

Cambodia: UN rights expert calls for ‘reset’ to put people first

GENEVA (25 September 2019) – A UN human rights expert has expressed her concerns about civil and political rights Cambodia, including a ban on the main opposition party, calling on the Government to reset the dial to ensure a fully inclusive society based on democratic principles and human rights.

“It is time to reset the approach to rights and freedoms in Cambodia and ensure that all rights and freedoms voluntarily accepted by the Government are enjoyed by everyone in the country,” the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Rhona Smith, said.

“Human rights are, by definition, about people. Not politics.

“The votes and the voice of the 42 percent of the population who voted for the CNRP at the communal level remains denied and yet to be remedied,” she added.

The independent expert reiterated her call for the release of opposition leader Kem Sokha from pre-trial detention, and the swift conclusion of the investigation into his case to ensure his right to a fair trial within a reasonable time or for the charges to be dropped.

Smith also addressed the recent arrests and summonses of over 100 former members of Kem Sokha’s party charged with offences related to engaging in political discussions or activities contrary to the November 2017 decision of the Supreme Court to dissolve the CNRP. “The summonses and charges against these people are vague and unclear

raising concerns not only for the freedom of expression and association and political rights but also for the right to a fair trial.”

While the Special Rapporteur welcomed the removal of the requirements that civil society organisations must provide a three-day notification prior to holding events, she expressed serious concerns about civil society events and operations being monitored by local authorities.

She called on all sides of the political spectrum to focus on constructive debate of policies and programmes rather than on personalities as the best way to achieve peace and development in a sustainable manner.

Smith cited the relocation of the ethnic Vietnamese floating communities in Kampong Chhang, and recommended that the relevant authorities ensure that the conditions of all relocations are in line with economic and social standards.

The rights of people with disabilities in detention and rehabilitation centres was another area of concern. “People with disabilities, in particular mental disabilities, should never be deprived of their liberty on the basis of their disability,” Smith said when addressing the situation of people with cognitive impairment and disabilities in the Rehabilitation Care Centre for people with mental health conditions in Kandal Province.

Smith reiterated her commitment to working with the Government, civil society and other stakeholders to strengthen the protection, promotion and respect for human rights in the Kingdom.

“A clearer articulation of human rights in the Government’s strategic development framework and practical actions will help to support the country’s rapid development and for it to be inclusive, peaceful and just, leaving no one behind,” Smith told the Human Rights Council.

ENDS

UN experts: Rhona Smith (United Kingdom) [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia.](#)

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