



Press Release
On

**Political Gender Watch Report:
Assembly and Female Members of Parliament and Empowerment of Female
Commune/Sangkat Councilors in their Performance at the Local Level**

Cambodia continues to maintain a pronounced inequality of elected representation as a leader between women and men in public affair. The issue of gender inequality is due to: (I) a lack of specific written policies and a lack of strict and effective enforcement of existing laws and mechanisms to support and provide equal opportunities for women in public affairs and politics. (II) the continuing discrimination against women in leadership roles and political affairs. (III) Failure to fulfill national obligations in accordance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which Cambodia has ratified since 1992. (IV) Male leaders want to retain their political power and do not want to step down. As a state party of the CEDAW Convention, the RGC recalls that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life. The discrimination against women impedes the growths of the prosperity of society and the family and makes it more difficult for the full development of the potentialities of women.

Apart from the issue of inequality of representation and the exercise between the rights of women and men in Cambodia at all levels, observing, monitoring and the checking of the situation and the performance of elected women at the national and local levels is the most important agenda that needs to be fully understood and monitored by all stakeholders in order to promote participation in political decision-making and leadership including fulfilling and gaining the full range of roles, duties, and power of women.

A 2019 COMFREL report on political gender watch which was produced through a direct observation methodology, monitoring, Semi-Interview, interview, and examination of the situation and performance of elected female representatives at both the national and local levels as well as women politicians.

Women MPs in the Parliamentary Sessions

For the first year in the sixth legislature of the National Assembly in 2019, between September 2018 and August 2019, only the ruling Cambodian People Party (CPP) won all of the parliamentary seats in the vote and has female MPs in the National Assembly. Only one female as Member of Parliament (MP), equal to 3.84% out of the total of 26 female parliamentarians who made the comments/expression at the plenary session for the first term of the 6th legislature while there are 11 male MPs, equal to 11.11% out of the total of 99 male MPs. The number of women MPs' and men MPs' comments/expression was a very low 9.60% compared to the total of 125 lawmakers whereas the expression is only in support of the law and appreciate achievement and leadership of the royal government but no one objected to any serious criticism or questioning.

ទីស្នាក់ការកណ្តាល ៖ ផ្ទះលេខ ១៣៨ ផ្លូវ ១២២ សង្កាត់ ទឹកល្អក់ ១ ខណ្ឌ ទួលគោក រាជធានីភ្នំពេញ ព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជា

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

ទស្សនៈវិស័យ ៖ សង្គមប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ ដែលការបោះឆ្នោតប្រកបដោយសេរី និងយុត្តិធម៌ ត្រូវបានលើកកម្ពស់ និងមានគុណភាពសម្រាប់នាំមកនូវផលប្រយោជន៍ដល់ប្រជាជន។

Her Excellency **Lork Kheng**, MP of Phnom Penh constituency made a positive comment, focusing on discussion and approval of the draft law on Finance for Management 2019 and expressed her support for this law which brought benefited to the people and made the Cambodian economy grow faster as well as support the achievements related to construction and supporting people.

In the first year of the 6th Legislature of single party parliament, the issue of women and children was not mentioned on the agenda of the plenary sessions and neither discussion reflected the benefits and impacts of women and children.

Constituency Visit of Female MPs

During the period of September 2018 to August 2019, there were a total of 64 MPs, of which 14 were female MPs out of a total of 125 lawmakers conducted a total of 1,156 field visits. This number has decreased by 509 times, from 1,665 in the 5th legislature of 2016¹ to 1,156 in the 6th legislature of the first year 2019.

The total percentage of women MPs who conducted the field visit was similar to the percentage of male MPs, 53.84%, equal to 14 women MPs out of the total of 26 women MPs, slightly more than the percentage of male MPs 50.50%, equal to 50 out of the total of 99 male MPs. Compared to the 5th legislature that the two parties hold seats in the National Assembly (NA), the percentage of women MPs on the mission has significant decreased, from 83.33% in the 5th legislature of 2016 to 53.84% for the 6th legislature of 2019, while the percentage of male MPs on the mission also decreased significantly, from 78.79% in the 5th legislature of 2016 to 50.50% in the 6th legislature of the first year 2019.

There are 229 field visits made by 14 female MPs of single CPP which hold seats in the NA. This number has decreased by 110 times, from 339 in the 5th legislature of 2016 to 229 field visits in the 6th legislature of 2019. By comparison with the purposes of the mission of the female MPs showed that there were far more differences between the number of greeting, gift-giving and inaugurating achievements, which had 173 field visits (75.54%) and there weren't any for interventions and solutions to people's problems. There were 35 times for internal reinforcements and party network and 21 times for accompanying and escorting with her leader. The figures also clearly revealed that the process of greeting, gift-giving and inaugurating achievements remains a priority and active while strengthening internal and party networks is also a priority.

The most active female MP in the first term of the 6th legislature was Her Excellency **Men Sam An**, MP of Svay Rieng constituency, who conducted **58 field visits** which significant increased nearly **four times** when compared to the 5th legislature of 2016 which had only 15. The second was her Excellency **Ban Sreymom**, MP of Pailin constituency, who conducted **52 field visits**, which significantly increased by 13 times when compared to the 5th legislature of 2014 with only 4. The third was Her Excellency **Lork Kheng**, MP of Phnom Penh constituency, who conducted **38 field visits** which were similar to the 5th legislature of 2016 with 34 times.

The Situation of Cambodian Female Politicians

Between the beginning of the year and the middle of 2019, female politicians who used their political rights and women's rights to participate in the democratic process in Cambodia are subject to judicial prosecution, discrimination, harassment, intimidation and restrictions by authorities,

¹ របាយការណ៍ខុមហ្វ្រែល ឃ្លាំមើលយេនឌ័រផ្នែកនយោបាយ៖ សភា និងតំណាងរាស្ត្រស្ត្រី និងស្ត្រីក្នុងដំណើរការចុះឈ្មោះបោះឆ្នោតថ្មី ឆ្នាំ២០១៦ ចេញផ្សាយនៅខែមីនា ឆ្នាំ២០១៧ (COMFREL's Website: www.comfrel.org)

even the meetings and discussions on women's politics were also interrupted such as a warning message by the Prime Minister Hun Sen, a former chief of O'Char commune in Battambang province was subsequently summoned to court, a joint gathering of former members and officials of Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) was disrupted by authorities and a group of six elected female as commune chiefs, member of district and provincial councilors of the former CNRP in Kampong Speu province was forced to flee for safety to avoid persecution by Phnom Penh authorities.

Government's and authorities' actions were contrary to the CEDAW Convention in article 3 stated that: "In all fields, especially political, social, economic and cultural, the state shall take appropriate action including legislation for ensuring the full development and prosperity of women to ensure that women use and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms in equality with men. It also contradicted article 7 stated that "States parties shall take affirmative actions to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country..." The above acts also violate the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, which protects the right to freedom of expression and assembly, as stated in article 41: "Cambodian people have freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of publication, freedom of assembly ...", and also violated the International Covenant on citizen rights and political rights in article 19, paragraph 2 stated that "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression...."

Discrimination and Participation in Decision-Making at Commune/Sangkat Level

Discriminatory attitudes against female commune councilors have decreased significantly while strong supporting and promoting were made by male commune councilors and village chiefs because these men have changed their behavior, values women, gender understanding, respects women's rights, and good cooperation with women in work, problem-solving and commune development. However, discrimination against female commune councilors continued to exist because some male commune councilors did not want to cooperate and continued criticizing women. Compared to the 3rd mandate of 2015, women's support, women's motivation, women's value and cooperation with women have increased from 82.92% in 2015 (3rd mandate) to 97.22% in 2019 (4th mandate) while discrimination has decreased from 12.19% in 2015 to 2.77% in 2019.

Whereas discrimination regarding delegating the duty and role to female commune councilors in accordance with her role, COMFREL found that the chairman of the commune council mostly delegated the duties and roles to female members in accordance with the law while a few female members did not receive any duties. Compared to 2015, discrimination against female commune councilors decreased from 9.75% in 2015 (3rd mandate) to 2.77% in 2019 (4th mandate). Although the number of discriminatory figures is decreasing, it still showed more and more discrimination has never seen before, which need to be addressed immediately with the commune councilors were not received any duties and their position or received some duties to carry out work in accordance with the law on "the Commune/Sangkat Administrative Management", which guarantees that all commune/Sangkat councilors receive the tasks/duties regarding their position.

It is better to fully participate with both male and female commune councilors' opinion and decision making, although the number of men is much higher than women. Women expressed their potential, self-confidence, and exercised the rights to express their opinion in the work and in meetings, which mostly focused on issues of women, children and the elderly people, including development.

The Budget for Women’s and Children’s Affairs at Commune/Sangkat Level

Most communes easily accessed budgets for women’s and children’s affairs, but budgets are small, and few communes are difficult to access as well as budget transparency is limited in some communes.

Among 19 communes, 16 communes found it easy to withdraw the budget for the women’s and children’s affair. The other three communes have difficulty in withdrawing the budget from the treasury, the clerk managed the budget and does not have a clear budget allocation. The communes which faced difficult to withdraw the budget were Angchahn Rong and Porpel commune (Boribo district, Kampong Chhnang province) and Kraingskar commune (Teuk Phos district, Kampong Chhnang province). Separately, there was a disagreement in Kraingskar commune, Teuk Phos district, Kampong Chhnang province, 2 female councilors gave different answers, one said it is difficult to withdraw the money and other one said it is easy to withdraws.

Key Recommendations:

1. More attention should be paid by Female MPs and male MPs related to intervene and resolve issues of the electorate.
2. Female MPs and male MPs should show the results of their field visits to the public.
3. All discussion and approval at the plenary session of the National Assembly (NA) shall be included gender responsive in the law and national development strategic plan.
4. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) must respect the political rights of women and ensure the exercise of this right by making it easier for women to discuss on political affair and other issues, especially for women politicians from the opposition party and other parties in order to support and provide opportunities for more women to participate in politics and decision-making level in accordance with the CEDAW Convention and Cambodia's Sustainable Development Goals.
5. RGC has to review and pay more attention to women politicians of the elected government or other women politicians who are voice and active or who are willing to be involved in politics, by encouraging, protecting, providing opportunities and ensuring women’s full participation in political affair.
6. The Ministry of Interior, including the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) have to ensure that all commune councilors, especially women, are given full roles, duties, and power in accordance with the law on “Commune / Sangkat Administration Management”
7. All support should be provided to elected women and women leaders, such as providing budgets in line with the issues that women are working on, material and human resources and ways to facilitate and optimize women's work, to enable women to participate with quality in a representative and leadership role.

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វេសកកម្ម៖ ខុមហ្វ្រែល ជាអង្គការក្រៅរដ្ឋាភិបាល អព្យាក្រឹត្យដែលផ្តល់សិទ្ធិអំណាចដល់ប្រជាជនកម្ពុជា ដើម្បីអនុវត្តសិទ្ធិរបស់ពួកគេនៅក្នុងនយោបាយ និងការធ្វើសេចក្តីសម្រេចចិត្ត តាមរយៈការអប់រំពលរដ្ឋ និងការចូលរួមប្រកបដោយការស្ថាប័នជាមួយរដ្ឋាភិបាល និងមន្ត្រីជាប់ឆ្នោតសម្រាប់ការកែទម្រង់គោលនយោបាយ ការបោះឆ្នោតដោយសេរី និងយុត្តិធម៌ និងការបង្កើនការទំនួលខុសត្រូវក្នុងការផ្តល់សេវាសាធារណៈ។

MISSION: COMFREL, as a neutral non-governmental organization, empowers Cambodian citizens to exercise their rights in politics and decision-making, through civic education, and constructive engagement with government and elected officials, for policy reforms, free and fair elections, and increased accountabilities in service delivery.