



NARRATIVE REPORT

The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)

Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (COMFREL)

NARRATIVE REPORT 2019

"NGO Leaders Meeting on Cambodia Issues"

Project Title	"Strengthening and Renewing the Commitment to Uphold and Promote Democracy Together in Cambodia"
Location	Bangkok, Cambodia
Project period	24-26 February 2019
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Activities

NGO Leaders Meeting on "Strengthening and renewing the commitment to uphold and promote democracy together in Cambodia"

From 24 to 26 February 2019, ADHOC and COMFREL, the organizational coordination network conducted the three day-meetings in Bangkok, Thailand. A first day meeting was attended by 16 representatives from NGOs, Worker Unions, Socio political Analysts, Academics and Lawyers. A second day meeting was attended by the same 16 persons with adding more six representatives from the regional partners: NDI, Forum Asia, ANFREL, Asean Press Alliance, ICJ, Amnesty International. A third day meeting was a diplomat meeting held at the Resident of Royal Belgium Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand attended by seven diplomats from the embassy of Belgium, France, Norway, Austria, Australia, Italy and Poland.

Due to forbidden, excessive and intrusive monitoring of CSO/NGO activities by police and other officials, NGOs leaders have been holding a series meeting outside the country such as Thailand, Malaysia, etc. since 2016, to provide CSOs with a safe and open environment to gather and discuss. In this context, the meeting proposed to provide independent Cambodian CSOs' with a platform to discuss the current political and human rights situation in Cambodia, develop and strengthen joint

advocacy strategies and seek consideration and support from regional, international and key diplomats to restore democracy and achieve human rights in Cambodia.

I. General goal

- Build trust among and strengthen the Cambodian NGOs coalitions, as well as define strategies aimed at protecting human rights and promoting democracy in Cambodia.

II. Specific objectives

- To provide space for CSOs to share and exchange information, on what happen in Cambodia today, economically, socially and politically;
- To identify ways in which CSOs can work together, under the current socio-political context;
- Give a chance for CSOs to share their views and information with regional partners. especially for those who are based in Bangkok; (this was day two sessions);
- It is an opportunity for CSOs to meet face to face with invited diplomats, especially for western diplomats based in Bangkok.

III. Summary of discussion

Day One: 24th /02/2019

Initially, the meeting placed much emphasis on the reason why this meeting needs to be held outside the country, rather than to organize it inside Cambodia. As was explained by the participants, it is still difficult for such meeting to be held in Cambodia, under the condition where public gatherings and meetings are still scrutinized by the government. Furthermore, it was stressed that, although some positive responses from the government has been made regarding space for CSOs, to meet and carry out their activities freely, it is observed that, CSOs gathering still be kept government close surveillance.

A brief review on key activities agreed by the participants during the last meeting was also done, to check for progress and update:

- 1) The assessment on the Paris Peace Accords (PPA), which was still in progress and expected to be completed with the next 4 weeks;
- 2) NGOs attempt to create spaces, their freedom of activities, where the first meeting between CSOs and Mol was organized for the first time, after the political crisis. At the same time, alliance has also been built and strengthened, amongst NGOs working on human rights, where they have agreed in principle to re activate the role of Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHHRAC). Up until this stage, the CHHRAC formation has now been accepted and registered by Mol, and a strategic planning for CHHRAC has already been reviewed.

The participants also discussed on what were the key issues that need to be raised during the next day meeting with regional partners. Here is the list of issues to be shared:

- The ongoing threats are continuing, as government has now deployed more secret service and spite, both in Phnom Penh and in rural areas.
- More aggressive wordings have been voiced by the government, especially from the Prime Minister, to suppress the opposition. These threats were done after the government fails to win support from members of the opposition, both the local and national level.
- Real feeling has been expressed re: the EBA sanction, particularly from the investment sectors.
- Politically, the ruling party appears to keep up with their strategy to buy time, so that, they can weaken or destroy the opposition, before returning to normal situation.
- Space is opened, but in practice, the government surveillance continues
- Endorse the efforts of the UPR but to do more in response to what is stated by the PPA,

- Expect to see more active role of the special reporter in the next September meeting, and CSOs are willing to engage more in the meeting on Cambodia resolution. Looking for support to a Cambodian team.
- Inform about the progress in PPA, and it is believed that, this document can be used as basis for international campaigns.

Day 2: 25/02/2019

The meeting was facilitated by Forum Asia. A brief update on the current socio political issues were shared by the Cambodian CSOs, followed by questions and answers, to clarify and comments.

- Whether the real practice of EBA has been well understood by Cambodian people. It was explained that, EBA is not a sanction. It is just referred to the way in which EU will decide for the garment export to pay tax like other businesses.
- Partners has also checked “what are the views or where CSOs stand on the EU/EBA decision. It was responded, that, EBA could be a sword to deal with Political crisis in Cambodia. However, it is believed that, if this sword will be broken or not working effectively, then it will motivate the Cambodian government to do whatever they wanted.
- The regional partners also stressed that, the EU move on EBA is great and an important step to pressure the Cambodian government, and indeed, it will surely affect the Cambodian economy. However, it was argued that, although this is based on technical aspect, the decision has still been very emotional.
- More discussions were also carried out, to see if China is really able to save the Cambodian government, under the current regional and international political context. It was argued that, based on the recent trends, Chinese economy has also been slow, and thus, it might be difficult for the Chines to provide long term support to the Cambodian government.
- Regional partners also suggested for Cambodian CSOs, to request diplomats to provide an ongoing update about the progress of EBA process, that has been underway at the EU headquarter now.
- It is importance to stress that, EU and western allies should not only be focusing on EBA alone, but must adopt other resolutions that can link to individual sanction and businesses.
- There was a need to reinforce the work at the UPR on Cambodia, and using all possible means to raise the awareness among international community and organizations.
- It was also suggested that, while EBA decisions has now been in the process, the EU should also keep a close watch on the current human rights abuses in Cambodia.
- The IT digital training for local partners on security must be provided to whatever partners working as human right defenders.

Before the sessions ended, space was also given to regional partners to share what they have done for Cambodia, under the current political circumstance. Here are the key actions that have been taken by these regional partners, in response to the current political crisis in Cambodia.

- Forum Asia has a role to provide digital security training and research.
- A training on Digital security will be soon organized for Cambodian NGOs.
- Forum Asia also interested in research on Human rights and advocacy skill training.
- Forum Asia continues to provide protection and support to human rights defenders, who are at risk from being arrested or intimidated.
- Continues to provide technical assistance on advocacy, social media workshop.
- Keep an ongoing support and lobbying with the international community on Cambodia resolution, such as the UPR meeting in Geneva and elsewhere.
- Mobilize support for Cambodian delegation to the Asian Network for Democracy (AND)held in Kula Lumpur this year.
- Support advocacy initiatives, up on requested
- Increase efficiency on face book on democracy education and campaigning
- Also interested in assisting the process of PPA assessment and commit to carry out further advocacy, when the document be finalized.

- Help to organize the site events for Cambodia, during the next UPR meeting in Geneva. However, they stressed that, Amnesty International is not working on EBA and had no mandate beyond human rights.
- They will follow up closely on the results of the HR meetings in June and September this year.
- Amnesty reports have always been trusted and well accepted by the EU. In this case, any recent update on HR issues in Cambodia could be worth for Amnesty International to share to the EU and UN.
- The current issues on human rights and democracy in Cambodia have always been raised during the meetings between Japan and Cambodia government.
- Japanese NGOs always interested in supporting Cambodian initiatives, to struggle for democracy and Human rights through small funding and ideas.
- Beside supporting this meeting financially, he is working closely with Japan Ministry for Foreign affairs to ensure that, Japan government must be aware on what happen in Cambodia.
- In the past election, somehow, it was succeeded in convincing the Japanese government not to send the election observer to overseeing election in Cambodia.
- SEAPA has roles to monitor and alert on the political situation in Cambodia, through regular report to partners, both in the region and internally. It was confirmed that, another update report on Cambodia will be released in May this year.
- Keep gathering lesson learned from Cambodia on “Freedom of Media” and then share to wider community and some audiences.
- Develop a mapping of key Journalists, and keeps an eye on “what happen to them personally in case they are threated or intimidated. They are also helping journalists who are out of job, as result of threats and intimidations.
- Anfre continues to work with NDI to support the quarterly meeting for Cambodian CSOs in Bangkok;
- Looking at the possibility of a research on “how people mitigate their risks under strict political environment.

At the last part of the meeting, the Cambodian CSOs had requested to regional partners:

- Continue to support Cambodian delegation to the meeting on “Cambodia Resolution” led by Japan in September this year.
- Begging regional partners to keep alert and closely monitor on the current political situation in Cambodia.
- Request to all partners to work collectively, to influence EU and the US and making sure that, they must be strong on the conditions (not compromise with the Cambodian government.

Day 3: 26/02/2019

Meeting begun from 9 to 11 am, with a brief introduction of participants from all embassy representatives and CSOs team, then it was followed by a briefing report from CSOs representatives on Cambodia current political issues, and what have been done as responses from CSOs. (Issues as raised during day one meeting amongst CSOs representatives)

In the meeting, some key questions were raised by the diplomats on:

- What are the direction of the government crackdown on people demonstrations or political rallies?
- What are the status of relationship between the opposition leaders Mr. Kem Sokha and Mr. Sam Rainsy?
- To see if the opposition party such as CNRP has now been strong enough to win or manage the country, if they won?
- What are the expectations of Cambodian people on the EBA/EU resolution and what are the impacts of EBA, based on the views of CSOs?
- Where would be the future directions of CSOs actions, in response to the current political situation?

All Diplomats have expressed strong support to efforts made by the EU up to date and will continue to monitor the situation closely. Some embassies, that has no office in Phnom Penh will send their staff on a regular basis, to overseeing the situation and keep their own government with the most update information on Cambodia; human rights and democracy. It was also stressed that, under the current EU process on future EBA, EU diplomats and embassies, both in Phnom Penh and Bangkok, will continue to monitor the situation closely and reporting to EU, if necessary.

IV. Result of the meeting:

- Increase level of trust building among the Cambodian CSOs/NGOs who were participated and they were able to share their views and information freely during the meeting.
- All NGOs members committed to continues working, not only from the outside country and continues to work inside the country, and discuss about the current socio political situations and some activities become an ongoing activity, for example monitor and investigate hot cases, issued press statements at a hot political issues arising, etc.
- NGOs members work together to formulate and issue a press released on concern issues over the EBA and GSP. This statement was fully endorsed by 71 CSOs/NGOs in Cambodia.
- The statement above and the endorsement from NGOs, indicate a move in CSOs momentum, to open space for expression/movement.
- Gains more unified commitments from regional partners, where they agree to share their role and responsibility on Cambodia. In this case, through negotiation, the Cambodian CSOs group continues to receive financial support from the regional partners to continue their work.
- The relationship between the CSO group and Embassies in Bangkok has been strengthened, where the Cambodia CSOs –diplomats meeting will be continued through a rotation arranged by the embassy.

V. Next Plan

- Work together to prepare and issue a press released on concern issues over the EBA and GSP
- Advocate and lobby the government, specially the Ministry of Interior to review and amendment the current the NGO law in Cambodia.
- Prepare and submit a letter of request to the Ministry of Interior to remove list of eight CSOs from blacklist (White Paper) of the cabinet of the Council of Ministers of Cambodia.
- Next NGOs leader meeting will be held on 18-21 May 2019 at BKK.

VI. Financial report

Also please find the attachment.