



Cambodia

2 November 2010

The international community must stand by human rights in Cambodia

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) expresses its deep dismay at the public comments of the Prime Minister and high-level Cambodian officials threatening the closure of the Country Office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and undermining the independence of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). FIDH considers that such comments seriously question the state of the rule of law and the development of democratic institutions in the country.

According to the information received, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen asked Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations Secretary-General, on October 27, to remove Mr. Christophe Peschoux, the representative of the OHCHR in Cambodia, or the OHCHR office will have to be closed. The Prime Minister also added that it is the intention of the government to limit the scope of investigation by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).

Senior government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also made baseless accusations that Mr. Peschoux is a 'spokesman' for the political opposition. According to media reports, Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith later stated the office would be closed regardless of whether Peschoux remained.

The OHCHR Country Office was established in October 1993 by Resolution 1993/6 of the Commission on Human Rights, in accordance with the Paris Peace Accords. OHCHR operates in Cambodia at the request of successive United Nations resolutions, and with the agreement of the Government of Cambodia. It is mandated to work with the Government, civil society organizations and interested Member States to support the Government's duty to meet its obligations under the human rights treaties it has ratified. Since September 2007, Mr. Peschoux has been leading his office in carrying out this mandate in good faith and in a spirit of constructive dialogue with the Cambodian authorities.

In recent years, Cambodian, regional and international human rights organizations have observed a shrinking space for the peaceful exercise of fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression, association and assembly. This shrinking space has been characterized by physical attacks, physical and legal threats and harassment of the opposition, human rights defenders, union leaders, and ordinary citizens protesting against abuses of their rights. [\[1\]](#) In one of the latest examples of such threats, a community representative, who was peacefully demonstrating with approximately 100 people, was brutally beaten by anti-riot police on October 28, 2010, outside of Phnom Penh's Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital, where Mr. Ban Ki-moon was conducting a visit. The Prime Minister's request to remove the head of the OHCHR office is another example of the government's growing intolerance and of the restrictive measures it uses to silence constructive criticism and peaceful dissent.

"These baseless accusations against the OHCHR office emanating from the highest levels of government are indicative of the increasingly authoritarian tendency of the current regime. The international community must stand behind all human rights defenders in Cambodia and continue to pressure the authorities to cooperate with the UN human rights system in good faith," said Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

FIDH further condemns a statement attributed to Prime Minister Hun Sen, during his meeting with the UN Secretary General, that the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) would not be allowed to pursue further investigation and prosecution beyond Case 002.

In September 2009, and despite the opposition of the national Co-Prosecutor, but with the authorization of the Pre-Trial Chamber, the International Co-Prosecutor had filed two new introductory submissions covering crimes committed as part of a joint criminal enterprise and identified a total of five suspects. These judicial proceedings, which would represent additional cases, are now under the scrutiny of the judges.

"The Prime Minister's declaration is a blatant attempt of political interference in the independence of the ECCC. Only the judges of the ECCC have the legitimacy and the power to decide whether or not to open new investigations and prosecutions. The ECCC have been facing since their creation attempts of political interference. These should stop in respect of the memory of millions of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime", added Souhayr Belhassen.

[1] See "Freedoms of Expression, Association and Assembly: A Shrinking Space" by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, September 2010. Available at: <http://www.fidh.org/Human-rights-de...>

<http://www.fidh.org/The-international-community-must-stand-by-human>