

Cambodia: UN experts call for immediate release of five human rights defenders

25 January 2017 – Two United Nations human rights experts today called on the Government of Cambodia for the immediate release of five human rights defenders detained in May 2016 on charges, which they see as politically motivated.

The use of criminal provisions as a pretext to suppress and prevent the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and to silence human rights defenders is incompatible with article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (ICCPR), which has been signed by Cambodia, said the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Rhona Smith, in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ms. Smith recalled that, on 11 May 2016, a group of UN human rights experts sent a follow-up joint urgent appeal to the Cambodian Government on the cases of the five detainees, but has not received any response to date.

The experts requested detailed information on the legal basis for the detention of four staff of human rights NGO Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) – Lim Mony, Ny Vanda, Ny Sokha and Yi Soksan – as well as the Deputy Secretary General of the National Election Committee and former ADHOC staff member, Ny Chakrya.

As a party to the ICCPR, Cambodia is obliged to respect freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial, which entails a prompt and fair trial within a reasonable period of time or release, Ms. Smith stressed.

With so much effort and resources invested in improving the functioning of the judiciary, which had begun to see improvements in some respects, all that is lost with these cases, she cautioned. They have damaged even further the standing of the Cambodian judiciary, which according to studies commands the least respect of the public among all the State institutions.

The Special Rapporteur's call was also endorsed by human rights expert Sètonджи Roland Adjovi, who currently heads the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.