

Silencing opposition voices threatens Cambodian democracy – UN rights expert

12 October 2017 – Civil and political rights in Cambodia are “under threat” as the main opposition party is being dissolved in the parliament, a United Nations human rights expert warned Thursday, also voicing concern that the dissolution may affect upcoming elections in the country.

“For Cambodians to engage in open and serious political debate, the opposition must be allowed to exist and to function without fear or intimidation,” said Rhona Smith, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Cambodia, stressing that “[democracy is about voice and choice](#). These moves risk leaving many Cambodians without either.”

The Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) is the only opposition party represented in the National Assembly. To strip its seats of the parliament would affect Cambodians’ voice and choice at all levels of Government, said Ms. Smith.

She not only raised serious concerns about the representativeness of government, but was also worried that the Government’s moves were “under the guise” of rule of law.

The CNRP’s leader, Kem Sokha, remains in pre-trial detention on conspiracy charges, while half of the party members in parliament have left the country.

The human rights expert said these actions against the CNRP have created additional grounds for dissolving the party, and some of which are “broad and vague.”

“Modern Cambodia was established as a multi-party liberal democracy, respectful and protective of human rights. Its Constitution sought to prevent a return to a single-party state,” said Ms. Smith, adding that “those who drafted the Constitution were all too well aware of the consequences of one-party rule.”