

Civil Society and Private Sector Groups Condemn Government's Arbitrary Suspension of Local NGO

“We Are All STT”

We, representatives of the undersigned members of civil society and private sector groups, support national development that is equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. We believe national development should contribute not only to the growth of commerce and industry but also to the welfare of the wider population. Civil society actors, both local and foreign, play a vital role in this development through monitoring, community development, poverty alleviation, humanitarianism, research, and advocacy. In promoting equitable development and good governance, we also have a right and a responsibility to speak out when development projects have harmful effects.

Over the past two decades, a vibrant civil society sector has developed in Cambodia. The future of that sector is dependent on guaranteed rights to freedom of expression and association as articulated in Cambodia's Constitution, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today, we see the future of Cambodian democracy at a crossroads. The third draft of the Law on Associations and Non Governmental Organizations (LANGO) currently at the Council of Ministers and may be on the verge of passage. Unfortunately, even before the restrictive law has been enacted, Cambodian society has been offered a preview into the future of government control over civil society organizations and associations under this law.

On August 2, the Ministry of Interior issued a letter to local NGO Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT) to “suspend [its] activities” until December 31, 2011, a period of five months. STT works with urban poor communities regarding land and housing rights. The organization is also a well-respected member of several civil society networks.

The letter offers no legal basis for the suspension. It simply accuses STT of failing to modify its leadership structure and making a revision to its statutes “according to the instruction of a specialized department.” The letter offers no further explanation. To our knowledge, however, the real reason for suspending STT is the organisation's legitimate work among urban poor communities.

We are not aware of any legal provision authorizing such a suspension. The lengthy five month time period also appears entirely arbitrary. Efforts to seek clarification from the Ministry of Interior have been met with silence.

We condemn the suspension of STT in the strongest possible terms. The suspension of STT is completely arbitrary and a violation of the constitutional right to freedom of expression and association, and an assault on human rights defenders. We demand its immediate reversal. We regard this act to silence STT as an act of oppression against us all. The use of a vague administrative technicality to suspend an organization is an alarmingly clear sign of how the Cambodian government intends to use the LANGO to curb the activities of all associations and NGOs that advocate for the rights of marginalized groups within Cambodian society.

STT's work with some of Cambodia's most marginalized communities should be applauded, not silenced. The independent, quantitative research on the impacts of development projects that STT provides should be regarded as helpful in guiding both current and future development projects to better serve the Cambodian people. We urge all concerned parties to read STT's most recent report, available on the organization's website, and determine for themselves the value of STT's work. The report is available at: <http://bit.ly/o2mL9n>

This joint statement has been endorsed by
130 civil society and private sector groups
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Cambodian Committee for Women (CAMBOW) / Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) / HRD Apparels / National Democratic Institute (NDI) / The NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGO FORUM) / WITNESSThe Change To People's Organisation Of Wadala for Equality & Rights (POWER) / People's Responsible Organisation of United Dharaui (PROUD) / Perstuan Sabhat Wanita Selangor (PSWS) / Planet Wheeler Foundation / Ponk Khmer / See LICADHO Canada (LC) / Life With Dignity / Living River Slam Thailand / Love146 / Maryknoll / Mekong Watch / MISREOR / My Village / National Forum for the Urban Poor (NFUP) / NGO Coalition to Address Trafficking & Sex Hard Places Community (HPC) / Heinrich Boell Stiftung (HBS) / Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF) / Human Rights Watch (HRW) / Human Settlement Foundation Thailand (HSF) / Imago Dei Church / Indigenous Community Support Democratic Dimension Ukraine / Development and Partnership in Action (DPA) / Development & Peace (D & P) / Diakonia / East-West Management Institute Program on Rights and Justice (EWMJ-PRAJ) / Empowering Youth in Cambodia (EYIC) / Clean Clothes Campaign Denmark (CCCDK) / Clean Clothes Campaign Netherlands (CCCNL) / Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C-CAWDU) / Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (CCFC) / Collaborative Studio Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) / Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW) / Cambodian Watchdog Council (CWC) / Cambodia Women's Crisis Center (CWCC) / Cambodian Women's ActionAid Cambodia / Amnesty International (AI) / Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) / Asia Monitor Resource Centre Hong Kong (AMRC) / Bridges Across Borders Cambodia (BABO) / Building Community Voices (BCV) / Calvin Presbyterian Church / United for Sustainable Development (VSD) / Walthungerhilfe / Women for Prosperity (WFP) / Women League Struggle for Housing Rights / Women's Media Center of Cambodia (WMC) / World Education Cambodia (WEC) / Floor Wage Alliance / Sor Sor Troung (SST) / Star Kampuchea (SK) / Shelter for the Poor / Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior (SACOM) / Teachers, City in Crisis-Course, Finland / Thai Labour Campaign (TLC) / People's Aid (NPA) / Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT) / One-2-One Cambodia (one-2-one) / Operation Day's Work Finland (ODW) / Oxfam / Pari Project / People's Action for Change (PAC) / INKOTA / KEPA-Service Centre for Development Cooperation / Khmer Arts / Khmer Youth Association (KYA) / KOMITU Working Group Finland / Labour Behind the Label (LBL) / Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW) / Forum Asia (FA) / Forum Syd (FS) / Four Regions Slum Network Thailand (FRSN) / Foursquare Children of Promise (FCOP) / Freedom House (FH) / Front Line Defenders / Gender And Development For Cambodia (GADC) / Global Witness (GW) / Legal Education Center (LEC) / Community Organization for People's Action Thailand (COPA) / Community Organization in Asia (LOCOA) / Community Peacebuilding Network (CPN) / Concern Worldwide Cambodia / DanChurch Aid (DCA) / CA) / Christliche Initiative Romero (CIR) / Christians for Social Justice (CSJ) / Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) / Civic Alliance for Social Accountability in Cambodia (CASA) / Civil Servant Independent Association (CISA) / Workers Federation (CFSWF) / Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) / Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA) / Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC) / Win Labor Federation (CtW) / The Messenger Band (MB) / Civil Rights Defenders / Trocaire / Ukumbi / Urban Poor Women Development (UPWD) / Vants Cambodia / SILAKA / Social Action for Change (SAC) / Society of Community Organisers in India (SOCO) / Southeast Asia Coordinator of Asia / Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia (COSECAM) / NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child (NGOCRC) / NGO Education Partnership (NEP) / Norwegian Support Organization (ICSO) / Indigenous Rights Active Member (IRAM) / Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA) / INKOTA-network / Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) / Education International (EI-IE) / Epic Arts Cambodia / Farmers Association for Peace and Development (FAPD) / Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL) / Community Capacities for Development (CCD) / Community Economic Development (CED) / Community Network for Development (AMARA) / Cambodian Youth Network (CYN) / Center on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) / Chab Dai Coalition Cambodia / Christian Aid / Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) / Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) / Cambodian Confederation of Unions (CCU) / Cambodian Food and Service