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Cambodia: Prime Minister seeks to shut down leading human rights organisation

On 26 November 2017, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen called for an investigation into the **Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (CCHR)** with a view to its potential closure.

The [Cambodian Centre for Human Rights](#) is a prominent Phnom Penh based non-governmental organisation that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights across Cambodia. It was the first NGO to organise public forums in Cambodia and won the Information Society Innovation Fund Award (ISIF) in 2011. In 2016, the organisation experienced several successes for LGBT rights through its “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity” (SOGI) project. CCHR has organised at least 165 radio shows, diversely focusing on land rights, business and human rights, digital rights and fair trial rights and has produced two educational videos promoting freedom of expression. It also runs a project for human rights defenders which aims to promote the right to defend human rights and protect defenders at risk.

On 26 November 2017, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen called for an investigation into the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights with a view to its potential closure. The Prime Minister accused the organisation of relaying foreign influence and being linked to the dissolved opposition party Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). The Prime Minister also asserted that the organisation had been founded by foreigners to serve their own interests, rather than the interests of the Khmer population.

On the same day the investigation was announced, CCHR released a [statement](#) denying all allegations against it, reaffirming its independence from all political parties and inviting the government to begin a meaningful dialogue regarding these allegations. The organisation also reiterated the changes in its leadership since the resignation of former member Kem Sokha and its independence from any other former staff members who have entered politics.

On 16 November 2017, the Cambodian Supreme Court [dissolved](#) the Cambodia National Rescue Party, the country’s only opposition party, with no opportunity for appeal, over suspicions of engaging in a foreign-backed “revolution”. In addition, political bans were imposed on 118 members of the party. On 3 September 2017, the party’s former president Kem Sokha was arrested and is awaiting trial on treason charges. Kem Sokha, who founded CCHR in 2002, resigned from the organisation in 2007 to return to politics.

The Cambodian government has engaged in an intensified crackdown against political opposition and human rights groups in the country in recent years. Between 2016 and 2017, [six human rights defenders](#) from the [Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association](#) (ADHOC), the National Election Committee (NEC) and the United Nation’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) in Cambodia, were officially charged. Five of them were released on bail after 14 months of pre-trial detention.

Front Line Defenders expresses concern over the ongoing judicial harassment of the Cambodian

Centre for Human Rights, which it believes to be related to its legitimate and peaceful human rights work in Cambodia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Cambodia to:

1. Immediately cease the investigation and harassment against the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, as it is believed that this is solely motivated by the organisation's legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Take measures to ensure that government officials or other public figures refrain from making statements or declaration stigmatising the legitimate work of human rights organisations;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders and organisations in Cambodia and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.