed by reports of mass trial of activists

GENEVA (25 November 2020) – The UN human rights expert on Cambodia today expressed serious concerns about an imminent mass trial of individuals associated with the disbanded Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

Rhona Smith, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, said credible information pointed to trials commencing on 26 November of at least 113 individuals summoned by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court. Several others have been summoned for a trial in December.

Most face charges of conspiracy and incitement to create serious chaos to social security, crimes punishable by up to 10 years in jail.

“The mass trials of CNRP activists appear to be politically motivated, lacking clear legal grounds and constitute a serious violation of the due process rights, firmly established by international human rights law,” said Smith, adding that such judicial proceedings appeared to be part of a strategy to intimidate and discredit opponents of the government.

“This is not an isolated episode. Civic and democratic space in Cambodia has continued to shrink and there remains little evidence of political rapprochement and reconciliation.”

In recent months, authorities have resorted to suppressive measures against those affiliated with CNRP. Since June 2019, over 150 people associated with CNRP have been arrested and detained, with the majority facing charges of plotting and incitement, the UN expert said.

“Every person must have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare his or her case.” Smith said.

“As some of the individuals summoned are currently residing outside Cambodia, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the defendants do not have access to relevant materials, including exculpatory material to prepare their defence,” she added.

“I call on the authorities to open up civic space, protect and promote fundamental freedoms, including the rights to assembly and of expression, and to ensure the right to a fair trial for all, as guaranteed by international human rights norms and standards and Cambodian laws,” Smith said.

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Ms. Rhona Smith (United Kingdom) was appointed as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2015.

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