
EU AMBASSADOR 'CONCERNED' OVER RIGHTS SITUATION IN

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The European Unions ambassador to Cambodia, George Edgar, has expressed concern over the deterioration of human rights in Cambodia.

On the 70th anniversary of the passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Monday, Edgar said it was no secret that the E.U. was concerned by the dissolution of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party last year and the jailing of its leader, Kem Sokha, on treason charges.

In terms of the general situation, it's no secret that the E.U. has concerns about the human rights situations in particular in relation to some of the events over the last year or so that in particular affect political rights, he said.

In September 2017, Sokha was arrested on allegations that he had plotted with the United States to overthrow Prime Minister Hun Sen. The CNRP was dissolved the following month by the Supreme Court. He spent the next year in jail, before being released into house arrest.

Some 118 opposition officials were also banned from politics for five years in the same court decision.

The government has denied wrongdoing and claims it has only acted to uphold the rule of law in the Kingdom.

The ruling Cambodian Peoples Party also oversaw a wider crackdown on opposing voices and independent organizations, including curtailing the rights of civil society groups, activists and independent media outlets.

The moves prompted the United States to impose limited sanctions on senior members of the Hun Sen administration, followed by the E.U., which is also considering dropping Cambodia from a preferential trade scheme that experts say could cripple the countrys garment sector.

Following the threat from the E.U., the Cambodian government has sought to ease the pressure on civil society and is considering amending the law to allow the 118 CNRP politicians to return to political life.

We carefully noted that the statements by the government in particular from the beginning of last week contained some very positive elements and we look forward to seeing those implemented in practice, Edgar said.

Keo Remy, president of the official Cambodian Human Rights Commission, said Cambodia was not unique in its treatment of human rights defenders and opposition forces. If you check the Internet, you can see [the state of] human rights in every nation, he said. I want to say that every nation has human rights issues.

On Tuesday, the government released a statement defending its position on human rights. Human rights in Cambodia are guaranteed by law in which the government is still reforming the judicial system and other related laws to ensure and protect the rights of the people as well as the effectiveness in law implementation by the authorities, it said.

Chak Sopheap, president of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, said she hoped the government would do more to cooperate with local communities to improve human rights at the grassroots level.

The human rights situation for the last two years has deteriorated. I hope that this Human Rights Day ... is a reminder that the government has an obligation to respect and protect human rights, she said.

She added that the restrictions placed on a rally organized on Human Rights Day, despite the authorities initially granting rally-goers permission to hold the events, was a concern.

Meas Ny, a political analyst, said the restrictions placed on the rallies were a trial by the government that showed it was not yet comfortable allowing more political space for dissenting voices.

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