



Human Rights Institute

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Item 4: Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Cambodia

Oral Statement

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, Lawyers for Lawyers, and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, welcome the Special Rapporteur's report.¹

We appreciate the recent communication on the challenges facing lawyers, access to justice in Cambodia, and addressing concerns on lack of investment in legal aid. Combined with the reduction of international funding, this issue is leaving thousands without access to justice, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups and undermining fair trial rights.

Cambodia's justice system requires much increased attention. The country lacks enough lawyers to meet demand, and those who take on sensitive cases are isolated, under-resourced, socially discriminated against, and harassed. The absence of a strong, independent legal community erodes trust in the rule of law.

While attention is focused on peace at the Cambodia–Thailand border, we receive troubling reports of arbitrary arrests for expressing opinions about the conflict. With no independent legal aid network in place, only a handful of lawyers are compelled defend basic rights without pay making the defense of basic rights unsustainable.

Lawyers are key human rights defenders and are crucial to the defence of other human rights defenders. We urge the international community to work with Cambodia and civil society to build an independent, resilient legal profession to protect rights without fear of retaliation.

This statement was delivered by:

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¹ This statement is also endorsed and supported by local civil society organizations: Legal Aid Cambodia, Community Legal Education Centre, Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition, Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, and Federation of Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia.