LC works for all people in Cambodia to live in a peaceful society that respects human rights, democracy, and social justice.

July 2015

THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING

CRIMINALISING THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

This year has seen some worrisome development in Cambodia. The ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CCP) are resorting to all kinds of underhanded tactics to silence any challenge to its authority. With imprisonment of activists, oppressive laws, the legalised control over the court and judges, and a firm grip around a bullied and weakened opposition, Cambodians have increasingly less space to exercise their rights.

SILENCING THE LEADERS

Nineteen activists imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights were freed in April after spending five to seven months in prison. Eleven of them were convicted on various charges. Among the 19 were several prominent activists and well-known campaign organisers.

This is not the first time the government has tried to silence dissenting voices, the people remain strong. During the campaign to release the 19, new leaders stepped up showing the people’s will to keep struggling for justice and their rights. After being released from prison, Boeung Kak activist Tep Vanny told the media:

“I will still advocate and peacefully protest to demand solutions and justice for all the victims in Cambodian society, even if I will be imprisoned or killed by the authorities”.

FIND THE MUSIC VIDEO HERE

We Can’t Accept it!

We can’t accept (this law)
We don’t like (this law)
We don’t need any law that bans our freedom!

A democratic country has laws that protect the people’s freedoms
And no one can take those rights away.

We have the right to meet and participate (in this democracy)
We have the right to gather together to form associations, unions and organisations.

This law is so strict it’s not normal
There’s no value in a law that seeks to control NGOs and civil society!

Yeung Min Sok Chet Te
(Khmer phonetics)

Yeung min sok chet te. Yeung min penh chet te.
Yeung min trovka te. Chbab ey khos kei bombet serey.

Protes dal mean chbab, let-ti prochea thapatai.
Prochea pros srey trouv mien set serey min ach bompian

 Yeung mien set cholroum. Yeung mien set chhoum-chhoum. Mien set promol p’dom bongkart samakom sahatcheep ongkah

Chbab nih reth t’but klang. Koh pi tomada kmien pro-yowt soh na. Chbab kroup-krong ongkah songkum civil.

From left: Kong Chantha, Tep Vanny, Song Srey Leap, Po Chorvy, after their release on April 11.
In 2014, the government passed three new laws on the judiciary. These laws effectively place the so-called “independent” judiciary in the hands of the ruling CPP. As a further attempt to control civil society, the government is now fast-tracking an additional set of laws to control the Internet: one of the few places left for Freedom of Expression, and for civil society to thrive and resist in the conditions of a totalitarian state.

The dreaded Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (LANGO), originally proposed by the ruling party in 2005, was shelved in its fourth draft in 2011 after being heavily criticized by Cambodian civil society and the international community. In April 2015, Prime Minister Hun Sen announced that the draft law had been finalised secretly in 2012, and that the government has been planning all along to adopt the law as early as May 2015.

The latest draft of the law, which was only released to the public in early June, places restrictive and cumbersome registration requirements not only on NGOs but also on informal networks, grassroots groups and social movements. LANGO has been widely condemned for the repressive effects it will have on Cambodia’s vibrant civil society.

An extraordinary National Assembly session is planned for July 10, during which members of parliament will vote on whether to pass LANGO. It is expected that LANGO will be passed given that the ruling CPP occupies a majority of the seats in the National Assembly. If LANGO passes, it will severely restrict the activities of many organisations, grassroots groups and activists. For example, the law requires all associations and non-governmental organisations to register, but does not specify the reasons for which a group can be denied registration. In its current form, LANGO will only serve the ruling party’s interests to restrict activities that challenge its authority, or as the government has phrased it “jeopardize peace, stability and public order or harm the national security, national unity, culture, and traditions of the Cambodian national society”.

Besides LANGO, the draft Law on Union and Enterprises (Trade Union Law, or TUL) was leaked in 2014. TUL looks to be yet another tool to further restrict civil society by controlling union formation and union activities – a network crucial in protecting the rights of workers.

Legalising Suppression

Im Touch, Boeung Kak activist, marching to Say No! Union, Association and NGO Law

Security forces obstruct and suppress peaceful civil society protests on June 30 by confiscating campaign material used symbolize opposition to the LANGO.

www.youtube.com/user/licadhocanada, www.vimeo.com/licadhocanada
On May 1, International Worker’s Day, Cambodian civil society initiated the “Say NO! Union Association and NGO Laws” campaign to protest against these repressive laws. The campaign has been spearheaded by several community-based groups and civil society sectors. Since then, actions to halt the passage of repressive laws, LANGO in particular, have taken place every week. These actions have included gatherings outside the National Assembly, dancing, singing songs, marches and public meetings.

On June 28, protesters carried lotus flowers, released balloons and marched in front, and around, the National Assembly. They also carried banners with the messages, “SAY NO! Union, Association and NGO Laws” and “We will not vote for any party that passes these laws.” In addition, the protesters sang and danced to a song based off of an old pop song, and whose lyrics have been re-written to protest against LANGO and TUL. The following day, on June 29, over a hundred community groups and local and international NGOs released thousands of balloons in Phnom Penh and 13 provincial towns to express their firm rejection of the repressive laws.

Then, on the morning of June 30, over 400 people marched from four different locations to the National Assembly where the participants sang, danced and cheered to assert their right to assembly and expression. The marchers were temporarily blocked and intimidated by security guards and police. The campaign against repressive laws will continue with several more activities planned in the coming days.

Although time is running out, many sectors of civil society are bravely showing solidarity and unity to protest against the passage of LANGO in the National Assembly on July 10. Please continue to do thousands of balloons have been released in Phnom Penh and 13 provincial towns to highlight the SAY NO! campaign.
your part to advocate against this repressive draft law.

LANGO and TUL are not the only draft laws to be concerned about in the future. The draft Cybercrime Law and the draft Law on Telecommunications also threaten the freedoms and rights of community-based groups, networks, associations and NGOs, essential for democracy.

Altogether, these repressive laws will create a comprehensive legal framework for the government to control all aspects of civil society in Cambodia.

“The law is a genuine threat to the existence of independent civil society in Cambodia. It gives the government carte blanche for the government to shut down and criminalize any groups they don’t like”.

“If the law passes, every single association will become a criminal organization if they do not register. Think about that: The simple fact of joining with your fellow citizens to pursue a cause as a group makes you all criminals, unless you get the government’s permission. This is a violation of international law”.

- Maina Kiai, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Read full article here

Civil society members singing and dancing to a classic Cambodian pop song “I Don’t Accept It” in front of the National Assembly. The lyrics were specially rewritten by Cambodian youths and Boeung Kak activists to express their rejection of the laws and to assert their right to gather and express themselves freely.

YOU CAN HELP TOO!

Educate yourself and others about the human rights situation in Cambodia via Twitter, Facebook and LICADHO/LICADHO Canada websites.

Become a LICADHO Canada advocate, be an online social activist, sign petitions, join campaigns, or become a Human Rights Defenders Apparel Distributor. Your actions will support and protect Cambodian activists and their communities.

Donate today to protect and defend Cambodian human rights defenders and their communities. LICADHO Canada is in constant need of funding support to address the increasing number of emergencies arising from Cambodia’s current political and human rights crisis.

For more information: contact@licadhocanada.com