



Organization: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
Item: Item 10: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia
Date: 7 October 2024
Speaker: Catherine Morris

Oral Statement to the 57th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, and the International Commission of Jurists, NGOs in special consultative status

Cambodia: Comply with international law and stop harassing defenders and dissidents

Mr. President,

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, and the International Commission of Jurists appreciate the Special Rapporteur's emphasis on increasing women's presence in Cambodia's legislature, judiciary, legal profession, human rights organizations, and civil society.¹ We deplore that recent leadership changes have failed to yield improvement in Cambodia's inclusion of women or respect for the rule of law.

Cambodia continues to resist recommendations by Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies to reform vague and overbroad criminal laws and the law on associations and NGOs.² Officials routinely invoke these abusive laws to harass human rights defenders, journalists,³ and political opponents.

Cambodia's non-independent and corrupt courts⁴ have convicted defenders and dissenters in sham trials that violate fair trial guarantees,⁵ including women defenders such as SENG Theary and CHHIM Sithar. Yet, Cambodia continues to resist recommendations to reform its judiciary laws to ensure judicial independence and impartiality.

Cambodia has also failed to investigate historic and recent enforced disappearances,⁶ including disappearances of two activists over the past decade.⁷

We urge the Council and all States to insist that Cambodia:

- Implement all recommendations of Special Procedures, Treaty Bodies, and the OHCHR;⁸ and
- Halt the harassment of defenders, journalists, and dissenters, and immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons.

Thank you.

¹ Situation of human rights in Cambodia, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, A/HRC/57/82, 5 August 2024, <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/57/82>.

² Ibid, para 15.

³ Poppy Mcpherson, Cambodia charges investigative journalist **Mech Dara**, who exposed trafficking and scam compounds, with incitement, Reuters, 1 October 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/cambodia-arrests-investigative-journalist-who-exposed-trafficking-scam-compounds-2024-10-01/>

⁴ UN Committee on Enforced Disappearance, Concluding Observations, CED/C/KHM/CO/1, 25 March 2024, Para 29, <https://www.undocs.org/CED/C/KHM/CO/1>.

⁵ Cambodia: Arrests Target Critics of Regional Development Zone: 94 Arrested for Opposing Cooperation Deal with Laos and Vietnam, HRWC, 28 August 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/28/cambodia-arrests-target-critics-regional-development-zone>.

⁶ Ibid, CED, Para 17.

⁷ Cambodian labour activist Khem Sophath, age 16, disappeared in 2014, and Thai human rights defender Wanchalearm Satsaksit, disappeared in 2020. See OHCHR, Experts of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances Commend Cambodia's International Cooperation on Fighting Crime, Ask about Plans to Adopt Legislation on Enforced Disappearance and Measures to Prevent Corruption in the Judiciary, 20 February 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2024/02/experts-committee-enforced-disappearances-commend-cambodias-international-cooperation>

⁸ Role and achievements of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in assisting the Government and people of Cambodia in the promotion and protection of human rights, Report of the Secretary-General, A/HRC/57/78, 26 August 2024, <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/57/78>.