



Protect the right to adequate housing for resettled communities says UN, after report launch

Phnom Penh, 8 March 2022 – The right to adequate housing in Cambodia has not been fully respected, protected and fulfilled in relation to community relocation and resettlement – but new resettlement guidelines aim to help the Government provide a better standard of housing to evicted communities.

As a part of its technical cooperation with the Royal Government of Cambodia to support state institutions to respect and protect human rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Cambodia has launched a report on human rights and resettlement that also contain the guidelines and a recommendation to create an Inter-Ministerial Committee to address the identified challenges in a holistic manner.

United Nations Resident Coordinator Pauline Tamesis welcomed the report in her opening remarks at the launch of the study yesterday.

“These recommendations are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and coincides with the pledges the Royal Government made during Cambodia’s Universal Periodic Review in 2019 to ensure that all pending land disputes, evictions and relocations are settled in a fair, transparent, negotiated and adequately compensated manner,” she said.

The European Union and Sweden-funded “[Study on the Human Rights Situation of Communities Living in Resettlement Sites in Cambodia](#)” found that on multiple occasions resettlement sites were situated in locations that made it hard for affected populations to enjoy their other human rights, for example in cases where education and healthcare services are located far from the sites. An Inter-Ministerial Committee could ensure all rights were protected in cases where resettlement is deemed necessary.

The report comes at the conclusion of a two-year empirical and comprehensive study looking at the human rights situation in 17 resettlement sites in Phnom Penh and eight provinces. The report illustrated a worrying trend that evicted communities were sent to resettlement sites before infrastructure and services, in particular provision of portable water, sanitation, food security, roads, electricity, health and education services, were in place.

“Relevant authorities should ensure that prior to resettlement, basic services are established in the resettlement sites,” Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Cambodia Pradeep Wagle said at the launch event. The report also found that resettled households were not provided sufficient notice of relocation and were not given adequate time to plan and prepare for relocation.

Head of the Embassy of Sweden Section Office in Phnom Penh Camilla Ottoson said that the launch of the report was well-timed.

“The report offers constructive findings to the government to address the human rights concerns related to resettlement sites. The report also complements multiple Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, in which all UN member states agree to ensure access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services by 2030.”

A number of frontline defenders and CSOs were present at the launch including Cambodia Centre for Human Rights Executive Director Chak Sopheap, who said the report highlighted important linkages between the right to adequate housing and other fundamental human rights.

“[There is a clear] interdependence between the right to adequate housing and the enjoyment of other human rights including the right to education, the right to work, and the right to the highest attainable standard of health,” she said, noting the particular challenges faced by women and indigenous peoples.

Existing laws, government policies and regulations related to adequate housing provide a certain level of protection from forced evictions and resettlement. However, to date, there are no existing national guidelines on resettlement when relocation is a result of economic land concessions and privately funded development projects.

“The weakness lies in the implementation, which is primarily related to institutional capacity and the lack of coordination between different Ministries to develop and implement concrete policy measures,” People in Need Cambodia Country Director Lukas Laube said.

“If adopted, the draft resettlement guidelines would address this.”

OHCHR recommends the Royal Government of Cambodia to adopt and implement the draft Resettlement Guidelines annexed to the study and for the creation of inter-ministerial committee to allow the situation of human rights and resettlement are addressed through a whole-government approach.

“OHCHR Cambodia believes that the adoption and implementation of these guidelines can and will contribute to the enjoyment of all people, groups and communities to the right to an adequate standard of living,” Mr Wagle said.

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