

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

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

Organization: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

Item: Item 10: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia

Date: 29 March 2021

Speaker: Catherine Morris

Oral Statement to the 49th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), NGO in special consultative status

Cambodia: Fulfil treaty promises with action to uphold rights of dissidents and defenders

Mr. President,

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada thanks the Special Rapporteur for his report.

This month Cambodia told this Council that its ratification of almost all core human rights conventions shows the importance it attaches to human rights.¹ Cambodia's reality differs from its treaty promises.

Cambodia says it holds "human rights at the core,"² pointing to its COVID-19 vaccination record. Yet the government deploys pandemic laws to increase its control, weaken its accountability, and violate rights.³ The pandemic also reveals growing inequality fueled by corruption that is abetted by a government-controlled judiciary.⁴

Despite decades of advice by UN bodies, Cambodia's government pursues ever more control, misusing laws and courts to quash and criminalize peaceful dissent. Political opposition leaders and human rights defenders face spurious charges, inadequate legal representation, unfair mass trials, and arbitrary detention.⁵

Cambodia claims to be a multi-party democracy; in reality it has been a de facto one-party State since its ungenune 2018 National Election.⁶ The June 2022 commune elections and the 2023 National Election are now looming. The National Election Commission's promise of transparent, fair elections⁷ seems doubtful.

We urge the Council to insist on Cambodia's genuine fulfilment of its treaty obligations, including fair elections¹ and true respect for the rights of dissenters and defenders.

Thank you.

References

- ¹ Statement by Cambodia Ambassador and Permanent Representative Sokkhoeurn An , Agenda Item 5: Human Rights Body and Mechanism, 22 March 2022, https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/HRCDocuments/56/SP/42569_54_54b85c8d_b96948e3_9000_ab196428f83d.docx.
- ² Statement by H.E. Mr. Sokkhoeurn An, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Cambodia At the 49th Session of the Human Rights Council “Meeting on Technical Cooperation in Protecting Human Rights of Vulnerable Persons during and after Covid-19 Pandemic,” 7 March 2022, https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/HRCDocuments/56/SP/42445_54_dc50ced2_6e3c4e43_806e_00f882b4e7d9.docx.
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- ³ Transparency International, press release 25 January 2022, <http://www.ticambodia.org/cpi2021/>; LRWC, Cambodia: COVID-19 measures must respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, Statement, 7 June 2021, <https://www.lrwc.org/cambodia-covid-19-measures/>.
- ⁴ Cambodia ranked most corrupt in the region — juridical system the main cause, Camboja News, 26 January 2022, <https://cambojanews.com/cambodia-scored-the-lowest-in-the-region-as-the-corrupt-country-juridical-system-found-the-main-source-of-corruption/>, citing Transparency International Cambodia, CPI 2021 Press Release Cambodia, 25 January 2022, <https://www.ticambodia.org/cpi2021/>.
- ⁵ LRWC, Cambodia: Halt judicial harassment of human rights defenders and dissidents, Statement, 22 December 2021, <https://www.lrwc.org/cambodia-halt-judicial-harassment-of-human-rights-defenders-and-dissidents-statement/>.
- ⁶ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia A/HRC/39/73/Add.1, 7 September 2018, https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/73/Add.1.
- ⁷ NEC to uphold transparency, fairness, Khmer Times, 14 March 2022, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501040613/nec-to-uphold-transparency-fairness/>