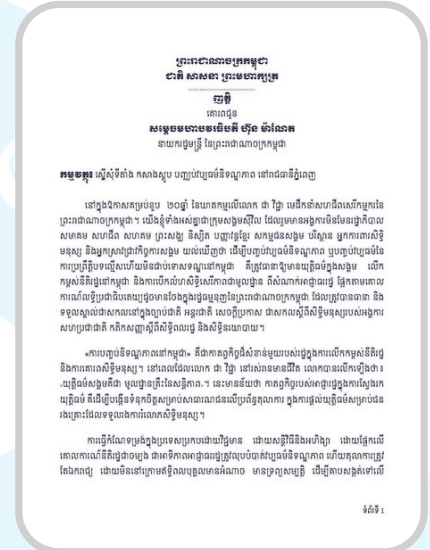


CID Newsletter of Democracy

The newsletter for February to March 2024 highlights the civil society organization's effort for social justice and human rights. It also celebrates the 113th International Women's Day and important events related to democracy and human rights development in the country.

SEEKING JUSTICE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

After 20 years of assassination over union leader Chea Vichea, the former President of the Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC) who was shot dead in daylight at a newspaper stall outside the Langka pagoda on 22 January 2004, [rights group](#) calls for the murderers to be brought to justice as they gathered again nearby Phnom Penh's Wat Langka pagoda this year. Ongoing advocacies were still carried out to bring justice into light as there are [55 civil society organizations](#) including unions, associations, and local communities endorsed the petition to the Prime Minister of Cambodia to build a stupa to symbolize the end of the culture of impunity in the Kingdom. However, there was no positive response from the Government's spokesperson as they did not necessarily consider and [rejected](#) the group's proposal.



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK



Mr. Soeng Senkaruna is the deputy head of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC). He is one of the outspoken and active human rights defenders in the country. However, he faced a lawsuit from the ruling party for allegedly inciting hatred and provoking unrest against the ruling party. This was due to a misquote in a news article from the Cambodia Daily. As a result, he was fined \$500,000 in damages. On 14 February, 55 civil society organizations called for an immediate end to the legal threat against him. The statement highlighted that the freedom to express political criticism is protected under Cambodia's Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Cambodia is a party. Therefore, such speech should not be criminalized or repressed, [the statement read](#). Even though the Cambodia Daily [corrected](#) its news article, unfortunately, the ruling party's spokesperson claimed that there would be no compromise as he is quoted by [Cambodia News](#) that "there will be no negotiations, only a settlement by the court".

Similarly, the government's spokesperson was also quoted by [Cambodianess](#) that "So the lawsuit cannot be interpreted as a way to repress freedom of speech". However, for some, this lawsuit is considered to be a sign of political repression in Cambodia, as political expression is still viewed as an [illegal activity](#). In addition, [Freedom House](#) noted that freedom of expression in Cambodia has been increasingly restricted in recent years, including those who work to promote and protect the rights of others. On the global ranking, Cambodia scored 130 out of 140 for freedom of expression, and 13 out of 15 in the regional ranking according to the [World Justice Project](#). Noticeably, HRDs in Cambodia endure various forms of violence. Between January 2022 and June 2023, [FORUM-ASIA](#) recorded a total of 101 cases of violence committed against HRDs. These cases include incidents of intimidation, threats, and administrative harassment.

CID Newsletter of Democracy

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

To mark the 113th International Women's Day, Cambodian civil organizations including CID have jointly organized an event to celebrate and highlight women's crucial role in the socio-economic development of Cambodia. The event took place at Freedom Park on 08th March 2024 under the theme "*Ensuring the Rights and Freedom of Women and Girls for Economic Stability and Social Justice*" where approximately 750 participants attended. This event was conducted as a series of online campaigns from 1-9 March and a physical event on 8 March. Those activities included radio talk shows, video animations of the 16 demanding messages, and a change of Facebook profile frame.



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID) organized a youth democracy camp on March 7–10, 2024, with a focus on the theme "Youth Ambassadors for Freedom of Expression" at Kirirom National Park, with 51 youths including 27 women, 24 men (3 monks) and one disabled person, from 16 provinces/cities including Kandal, Kratie, Kompong Cham, Kompong Thom, Kompong Spue, Kampot, Tbong Khmo, Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Prey Veng, Preh Vihea, Ratanakiri, Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Svay Reing, and Oudar Meanchey. This camp aims to empower youths and engage them in promoting freedom of expression and democratic processes in Cambodia. Through this event, the participants learned about human rights, freedom of expression, the necessity of freedom of expression in promoting democratic governance, critical thinking skills for freedom of expression and public speaking, how to write a commentary or op-ed, and how to produce an educational video by using a smartphone.

This activity complements what a research study has found out in 2022 that youth's civic and political engagement are relatively low. According to this study, youth civic engagement in local community development is relatively low. Out of 1600 youth who participated in the study, only 16% stated that they attended the formulation of the commune/district development plan, 11% attended the monthly council meeting, and 9% took part in monitoring the implementation of the commune/district development plan. The reason for this low participation was due to a lack of information, not being invited, and a lack of time. The study also found that youth political engagement was similarly low. According to the data, a higher percentage of young people show less interest in political affairs. Out of 1600 young people, 82 percent are not interested in politics. Additionally, only a small number of young people (5 percent) discuss political matters with their family and friends. The main reasons why they do not pay attention to politics are because of lack of political knowledge, considering themselves too young, not feeling responsible to think about politics, and perceiving political concepts as troublesome.

It is imperative to acknowledge and recognize the findings in question. The situation calls for necessary measures to be taken in order to facilitate and renovate the learning platform that serves youth empowerment in Cambodia. Therefore, the youth democracy camp has been established to address the need for a platform where young individuals could express their views to urge for policy reform, and move forward toward a knowledge-based society, as Francis Bacon suggests, "Knowledge is power."



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CID in the Media

Cambodianess, 16 February 2024, "[PM Hun Manet's Australia Visit Sparks Ambivalence Among Diaspora, Raises Hope for Ties Reset](#)." Regarding this topic, CID's co-founder, Dr. Ro Vannak said Australian leaders should raise the issue of healthy democratic development in Cambodia in special meetings while Hun Manet can be more receptive to such constructive engagement. "The significance of strong state institutions, opposition parties with equal opportunities for free and fair competition, vibrant civil societies, and independent media outlets cannot be ignored. This is vital for the interests of both countries which are adhering to the parliamentary system,".

CamboJA News, 22 February 2024, "[Cambodia To Hire Contractual Public Servants, Experts Amid Local Officer Shortage](#)." In response to this topic, CID's president said the recruitment of officers to work in public institutions can be done in two forms – the recruitment of framework officers and contract officers. "I believe that the introduction of a professional contract recruitment policy is necessary both to provide opportunities for professionals to work in public institutions and also in part to fill gaps in public institutions and increase the effectiveness,". However, the recruitment process must be transparent and non-discriminatory in order to obtain highly skilled and efficient contract officers.

Phnom Penh Post, 22 February 2024, "[Manet: New DPM needed for reform implementation](#)." Regarding this topic, CID's president echoed Manet's remarks, saying that to lead public administrative reforms, the minister is required to have sufficient authority and influence. He noted that, given the political situation in the Cambodian government, criticism of the promotion of the prime minister's brother was inevitable. "Let's wait and see how efficient the public reform processes are," he said. Chanroeun suggested that, in response to the criticisms, the new deputy prime minister must show sufficient initiative in his work to justify his appointment.

CamboJA News, 26 February 2024, "[CPP Sweeps 55 Seats, Khmer Will Wins Three in Senate Election – Prelim Results](#)." CID's president said the election shows the total number of Members of Parliament and commune councils each party has. "Looking at the preliminary results, it's difficult to hope that the democratic process in the parliamentary system will be very effective because opposition seats are too few," Chanroeun said."

Radio Free Asia, 07 March 2024, "[The Ministry of Interior continues to remove police officers from service due to disciplinary violations](#)." CID's president believes that the Ministry of Interior should strengthen the management and effectiveness of officials at border checkpoints because citizens have raised concerns about the inactivity and various corrupt practices of these officials. He added that "I believe that the Ministry of Interior's past practices regarding the rotation of border officials is crucial. This is to prevent officials from staying in one place for too long and becoming entrenched, which could lead to favoritism and corruption."

CID'S UPCOMING EVENTS

1. Human Rights Academy (14-18 June 2024)

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