



សម្ព័ន្ធខ្មែរជំរឿននិរន្តរ៍ការពារសិទ្ធិមនុស្ស លីកាដូ

LICADHO

CAMBODIAN LEAGUE FOR THE PROMOTION AND DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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October 28, 2010

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We write to welcome you to Cambodia, and to summarize what we perceive as the most pressing human rights issues affecting Cambodia's relationship with the United States.

The United States has invested millions of dollars and considerable effort in assisting Cambodia's development and democratization since 1991. This effort has yielded positive results: Cambodia has witnessed an era of relative stability and peace, while the United States has benefited from Cambodia's emergence as an ally and business partner.

In 2010, the US-Cambodia partnership faces a serious threat. Cambodian democracy has entered a precipitous decline. The institutions required for checks and balances and self-government – which were painstakingly built with the help of the US government – are in the process of being systematically dismantled by the ruling party. If left unchecked, the inevitable result of this process will be Cambodia's degeneration into a pariah state, shunned by the international community and useless as an ally. Of course, the inevitable result will also be much worse for ordinary Cambodians.

It is not too late to reverse this trend. Below we have highlighted four areas which we believe require immediate action. We urge you to raise the following issues with the Cambodian government, and to insist that correct action is taken in the interest of the Cambodian people and the United States:

Freedom of expression: Journalists continue to be prosecuted. People who speak out are at risk of being beaten, threatened, killed or thrown in jail. An increasing number of communities affected by land grabbing are deprived of their freedom of movement and assembly. Villagers are routinely prevented from reaching the capital to raise grievances with national authorities. The scope and breadth of the actions taken by the government have the markings of a crackdown¹.

Independence of the judiciary: Justice is never assured inside a Cambodian courtroom. Corrupt courts are used by the executive or politically-connected businessmen to "legitimize" land grabs and to groundlessly charge and sentence community representatives to prison terms. As of mid-2010, over 60 villagers affected by land grabbing

¹See LICADHO's forthcoming report, "Freedom of Expression in Cambodia: The Illusion of Democracy," due for release on Dec. 10, 2010 [to be available at www.licadho-cambodia.org]



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were unjustly imprisoned. This blatant misuse of the judiciary is an effective weapon against communities in preventing from obtaining fair and just solutions.

Human Trafficking: Cross-border trafficking of underage women through licensed recruitment agencies has become a serious problem in Cambodia. Recruitment agencies scout rural villages to convince poor families to let their daughters work abroad. They procure fake documents, including birth certificates and passports, in collusion with the Cambodian authorities. Some of the most notorious agencies have strong political links, and the authorities have proven unwilling to conduct genuine investigations to stop this form of trafficking.

Law on local and international NGOs and associations: The government is considering a new law to regulate local and international Associations and NGOs. So far, the government has refused all requests to obtain copies of the draft law by members of civil society and embassies. Ruling party officials have publicly and repeatedly stated that the law is intended for NGOs who speak too freely and those which “rock the boat” by advocating on issues such as corruption and deforestation. We are gravely concerned that the law will empower the government to control all organizations which dare criticize the ruling party. If this is the case, the NGO law will destroy the very notion of civil society in Cambodia. Please accept the expression of my highest consideration and gratitude.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Pung Chhiv Kek

President & Founder

The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights

(LICADHO)