



**CCHR PRESS RELEASE – Phnom Penh, 1 March 2016**

**On the occasion of Zero Discrimination Day, CCHR publishes a timeline of Cambodian LGBTI history and calls on the Royal Government of Cambodia to introduce Anti-Discrimination Legislation**

Today - on the occasion of Zero Discrimination Day 2016 - the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) publishes an interactive timeline detailing some of the major events in the development of Cambodia’s LGBTI rights movement, and calls upon the RGC to introduce legislative protection for LGBTI people as a matter of priority.

The Cambodian Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity / Expression (“SOGIE”) Timeline charts the enormous progress made by Cambodia’s LGBTI rights movement from 1994 through to the present day, by highlighting statements of political support, government actions and legislative changes which have impacted the lives of LGBTI Cambodians. In recent months and years, public and political support for LGBTI equality has gathered significant momentum. As more and more people begin to understand SOGIE issues, Cambodia’s LGBTI community is growing in confidence and moving closer to true equality. Today, we celebrate Cambodia’s LGBTI community and recall that all human beings are born free and equal, and have a fundamental human right to be free from discrimination of all kinds. The Cambodian SOGIE Timeline is now online in [Khmer](#) and [English](#).

The RGC and civil society organizations (“CSOs”) have made positive strides together in recent months in the realm of LGBTI rights in Cambodia. Council of Ministers’ spokesperson Phay Siphon publically expressed [government support](#) for LGBTI people, stating, “*Cambodian society does not discriminate against LGBTI people... No laws discriminate against them*”. In a [later statement](#), Mr. Siphon said, “*LGBT people go to work and pay taxes like everyone else, so have the right to participate fully in society... If a gay couple ... wants a marriage certificate, they should apply for one*”. Khieu Kanharith, the Minister of Information, has taken this positive engagement a step further by actively engaging with NGO CamASEAN Youth’s Future (“CamASEAN”) to initiate a national [radio program](#) to discuss LGBTI issues. Additionally, with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (“UNESCO”) the [“#PurpleMySchool” campaign](#) is growing in popularity in Cambodian schools. The campaign has the mission of “*creating safe spaces for LGBTI students across Asia and the Pacific*.” In another hugely positive development, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (“MoEYS”) is cooperating with civil society to train 3,100 teachers across Cambodia on SOGIE awareness.

While great progress has undeniably been made in terms of official support for LGBTI rights, there is an enormous amount of work still to be done – both legally and socially – if LGBTI Cambodians are to become equal citizens of the Kingdom. While social stigma, particularly within the family structure, is an enormous concern for LGBTI Cambodians, CCHR’s research suggests that state actors too are

often at fault. Research for CCHR's "[LGBT Bullying in Cambodia's Schools](#)" report revealed that 63% of respondents were bullied at school as a result of their LGBTI status. Worryingly, the study found that this discrimination comes not only from peers, but also from teachers and even members of the police force.

These statistics are an indication of a widespread lack of understanding of SOGIE issues. LGBTI Cambodians are not treated equally as citizens, and many continue to live on the margins of Cambodian society. One in ten Cambodian LGBTI students never finishes school as a result of bullying, and the internalization of such treatment carries on throughout their lives. Traditional Cambodian family values contribute greatly to the discrimination faced by LGBTI Cambodians. Due to a concern for the family's reputation, LGBTI individuals often face rejection from their loved ones, and may even be forced into a heterosexual marriage. In cases of forced marriage, marital rape is commonplace.

On the occasion of Zero Discrimination Day, taking the reality outlined above into account, CCHR urges the RGC to introduce anti-discrimination legislation as soon as possible. This legislation must protect LGBTI citizens from discrimination in all areas of their lives. Provisions should include equal treatment for LGBTI students and staff in all levels of educational institutions, as well as equal treatment for LGBTI people in the workplace and recruitment processes and in the provision of healthcare services.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, clear consequences must be outlined for anyone who violates these laws.

**LGBTI rights activist Ye Sethanavuth comments:**

*"On Zero Discrimination Day, LGBTI people are given the opportunity to raise awareness of the everyday discrimination we face in society. I urge the government to support us by introducing new legislation which would protect us against this treatment. This day is about recognizing the value and equality of all LGBTI Cambodians."*

**CCHR's SOGI Project Coordinator Nuon Sidara comments:**

*"Despite some recent progress in the arena of LGBTI rights in Cambodia, there is an urgent need to introduce anti-discrimination legislation which aligns with the positive statements made by government figures. LGBTI Cambodians suffer from serious discrimination on a daily basis, both at the hands of private individuals and state actors, such as the police. The time for action is now."*

LGBTI rights are human rights, and all individuals must be safeguarded against mistreatment, harassment and discrimination on the basis of their SOGIE.

**For more information, please contact Mr. Nuon Sidara, Project Coordinator of the SOGI Project, via telephone at +855 (0) 9796 66566 or email at [sidara.nuon@cchrcambodia.org](mailto:sidara.nuon@cchrcambodia.org) or CCHR Legal**

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<sup>1</sup> More detailed recommendations to stakeholders can be found in CCHR's LGBT Bullying in Cambodia's Schools report that was released in December 2015. <<http://bit.ly/1p71s4t>>

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Notes to the Editor:

CCHR, founded in November 2002, is a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights throughout Cambodia.

CCHR is a member of International Freedom of Expression Exchanges (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression. CCHR is also a member of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) SOS-Torture Network.

The Cambodian Human Rights Portal [www.sithi.org](http://www.sithi.org) is the 2011 winner of the Information Society Innovation Fund Award in the category of Rights and Freedoms and the 2013 winner of the Communication for Social Change Award, awarded by the Centre of Communication and Social Change at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.