

Joint Civil Society Statement

Joint Civil Society Statement on the 2025 International Human Rights Day

“Our Everyday Essentials: Reaffirm Human Rights Values, Civic Space, and the Rights of Human Rights Defenders”

(Aligned with the international theme: “Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials”)

Phnom Penh, 10 December 2025 — On the occasion of International Human Rights Day 2025, we the undersigned civil society organizations in Cambodia reaffirm that human rights are our everyday essentials—fundamental to dignity, justice, equality, peace, and the protection of all people under the law.

In a context where social, economic, and political pressures increasingly affect fundamental freedoms, we highlight the urgent need to defend universal human rights and the civic space required for individuals and communities to freely participate in shaping their society.

This year, Cambodian civil society marks the day under the theme “Reaffirm the Human Rights Values, Civic Space, and the Rights of Human Rights Defenders,” aligned with the global theme “Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials.” Both underscore that human rights are not abstract ideals—they are daily necessities that allow individuals, families, and societies to thrive.

Shrinking Civic Space in Cambodia

We express our deep concern over the continuing deterioration of civic space in Cambodia. Public space for participation, freedom of expression, press freedom and assembly has progressively narrowed and restricted, limiting the public’s ability to voice concerns, hold institutions accountable, and engage in dialogue.

Key concerns include:

- Increasing use of criminal provisions—especially Article 495 (incitement) and defamation—creating fear that discourages public participation in civic and political life;
- Restrictions on peaceful assembly, including close monitoring, the presence of high-ranking officials, and heavy deployment of armed forces around lawful and traditional meetings, creating an intimidating and unsafe environment for citizens and civil society;

- Tightened administrative controls and oversight of civil society organizations; and
- Digital repression targeting online critics, activists, and journalists.

These pressures undermine democratic governance, accountability, and inclusive participation—the foundation of a peaceful society.

Human Rights Defenders and Vulnerable Groups

Human rights defenders (HRDs)—including community representatives, environmental defenders, union leaders, journalists, and online activists—continue to face arrests, prolonged pretrial detention, legal harassment, and threats for their peaceful work. Despite their essential role, Cambodia still lacks a national protection mechanism consistent with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, especially the communities affected by land dispossession and Environmental defenders and indigenous minorities.

These groups require inclusive, equal, safe, and open public spaces where their voices can be heard without fear.

Human Rights Situation: Recent Data (2025)

According to LICADHO, nearly 100 citizens were arrested related to exercising their right to freedom of expression. CambodJA [recorded](#) 23 human rights violations against journalists and media institutions during the third quarter of July to September 2025, representing an alarming 130% increase compared to the previous quarter.

From January to September 2025, CambodJA recorded a total of 47 cases of violations against journalists and media institutions. These included 37 cases of legal harassment (79%), 5 cases of physical assaults, and 5 instances of media license revocations. Notably, 87% of these violations were committed by state actors at local, provincial, and national levels.

These recent data underscore the urgency of protecting civic space and fundamental freedoms and reflect a broader pattern of shrinking freedoms and growing risks for those exercising their fundamental rights.

Role of Youth in Advancing Human Rights

We emphasize the crucial role of youth as leaders, communicators, defenders, and positive changemakers. Young people bring energy, innovation, and hope to human rights work, and their participation is essential to building an equitable society grounded in justice, transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination.

Ensuring a safe, open, and enabling environment for youth is vital to Cambodia's democratic future.

Our concerns are still in line with the Conclusions and Recommendation of the Universal Periodic Review – 4th Cycle, especial the recommendations/conclusion numbers that the Royal Government of Cambodia supported and noted related to the civic space, civil and political rights, fundamental rights and freedoms and the rights of the human rights defenders (supported recommendations: 139.106, 139.107) and (noted recommendations: 139.76, 139.111, 139.87 and 139.102).

Our Calls to the Royal Government of Cambodia

On this Human Rights Day, we call on the Royal Government of Cambodia to seriously consider our recommendations below:

- Releasing all prisoners of conscience detained for peaceful expression and actions for defending human rights, public benefits or needs and environmental rights and freedom of the press.
- Ensure fair, impartial, and timely legal proceedings for individuals facing human rights-related charges;
- Reopen and expand civic space, ending unnecessary restrictions on civil society and communities and allowing them to exercise their role without fear and close monitoring by armed forces as not necessary;
- Protect human rights defenders, end judicial harassment and inhumane arrest to civilian including female human rights defenders, and adopt national safeguards consistent with international standards;
- Implement international human rights conventions and fully realize UPR recommendations related to civic space and human rights defenders;
- Strengthen transparency, accountability, and the rule of law;
- Promote collaboration between communities, civil society organizations, educators, and state institutions, especially to support vulnerable groups. Refrain from bringing criminal charges against journalists and citizen journalists in relation to their journalistic work.

- End impunity by promptly investigating, prosecuting and redressing cases of violence against journalists and human rights defenders.
- Amend the Criminal Code to repeal or amend the incitement crimes (Art. 494, 495), public defamation (Art. 305) and public insult (Art. 307) and other related article in order align with international freedom of expression standards.

As the world celebrates Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials, we stand united in reaffirming that human rights, open civic space, and the protection of human rights defenders are essential pillars of a peaceful and democratic Cambodia.

We call upon all stakeholders: government institutions, civil society, communities, youth, and international partners to uphold these values every day and work together toward a future built on respect, solidarity, justice, and shared responsibility.

Our statement endorsed by:

1. Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA)
2. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
3. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
4. Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC)
5. Cambodian Industrial Workers Federation (CIWF)
6. Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)
7. Coalition Of Apparel & Industrial Union (COALITION-AI)
8. Cambodian Truck Drivers Association (CTDA)
9. Cambodia Tourism Service Workers Federation (CTSWF)
10. Cambodian Youth Network Association (CYN)
11. Empowering Youth for Equitable Society (EYES)
12. Framer Association For Peace and Development (FAPD)
13. Independent Democratic Association of the Informal Economy (IDEA)
14. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
15. Khmer Association of Informal Economic (KAI)
16. Federation of Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC)
17. Partnership for Environment and Development (PED)
18. People Center for Development and Peace (PDP-Center)
19. Urban Poor Women Development (UPWD)