

28 September 2011

UN Special Rapporteur on Cambodia urges authorities to stop the current draft NGO law

GENEVA – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Surya P. Subedi, urged the Cambodian authorities to carefully review the current draft Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations, expressing concern that “it may hamper the legitimate work of NGOs in the country.”

“The Government of Cambodia should not proceed with the draft NGO law in its present form,” Mr. Subedi said presenting his annual report* on the situation of human rights in Cambodia to the UN Human Rights Council. “Of course, as a sovereign country, Cambodia is entitled to enact a law on NGOs, but the decision to adopt a law to regulate NGOs and associations is a critical initiative which requires careful attention, given its long-term implications for the development of Cambodian society - and in turn the country – itself.”

The UN expert drew special attention to the fact that many of the civil society organizations in Cambodia have been playing a complementary role to that of the State in helping or delivering key social services in the areas of education, health, rural development, sanitation, social welfare and the protection of natural resources and the environment.

Together with the UN Special Rapporteurs on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Mr. Maina Kiai, and on the situation of human rights defenders, Ms. Margaret Sekaggya, he also urged the Government to take fully on board the concerns raised during the consultation process before enacting the law, especially the onerous requirements for registration and the lack of clear criteria on which registration applications will be considered.

In his report, Mr. Subedi acknowledges that the overall situation of human rights had improved over the years in Cambodia, especially with the enactment of a number of key legislations. He also notes that the Government has sped up its legislative programme designed to implement, among other things, the key recommendations he made relating to the judiciary in his report last year.

However, the Special Rapporteur underscored that there still was “a great deal of work to be done to strengthen the rule of law, to accelerate the process of democratisation and to enhance the capacity of parliament to hold executive to account.”

In his view, despite encouraging progress made by the country in developing parliamentary practices within a relatively short period of time, “there remains a number of shortcomings in the workings of Parliament in general and the National Assembly in particular,” and especially those relating to the exercise of freedom of speech by members of parliament and effective representation of their constituents by those belonging to the opposition political parties.

(*) Check the report by the Special Rapporteur:

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/18session/A-HRC-18-46_en.pdf

ENDS

Professor Surya P. Subedi was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Cambodia in March 2009. He is currently Professor of International Law at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom.

OHCHR Country page – Cambodia:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/KHIndex.aspx>

The core international human rights instruments:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/index.htm#core>

*For further information and **media enquiries**, please contact Ms. Maureen Teo (Tel: + 41 22 928 9632 / email: mteo@ohchr.org).*

For **media inquiries** related to other UN independent experts:

Xabier Celaya, OHCHR Media Unit (+ 41 22 917 9383 / xcelaya@ohchr.org)

UN Human Rights, follow us on social media:

<http://www.facebook.com/unitednationshumanrights>

<https://twitter.com/unrightswire>