

## At the UN Human Rights Council, States call for a special briefing on Cambodia ahead of July elections

(Geneva, 21 March 2018) 45 States jointly expressed concern on Cambodia at the UN Human Rights Council today and called for an inter-sessional briefing on Cambodia ahead of the June session of the Council and the July national elections in Cambodia.

‘An intersessional briefing will allow the Council to take stock of the situation in Cambodia ahead of the elections. It would indicate that the world is watching with concern. We hope that states and UN officials take immediate steps to this end,’ says R. Iniyang Ilango of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA).

The States expressed concern over ‘the serious decline of civil and political rights in Cambodia’ ahead of the general election to be held on 29 July 2018, including: the crackdown on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and independent media; the arbitrary detention of opposition leader Kem Sokha since 03 September 2017; and the Supreme Court’s dissolution of the Cambodia National Rescue Party on 16 November 2017. They further called on the Government ‘to take all measures necessary, before it is too late, to ensure that the 2018 elections are free, fair and credible.’

‘A series of legal and administrative measures are at the core of the Government’s crack-down on civic space in Cambodia. These include the Law on Associations and NGOs, the Trade Union Law, as well as recent amendments to the Constitution, the Criminal Code and Law on Political Parties,’ says Rosanna Ocampo of FORUM-ASIA, ‘Unless urgent steps are taken to alter this, Cambodia cannot have an environment conducive to free and fair elections.’

In September 2017, when the Council passed a resolution on Cambodia, it failed to call for a strong report on democratic space in Cambodia. Instead it merely asked for an update on the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Cambodia. This report, which was submitted to the current session, has expressed concern on the curtailment of civic space in the country.<sup>1</sup>

‘While there has been a lot of focus on the opposition and political parties in Cambodia, it is also important to pay attention to threats and intimidation faced by civil society, human rights defenders and the independent media in the country’, says Sejin Kim of FORUM-ASIA, ‘In the last six months alone ten individual defenders have faced judicial harassment and four organisations<sup>2</sup> have either have been suspended or received threats of suspension or shut-down. And these numbers are growing.’

‘While the joint statement notes the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, some signatories to the agreement such as Brunei Darussalam, China, Lao PDR, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam as well as Co-Chairs of the agreement Japan, and Indonesia have not signed on to the statement. This raises questions on their commitment to Cambodia and to democracy in the Asia-Pacific Region. Urgent action is required to ensure that the vision of a democratic Cambodia outlined in the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement is not lost’ said Rachel Arinii of FORUM-ASIA.

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1 <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=24919>

2 List of HRDs’ cases, [https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/?page\\_id=14357](https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/?page_id=14357)

**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.*

**For further information, please contact:**

Rosanna Ocampo, [rosanna@forum-asia.org](mailto:rosanna@forum-asia.org)