

Statement condemning Cambodian Government's harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations and media institutions

For Immediate Release
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On June 23, 2017, the Cambodian Foreign Ministry released an order for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Phnom Penh to cease its activities and repatriate its foreign members. After the June 2017 elections, domestic civil society organizations and independent media institutions have also faced hostility from the Cambodian Government. We are deeply disturbed by these actions, and we demand to cease the harassment of human rights and media groups.

It is within the mandate of domestic and international democracy workers to contribute to the construction of a level playing field by providing opportunities for all stakeholders, most especially legitimate civil society organizations and political parties, to empower themselves. Such engagement from civil society and media resulted in a more peaceful and orderly electoral process as seen in the 2017 Commune Council Elections.

The recent actions of the Cambodian Government perpetuate a pattern of harassment experienced by media and non-government associations working in favor of free speech and human rights in the country. This includes the inquiry into the activities and threats against members of a coalition of election monitoring and human rights organizations known as the Situation Room, and the legal actions against independent media institutions such as the Cambodia Daily, Voice of America, and Radio Free Asia. These suppressive actions not only compromise the freedom and fairness of next year's elections, but also undoes any development Cambodia has made.

NDI has always stood side by side with domestic human rights organizations in strengthening democratic processes around the world. Democracy and human rights work is governed by the spirit of impartiality, and we trust that NDI and its members in Cambodia would never betray it by undermining a democratic process and favoring a single party.

More than 70,000 domestic election monitors participated and guarded the recently held elections. We urge the Cambodian Government to instead support and cultivate the growth of such vibrant interaction, work for the empowerment of its citizens by passing laws which promote citizen participation in democratic processes, and build paths for constructive engagements.

Most importantly, we express solidarity with other institutions in Cambodia who have continuously worked to promote democratic principles of free speech and association in the country.

