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On Zero Discrimination Day, CSOs urge government to “leave no one behind” in Cambodia’s development

On the occasion of Zero Discrimination Day 2017, we, the undersigned organizations, call upon the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) to respect, protect and promote the rights of all marginalized and discriminated groups in Cambodia, and to ensure that “no one is left behind” in Cambodia’s development, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We further call upon all Cambodians to accept and embrace members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (“LGBT”) community, people with disabilities, ethnic and racial minorities and all other marginalized groups.

01 March 2017 is Zero Discrimination Day, a global initiative designed to combat the mistreatment, stigmatization and marginalization of people within society by promoting acceptance, equality and equitable treatment of all people globally. Discrimination has many forms, from racial or religious discrimination, to discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation or age, to bullying at school or at work.¹ Zero Discrimination Day recognizes that the mistreatment of minority groups is a global issue and that through people, communities and nations collaborating together, the rights, freedoms and liberties of oppressed members of society can be better preserved and protected. Ensuring that these groups are full and equal partners in Cambodia’s development is a crucial component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The struggles of minority groups have been well documented in recent times in Cambodia. Recent research reports have uncovered widespread discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity² as well as on the basis of ethnicity.³ Marginalized groups in Cambodia are especially vulnerable because of a lack of any legislation explicitly prohibiting discrimination. A vital step in building a more inclusive Cambodia is the introduction of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation as a matter of priority. With Cambodia undergoing rapid development, it is vital that all sectors of society, including the most marginalized groups, are given a voice in determining and shaping the journey towards development. We extend our concern to those affected by discrimination on the basis of social status, including human rights defenders, as recently recognized by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.⁴ We call upon the Cambodian authorities to take decisive action to ensure the full participation of marginalized groups in crafting an equitable form of development that benefits all Cambodians.

Zero Discrimination Day 2017 will be celebrated in Cambodia by a diverse and vibrant coalition of civil society organizations and the wider public. Radio transmissions and Facebook live streams will

¹ UNAIDS, “UNAIDS Urges Everyone to Make Some Noise For Zero Discrimination” (Article) (2017) <http://bit.ly/2mfvaXH>

² Rainbow Community of Kampuchea & TNS Cambodia, ‘Research Report on Opinions, Attitudes and Behavior toward the LGBT Population in Cambodia (2015) ; CCHR, ‘Discrimination Against Transgender Women in Cambodia’s Urban Centers’ (Report) (2016) <http://bit.ly/2mu3kDV>

³ ACT, CCHR and KKKHRDA, ‘Citizenship Rights for Khmer Krom in Cambodia’ (Report) (2017) <http://bit.ly/2mkHiqs>

⁴ Human Rights Council Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 45/2016 concerning Ny Sokha, Nay Vanda, Yi Soksan, Lim Mony and Ny Chakrya (Cambodia), A/HRC/WGAD/2016/45, <http://bit.ly/2hhpWV9>

also be broadcast throughout the course of the day. The message of the day is inclusiveness, acceptance and friendship.

We, the undersigned organizations, call upon the RGC to prioritize the promotion and protection of human rights for all Cambodians and to promote a vibrant, accepting, inclusive and welcoming society. Specifically, we urge the RGC to introduce anti-discrimination legislation to protect marginalized groups and to ensure their full participation in Cambodia's development.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. *Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)*
2. *CamASEAN Youth's Future*
3. *Cambodia LGBT Legal Support*
4. *Cooperation for Social Services and Development (CSSD)*
5. *KHANA*
6. *KHEMARA*
7. *Men's Health Social Service (MHSS)*
8. *Media for Education and Development in Action (MEDIA One)*
9. *Men's Health Cambodia (MHC)*
10. *My Voice My Story*
11. *The Rainbow Community Kampuchea (RoCK)*
12. *Women's and Choices*
13. *Youth LEAD Cambodia*