

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada



NGOs in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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Organizations: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), and International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
Item: Item 10 – Interactive dialogue on the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia
Date: 25 September 2019
Speaker: Catherine Morris

Oral Statement to the 42nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), NGOs in special consultative status

Thank you, Mr. President;

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), and the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) thank the Special Rapporteur for her reports.¹ Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that no one is "left behind," necessitates equal access to remedies for rights violations within a trustworthy and independent legal system.

Cambodia has not fulfilled its treaty obligations to establish judicial independence and integrity. Civil society's rights advocacy is continually resisted.² Lawyers, defenders,³ journalists,⁴ politicians, or activists reporting on corruption,⁵ election irregularities,⁶ labour rights violations,⁷ illegitimate land acquisition,⁸ environmental degradation,⁹ or other rights abuses, including by businesses, are routinely subjected to official vilification; intimidation; interference with rights to expression, association,¹⁰ and assembly; criminalization; arbitrary detention;¹¹ and even unlawful killings with impunity.¹²

Since 2017, political opposition has been systematically suppressed, including through misuse of the judiciary. Despite the Special Rapporteur's repeated calls for release of opposition leader Kem Sokha, he remains under court-imposed restrictions tantamount to house arrest. The Special Rapporteur has been denied visits with him¹³ contrary to Special Procedures terms of reference for country visits.¹⁴ In May, numerous former opposition members were summoned to court for questioning.¹⁵ In September, the government threatened to arrest anyone supporting opposition politician Sam Rainsy's return to Cambodia.¹⁶

Cambodia's responses to Special Procedures' recommendations for the past twenty-five years have been characterized by disregard, delay, resistance, or hostility.¹⁷ Continued support for the Special Rapporteur's mandate is critical to ensure that Cambodia fulfils its international human rights obligations. We request that the Council extend the mandate.

Thank you, Mr. President.

References

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⁸ Coalition Calls on UN Expert to Investigate Claims of State-Backed Land Grabs in Cambodia, RFA, 12 November 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/coalition-11122018171045.html>.

⁹ Global Witness, *Enemies of the State? How governments and businesses silence land and environmental defenders*, 30 July 2019, <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/gb/campaigns/environmental-activists/enemies-state/>.

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