



Vision: A democratic society that democratization in particular democratic elections are promoted and qualified to bring benefits to people.

ទស្សនៈសង្គម ៖ ដើម្បីឱ្យការបោះឆ្នោតតាមបែបប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ និងយុត្តិធម៌ ត្រូវបានលើកកម្ពស់ និងគុណភាព ដើម្បីនាំមកនូវផលប្រយោជន៍ដល់ប្រជាពលរដ្ឋ។

Phnom Penh, on 29th March, 2016

**PRESS RELEASE
ON
REPORT ON DEMOCRACY, ELECTIONS AND REFORM**

COMFREL has conducted and produced its full of one year report on democracy, elections and reform in 2015. At end of 2015 COMFREL and CSOs jointly expressed concern over threats to democracy because of crackdown being undertaken by the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”), politically motivated physical assaults and legal harassments with unconstitutional action against the opposition’s members of the parliament, and its activists. The situation can be explained that is “Renewed Setback for Cambodia’s Democracy”.

Democratic governance made only limited progress despite notable reforms of the legislative and the increased responsiveness of the executive, in particular the prime minister to undo the electoral gains of the opposition in the national election 2013. The legislative reform was however severely disrupted after the politically motivated physical assaults and legal harassments against the opposition. The executive has strengthened its responses to gain more public support. However, executive accountability has not improved. Corruption remains endemic in Cambodia and appears to be on the rise. In addition, the judiciary continues to lack independency and impartiality and the military and law enforcement interfered into the political process. Freedom of expression and access to information did not improve. Despite recent rapid internet penetration in Cambodia, threats to both freedoms remain. The executive appear to respond to the new technological development with stricter controls of the internet including harassment, charges and imprisonment of citizens who express anti-government opinions online. At the same time the executive continues to hold onto its dominance over and control of traditional media (TV, radio, print media). Press freedom also remains under threat. Access to public information has not yet significantly improved.

Freedom of association is under threat. The new law on associations and non-governmental organizations (LANGO) requires associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be political neutral, but the provisions contravene the Cambodian constitution to violate article 35 provides that “Cambodian citizens have the right to active participation in political, life”, article 41 Cambodian citizens have freedom of expression; and article 42- freedom of association. Freedom of assembly is still restricted by the authority and assaulted by the third party in cooperation with authority but crackdowns by security forces were less violent than in 2014.

Despite changes to Cambodia’s party system after the last elections, recent political developments do not indicate that Cambodia’s party system is developing towards a competitive multi-party system, even though political pluralism has increased with the formation of ten new political parties. The post political-crisis agreement and an agreed code of conduct contributed to improve the political dialogue but did not prevent destructive political discourses and campaigns in 2015. Such discourses continue to obstruct the development of a genuine democratic political discourse.

Youth and women continue to lack means of political participation, and are underrepresented in national and local elected bodies. The executive has fallen short of achieving the Gender Millennium Development Goals. Youth is underrepresented in national and local elected bodies. Recent surveys indicate that the youth voter turnout is below the average.

Substantial reforms of electoral laws and electoral bodies have been undertaken. The reforms should increase confidence in the electoral process and help to prevent future electoral conflicts, but the reforms only partially can fulfill this expectation.

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