

8 December 2020

HE Ann Linde  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Stockholm, Sweden  
Re: Closure of the Embassy of Sweden in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Madam Minister,

We, the undersigned Cambodian civil society groups, are concerned about the recently announced plan to close the Embassy of Sweden in Phnom Penh at the end of 2021. We urge the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to reconsider their decision, or to seriously consider appointing a senior political or human rights officer from the Ministry based in Phnom Penh, to ensure strong continued engagement in human rights.

The current political situation in Cambodia is deeply concerning, and there are serious fears for the future of human rights in the country as we see the dwindling of our democracy, civic space and press freedom. Sweden has been a strong and positive force for the promotion and protection of human rights in Cambodia. It is one of the few embassies in Cambodia that monitors key trials and human rights events; meets imprisoned activists and their families; reaches out to threatened or high-risk human rights defenders; and maintains close relationships with key civil society actors. The closure of the embassy will represent a significant loss for the country.

The Government of Sweden previously announced in June 2020 that, as of July 2021, its development strategy will be focused entirely on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We welcome the continued support for these crucial topics, but we remain concerned that the embassy's planned closure at the end of 2021, will diminish Sweden's positive influence in the country and its ability to work closely with local civil society groups. We note that Sweden plans to accredit the ambassador in Bangkok to maintain relations with Cambodia, and that Sweden plans to continue development cooperation. However, without staff in the country focusing on human rights and the importance and challenges of civil society, we worry that opportunities for meaningful, constructive dialogue will be limited. Without a direct presence on the ground, it will be difficult for Sweden to build close connections and conduct outreach with local organizations, which will ultimately weaken its years-long relationship with Cambodian civil society. We are concerned that this will be harmful for the human rights situation in the country.

We view the Government of Sweden as a crucial partner in the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights in Cambodia. We sincerely hope that Sweden will reconsider the planned closure of the embassy, and maintain its diplomatic presence in Phnom Penh to remain a force for good in Cambodia.

**Yours sincerely,**

1. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong province)
2. Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
3. Am Leang Land Community (Kampong Speu province)
4. Bos Snor Community (Tbong Khmum province)
5. Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC)
6. Building Community Voice (BCV)

7. Cambodia Informal Economy Reinforce Association (CIERA)
8. Cambodia Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
9. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
10. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
11. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
12. Cambodian Food and Service Worker's Federation (CFSWF)
13. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
14. Cambodian Informal Economy Workers (CIWA)
15. Cambodian Journalists Alliance (CambodJa)
16. Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC)
17. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
18. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
19. Centre for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
20. Chi Khor Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong province)
21. Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C.CAWDU)
22. Committee for Free and Faire Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
23. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
24. Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUPI)
25. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
26. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
27. Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE)
28. Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear province)
29. Kiri Sakor district Land Community (Koh Kong province)
30. Klahan Organization
31. Klaing Toek 78 Community (Siem Reap province)
32. Labour Rights Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (L.R.S.U)
33. Lor Peang Community (Kampong Chhnang province)
34. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng province)
35. Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC)
36. Pailin Land Community (Pailin province)
37. Phum Phsar Kandal Land Community (Banteay Meanchey province)
38. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey province)
39. Prey Chher Pich Changva Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang province)
40. Prey Lang Network Cambodia (Kampong Thom province)
41. Prey Peay Land Community (Kampot province)
42. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)
43. Solidarity House (SH)
44. Sre Prang Community (Tbong Khmum)
45. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang province)
46. Ta Noun Land Community (Koh Kong province)
47. The Coalition for Integrity and Accountability (CISA)
48. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (CEDAW)
49. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu province)
50. Workers' Solidarity Strength Independent Union (WSSIU)

cc HE Peter Eriksson, Minister for International Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Mr. Robert Rydberg, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Mr. Per Olsson Fridh, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Ms. Cecilia Ruthstrom-Ruin, Director General, Department for Asia and the Pacific, Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Mr. Johannes Oljelund, Director General for International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
HE Bjorn Haggmark, Ambassador of Sweden to Cambodia  
Ms. Carin Jamtin, Director General, Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)  
Mr. Goran Holmqvist, Deputy Director General, Head of Department for HUMASIA, SIDA  
Mr. David Holmertz, Head of Asia Unit, SIDA  
Mr. Samuel Hurtig, Head of Development Cooperation, Swedish Embassy to Cambodia  
Ms. Camilla Ottosson, First Secretary, Swedish Embassy to Cambodia