

**Open letter to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon from
representatives of Cambodian civil society**

November 1, 2010

Dear Secretary-General,

We, the undersigned representatives of Cambodian civil society, write to you to express concerns regarding the request by Prime Minister Hun Sen on 27 October 2010 to remove Christophe Peschoux from his position as Cambodia Country Representative for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and his threat to close the OHCHR Cambodia office.

Since its establishment in 1993 following the Paris Peace Agreements, the OHCHR Cambodia office and its staff have worked diligently in pursuit of its mandate to protect and promote human rights and have made significant contributions to the concept of democracy and rule of law in Cambodia. In January 2010, the mandate of OHCHR Cambodia was extended for an additional two years. This extension is a reflection of the current human rights situation in Cambodia and the need for the continued presence of OHCHR in the country, where a corrupt and politically-controlled judiciary continues to facilitate wide scale transfer of land from poor and marginalised groups to a small economic and political elite, and imprisons all those who dare to speak out against the rich and powerful.

The accusations made by senior government officials about the head of OHCHR being affiliated with the opposition party seem to be a smokescreen to distract observers from the multitude of grave human rights issues facing Cambodia. This is consistent with the behaviour of senior government members in recent years whose responses to measured and constructive criticisms on issues such as freedom of expression, the independence of the judiciary, corruption, and the trafficking of women and children, have become increasingly belligerent. In this instance, the request indicates an attempt by the government to determine the leadership of OHCHR Cambodia and is in disregard to the fact that while the OHCHR approach to improving respect for human rights is based on cooperation with governments, it extends to “an honest assessment of issues of concern” where required.

We, the undersigned representatives of Cambodian civil society, fully support the staff and the work of the OHCHR Cambodia office and are deeply concerned by the request of the Prime Minister for the removal of the Country Representative. OHCHR’s continued operations and independent voice are essential in ensuring that the Cambodian government meets its national and international obligations to promote and protect human rights in Cambodia.

Yours sincerely,

Representatives of CPN (Community Peace-building Network) National Working Group

Ms. Sa Sat, Executive Director, Action for Environment and Communities (AEC)

Dr. Pung Chhiv Kek, President, Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)

Mr. Ou Virak, President, Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

Mr. Suon Sareth, Chief Secretariat, Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC)

Mr. Sia Phearum, Secretariat Director, Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF)

Mr. Ath Thorn, President of Cambodia Labour Confederation (CLC)

Mr. Yeng Virak, Executive Director, Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)

Mr. Vorn Pao, President, Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)

Ms. Pry Phally Phoung, Executive Director, Building Community Voices (BCV)

Mr. Sar Mora, President, Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)

Mr. Lun Borithy, Executive Director, Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC)

Mr. Run Saray, Executive Director, Legal Aid of Cambodia (LAC)

Mr. Koul Panha, Executive Director, The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (Comfrel)

Mr. David Pred, Executive Director of Bridges Across Borders Cambodia (BABC)