

## **Cambodia: UN expert urges Government embrace final opportunity for “genuine” election**

GENEVA (30 April 2018) – To ensure a genuine multi-party democracy in Cambodia which respects its citizens’ participation rights, the Government must immediately release detained opposition leaders and lift a ban on the opposition taking part in the July 29 general election, a UN expert says.

“No election can be genuine if the main opposition party is barred from taking part,” said Rhona Smith, an independent expert appointed by the Human Rights Council to monitor the human rights situation in Cambodia. On Monday, the National Election Committee started the two-week process of registration of political parties for the vote.

“Those who currently rule the country have one final opportunity to reverse the current trajectory, and return instead to the constitutional path of multi-party democracy and genuine elections – ensuring a level playing field for all political parties,” Smith said.

Last November, the main opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) was dissolved and 118 of its members barred from political activity for five years. All of the party’s local and national seats were reallocated to unelected members of the ruling and other parties.

The leader of the dissolved CNRP, Kem Sokha, who was detained in September, remains in prison on treason charges related to comments he made in 2013 about his grassroots political strategy to challenge the current Government. Another former President of the party, Sam Rainsy, is living in self-imposed exile, after a number of cases were filed against him in Cambodia.

Many other CNRP members and supporters have also fled abroad, fearing arrest and harassment. Some have also been imprisoned, along with former leaders of other political parties, including Nhek Bun Chhay, of the Khmer National United Party, and Soun Sereyrotha, of the Khmer Power Party.

Despite concerns of irregularities, the CNRP won over 44 percent of the popular vote in the last national elections in 2013, and was the only opposition party in the national assembly with 55 of 123 seats. The CNRP again won nearly 44 percent in the commune (local) elections in June 2017.

The Government has also clamped down on civil society and the media by closing and suspending several NGOs and media companies, and targeting individuals within those organisations.

“All Cambodians have a right to openly debate and discuss political affairs; the media must be allowed to scrutinise and criticise, as well as inform the public; and civil society, including NGOs, should be encouraged to play an active role in State affairs,” said Smith.

“A liberal multi-party democracy is an essential, entrenched and non-amendable feature of the Constitution of Cambodia.”

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**Professor Rhona Smith** (United Kingdom) was appointed as [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia](#) by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2015.

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