

21 May 2015

Dear High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini,

We would like to highlight the concerns of local civil society in Cambodia regarding the current draft *Law on Associations and NGOs (LANGO)*, which is expected to be introduced in Cambodia's National Assembly this month (May 2015). While the current version of the *LANGO* has not been made public, there are serious concerns that the draft law contains similarly-restrictive provisions that would hamper the ability of civil society to operate freely in Cambodia. This would have very serious consequences on the future development of the country. For more than three decades civil society organisations in Cambodia have made and continue to make important and sustainable contributions. It is widely acknowledged, that civil society had a strong impact on human rights, socio-economic as well as democratic development.

Previous versions of the *LANGO* were issued since December 2010. They included restrictive provisions that infringed on freedom of association and curtailed the activities of both national and international civil society organisations. Due to concerted pressure led by Cambodian civil society, they were not adopted. It is now assumed that the Cambodian Government may be refraining from publicly releasing the *LANGO* in order to avoid civil society and international interest in the legislation.

The situation for civil society in Cambodia has deteriorated since the country's July 2013 general elections. Civil society organizations engaged in human rights, advocacy and transparency-related work, in particular, face growing criticism from the government.

Civil society organizations have called for the release of the draft law to the public, access to broad and meaningful consultations with the government on legislation, and for the draft law to promote and protect – not restrict – civil society.

In the past, the European Union was an important and very helpful supporter of the concerns of the Cambodian civil society. We would therefore urge the European Union External Action Service and in particular the EU Delegation in Phnom Penh to call on the Cambodian government to:

- i. publicly release a copy of the *LANGO*;
- ii. allow for meaningful consultations with civil society on the draft law;
- iii. and ensure that the draft law promotes and protects – not restricts – civil society

We would also request to share this letter with all diplomatic missions of EU Member States in Cambodia and appreciate your attention to the concerns of civil society in Cambodia.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara LOCHBIHLER

Josef WEIDENHOLZER

Eugen FREUND

Ana GOMES

Karin KADENBACH

Jörg LEICHTFRIED

Arne LIETZ

Norbert NEUSER

Kati PIRI