

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Asiatisk Plads 2
1448 København K.
Att.: Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Holger K. Nielsen
udenrigsministeren@um.dk

Copenhagen, January 10th, 2014

Dear Minister of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Holger K. Nielsen,

Request for urgent response to the crisis and victims in Cambodia

As Danish NGOs with offices in Cambodia we are writing to draw your attention to the recent brutal crack-down by government security forces on unarmed peaceful protests in Cambodia, leaving at least four civilians dead and 39 hospitalized with injuries.

On January 2 and 3 Security forces used live ammunition, grenades and tear gas on striking workers from the garment industry, who have been protesting to demand a living wage of \$160 a month. Union and civil society organisation leaders, Buddhist monks, and striking workers were severely beaten and 23 held in arrest without access to medical, family and legal support for several days. Among the arrested and beaten are two leaders of local partner organisations, with whom both Danmission and DanChurchAid cooperate.

On 4 January 2014, the government violently cleared Freedom Park of protesters, using district security guards to attack and intimidate them. The principles of nonviolence have been an overarching theme of the people's actions. It appears that the human rights of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are now being denied through the use of excessive state force to suppress peaceful protest and a de facto ban by the municipal authorities of Phnom Penh of public gatherings of more than 10 people.

Protests by supporters of the political opposition have grown over recent months resulting from popular rejection of the results of the July 2013 elections. These elections were marred by significant irregularities. Recent demonstrations have involved marches by tens of thousands of people as well as peaceful gatherings in Freedom Park, Phnom Penh, a venue specifically established by the government to honour freedom of speech. This has coincided with a nationwide strike by garment factory workers (the most important export industry in Cambodia) seeking an increase in the minimum wage.

It is absolutely vital for a functional democracy that the citizens of Cambodia are allowed to protest peacefully and voice their dissent against their government. On 4 January, Cambodia's two opposition leaders, Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha have been summoned to court on January 14 on allegations of inciting civil unrest.

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We urge the Danish Government to condemn the actions of the past week to the Cambodian government in the strongest possible terms, demanding that human rights and democracy be honoured. In particular, we request the Danish Government to insist on:

- the immediate and unconditional release of the 23 arrested protesters
- the restoration of the right to peaceful protest and the stop of government sanctioned violence against civilians
- the establishment of an independent investigation committee to find those responsible for this violence
- insurance that the perpetrators are brought to justice without delay and redress provided to those injured and to the families of the people killed;

Finally we ask the ministry to kindly keep us informed of actions taken in this regard – by the Danish Government - through Embassy and through EU – and of possible responses to such actions.

Sincerely yours,



Henrik Stubkjær
Generalsekretær

DANMISSION

Mogens Kjær
Generalsekretær

c.c.:

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