



# International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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## Human Rights Committee

### Report on follow-up to the concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee\*

#### Addendum

### Evaluation of the information on follow-up to the concluding observations on Cambodia

*Concluding observations (134th session):* [CCPR/C/KHM/CO/3](#), 22 and 23 March 2022

*Follow-up paragraphs:* 9, 35 and 39

*Information received from State Party:* [CCPR/C/KHM/FCO/3](#), 3 March 2025

*Information received from stakeholders:* Mother Nature Cambodia with the support of  
Right Livelihood Award Foundation,<sup>1</sup>  
1 December 2025

*Committee's evaluation:* 9 [C], 35 [C] and 39 [C]

### Paragraph 9: Anti-corruption measures

The State Party should increase its efforts to prevent and eradicate corruption and impunity at all levels. It should ensure that all cases of corruption, including those related to land issues, illegal logging and contracts for development projects, are independently and thoroughly investigated, that those responsible are duly tried and adequately punished, and that victims receive full reparation. The State Party should ensure adequate protection for whistle-blowers, witnesses and victims of corruption, including by adopting the draft law on reporting persons and the draft law on witnesses, experts and victims, after open, transparent and meaningful consultations with civil society and other relevant stakeholders.

#### Summary of the information received from the State Party

The Government is committed to combating corruption, as outlined in the Pentagonal Strategy – Phase I, focusing on financial and public administration reforms to promote good governance, transparency and accountability. The Anti-Corruption Unit prioritizes streamlining law enforcement and promoting integrity in both the public and the private sectors to prevent and eliminate corruption and impunity. The Unit independently investigates all reports of corruption to build cases and secure convictions under the law.

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\* Adopted by the Committee at its 145th session (2–19 March 2026).

<sup>1</sup> Submission available at

[tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FNGS%2FKHM%2F67711&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FNGS%2FKHM%2F67711&Lang=en).



Victims of criminal offences are legally protected to seek reparations, which affirms citizens' rights to file complaints against breaches of the law by State officials, with courts responsible for resolving such claims. The Anti-Corruption Unit prioritizes the safety of witnesses, informants and other such individuals, thereby increasing confidence in its measures. The Government is drafting laws on the protection of witnesses and of informants in consultation with stakeholders, including civil society.

### **Summary of the information received from stakeholders**

In July 2024, five leaders of Mother Nature Cambodia were imprisoned for six to eight years for allegedly plotting against the Government after exposing corruption and environmental destruction between 2012 and 2021. Five more activists were convicted in absentia. Their work revealed illegal marine sand mining, forest clearance, corrupt land deals and foreign fishing exploitation. The charges are widely viewed as fabricated, signalling that challenging corruption in Cambodia leads to arrest, not protection.

The Government has failed to implement anti-corruption recommendations, enforce the Anti-Corruption Act or provide protection for whistle-blowers. Enforcement remains weak due to political interference. The authorities must release detained activists, quash convictions, ensure impartial investigations into corruption tied to land seizures, logging, sand dredging, mining and illegal fishing, and stop targeting civil society actors who expose malfeasance and illegal exploitation of natural resources.

### **Committee's evaluation**

[C]

While noting the information provided by the State Party, the Committee regrets the absence of concrete measures taken during the reporting period to effectively combat corruption and to ensure adequate protection for whistle-blowers, witnesses and victims of corruption. The Committee is particularly concerned by reports of convictions and the imprisonment of civil society actors for exposing alleged corruption and illegal exploitation of natural resources. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations and urges the State Party to adopt and implement effective measures to guarantee the protection of whistle-blowers and to ensure that civil society actors and human rights defenders are not subjected to reprisals or punishment for the legitimate exercise of their rights.

## **Paragraph 35: Freedom of expression**

**The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation on freedom of expression and urges the State Party to take immediate measures to ensure that everyone can freely exercise the right to freedom of expression, in accordance with article 19 of the Covenant and the Committee's general comment No. 34 (2011) on the freedoms of opinion and expression. In doing so, the State Party should:**

- (a) Refrain from prosecuting and imprisoning journalists, human rights defenders and other civil society actors as a means of deterring or discouraging them from freely expressing their opinions;**
- (b) Prevent acts of harassment and intimidation against, the placement of arbitrary restrictions on, or arrests of journalists, activists and human rights defenders who merely criticize public officials or government policies;**
- (c) Decriminalize defamation and bring any other relevant provisions of the Criminal Code and the Law on Telecommunications into line with article 19 of the Covenant;**
- (d) Review and revise its current and pending legislation, including the Sub-Decree on the National Internet Gateway, draft amendments to the Press Law and the draft laws on cybercrimes and on access to information, to avoid the use of vague terminology and overly broad restrictions;**

(e) **Ensure that in the formulation and enforcement of its legislation, including ministerial sub-decrees, any restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression and association comply with the strict requirements of articles 19 (3) and 22 of the Covenant.**

#### **Summary of the information received from the State Party**

Freedom of expression is guaranteed under the Constitution, with restrictions allowed only by law to protect rights, dignity, national security and public order. The Government has instructed the local authorities to organize public forums where citizens can freely express their opinions and raise concerns. The Criminal Code does not specifically target journalists, human rights defenders or civil society actors, and legal proceedings are not used to suppress critical expression. For example, newspapers are free from censorship. Criminal law includes provisions to protect individual honour, national security, public order, health and public morality, and prohibits threats and arbitrary detention.

The law prohibits criticism that includes defamation, incites unrest or contains false information. Defamation is criminalized in order to protect individual honour and dignity, in accordance with article 19 (3) of the Covenant. When individuals understand their duties and responsibilities when exercising their rights, no criminal offence will occur.

Several legal documents have been prepared and submitted for substantive consultation and are currently awaiting approval, including a decree on the establishment of the National Internet Gateway and amendments to the press law, the access to information law and the cybercrime law. The draft cybercrime law was developed based on legislation from other States and on the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, with the support of the Embassy of the United States of America in Cambodia and four major technology companies from the United States.

The Sub-Decree on the National Internet Gateway has been submitted for consultation with telecommunications experts and is being developed to protect national security and public order, in line with the principles enshrined in the Covenant.

#### **Summary of the information received from stakeholders**

Instead of safeguarding freedom of expression, the State Party has criminalized peaceful environmental advocacy. Since 2021, the authorities have intensified judicial harassment of members of Mother Nature Cambodia using charges such as incitement, plotting and lèse-majesté. Despite international concern, including over lèse-majesté charges in 2021, intimidation and prosecutions persist; in 2025, several activists remained imprisoned for exercising fundamental rights.

These actions reflect repression rather than compliance with article 19 of the Covenant, treating advocacy as a crime instead of protected participation. Laws enabling criminalization, including the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations, remain in force, and the courts continue to be used as tools of repression. Mother Nature Cambodia was arbitrarily deregistered in 2017. The 2025 CIVICUS Monitor report highlights shrinking civic space, abusive laws and politicized courts, as well as how the authorities weaponize border tensions to silence journalists and jail peaceful critics. Urgent international scrutiny is needed to protect fundamental freedoms and civil society.

#### **Committee's evaluation**

[C]

While noting the information provided by the State Party, including ongoing legal consultations, the Committee regrets the absence of details on concrete measures taken and their effect during the reporting period. It remains concerned by reports of the continued use of legislation that includes vague terminology and overly broad restrictions, and of judicial proceedings to silence or prosecute journalists, human rights defenders and other civil society actors, thereby deterring or discouraging freedom of expression. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations and urges the State Party to take effective steps to ensure full protection of freedom of expression, in accordance with its obligations under the Covenant.

### **Paragraph 39: Participation in public affairs**

The State Party should bring its electoral regulations and practices into full compliance with the Covenant, including article 25, by, among other things:

- (a) **Ending all arbitrary arrests and acts of harassment, intimidation and violence against members and supporters of opposition parties;**
- (b) **Conducting thorough and independent investigations into all allegations of harassment, intimidation and arbitrary arrest and acts of violence against members and supporters of opposition parties, in particular in the killing of Sin Khon, and bring the perpetrators to justice;**
- (c) **Ending all mass trials against members of the opposition and ensuring that all proceedings brought against them, as well as against human rights defenders, are in conformity with all of the procedural guarantees set out in the Covenant;**
- (d) **Ensuring the full and meaningful enjoyment of electoral rights by everyone, including opposition political candidates, and that all political parties can conduct an equal, free and transparent electoral campaign;**
- (e) **Guaranteeing the freedom to engage in pluralistic political debate, including by facilitating peaceful demonstrations and meetings and by refraining from using criminal laws to suppress that freedom or to exclude opposition candidates from electoral processes;**
- (f) **Strengthening the judicial and electoral mechanisms to ensure a fair electoral process, particularly in time for the 2022 commune elections and the 2023 national elections.**

#### **Summary of the information received from the State Party**

The competent authorities are not legally allowed to harass, intimidate, violate or arbitrarily arrest opposition members or supporters, as the election law grants them no such powers. The law protects individuals from arrest, harassment, intimidation and violence, and offenders are punished accordingly. Victims have the right to file complaints.

The judicial police conduct independent investigations and ensure that offenders face justice. For example, the Sin Khon murder case was thoroughly investigated and the suspect was sent to court. Only judges can adjudicate cases, and hearings follow legal procedures. Suspects are presumed innocent, informed of charges, given time to prepare, and allowed to meet their chosen lawyer. Trial dates must be recorded, and suspects have the right to attend, defend themselves and undergo cross-examination. No one may be forced to confess. Verdicts are announced publicly, and those found guilty can appeal. Proceedings in the Phnom Penh Court of First Instance in cases against opposition party members comply with the provisions of the Convention.

The election law guarantees political parties the opportunity to campaign freely, fairly and transparently. The Ministry of the Interior issued guidelines instructing the local administrative authorities to thoroughly implement the election law. The 2022 commune elections and the 2023 national elections were conducted smoothly, freely, transparently and peacefully, in accordance with the law. In the 2023 Legislative Assembly elections, 20 parties participated and 84.5% of registered voters voted. All parties had equal access to State media for political debates.

#### **Committee's evaluation**

[C]

While noting the information provided by the State Party, the Committee regrets the lack of details on concrete measures taken during the reporting period. The Committee reiterates its recommendations and urges the State Party to take all steps necessary to ensure the effective implementation of electoral regulations in practice, guaranteeing full compliance with the Covenant, particularly article 25.

**Recommended action:** A letter should be sent informing the State Party of the discontinuation of the follow-up procedure. The information requested should be included in the State Party's next periodic report.

**Next periodic report due:** 2029 (country review in 2030, in accordance with the predictable review cycle).

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