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Statement submitted by Save Cambodia, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Gender-based violence on women and girls in Cambodia

This statement has been developed jointly with prominent grassroots, human rights, and women's rights-based organizations in Cambodia. These organizations are disenfranchised, restricted of freedom of expression, assembly, and association, and have a lack of redress mechanisms available to the defenders and their communities. Save Cambodia is currently the only main existing organization accredited by the United Nations Economic and Social Council that is working on Cambodian issues.

Cambodia ratified the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1992, but implementation has remained slow. Women in Cambodia face daily direct and indirect discrimination in all forms. They are underrepresented at all government levels. This statement does not address the full extent of what Cambodian women face; nor does it address the full extent of violations of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Usually, States want to keep their sovereignty and territorial integrity, but Cambodia is currently facing extinction. Cambodia is selling vast land to neighbouring and foreign countries for profits only benefitting those in power. If gender-based violence is not addressed in Cambodia, women's voices are kept from negotiations, peacebuilding, and developing inclusive societies.

Women and girls in Cambodia are subjected to pervasive forms of gender-based violence, both inside and outside of their households. Cambodia's judicial system is widely criticized as weak, ineffective, and lacking independence, which greatly interferes with the fulfillment of women's and girls' rights. Over the past months, human rights defenders and women's rights defenders in Cambodia have been subject to constant acts of harassment from the government that has sought to link them to a fictitious "color revolution", allegedly led by the former political opposition. Patriarchal structures and discriminatory social norms weave a web of barriers to Cambodian women's access to justice. Such barriers are symptomatic of the government systems to reinforce women's and girls' inequality.

Protections against gender-based violence are included in both the Criminal Code of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims. However, these protections do not sufficiently address the complex and diverse ways in which women and girls experience gender-based violence.

Under Cambodian law, protection orders can be granted to women who remain at risk of violence. The numbers provided by the Royal Government of Cambodia show that only 19 protection orders throughout the country have been conceded. Such orders were granted during the three-year period from 2014 to 2016. During the same period, one non-profit alone monitored nearly 400 cases of domestic violence. District-based multi-sectoral networks and innovative networks designed and engaged all key stakeholders to respond to gender-based violence cases. This action involved local authorities, police, health personnel, teachers, Commune Committees for Women and Children, officials from district offices, and community resource persons, who were intervening in a total of 3,035 cases related to domestic violence in 2016. It proves that the actual number of women who require protection orders is far higher than the number of orders granted by the government.

As for the patriarchal structure and social norms, women are regularly undermined. Girls and young women are educated and reminded about Chbap Srey on a regular basis in school and at home. These are a set of traditional rules that are

used to repress women from engaging in decision-making processes, politics, and other professions that are considered “masculine”. Chbap Srey has also followed into the Cambodian international community. Gender discrimination is prevalent in Cambodian society, as well as outside of Cambodia.

Civil society spaces, especially women’s rights-based organizations, have limited the number of activities that has been reduced or shut down since the government initiated its political crackdown since 2007. Even today, the State interference and monitoring of human rights activities have also become a systematic practice. More human rights defenders and women's rights defenders have continued to be monitored and questioned by local authorities. In 2008, a peaceful protesting campaign was organized by Tep Vanny and 12 other women named, Boeung Kak 13, but the organizers were either arrested or detained. This campaign was created because of the Cambodian government’s economic land concession scheme to serve as a legal basis for granting land to foreign corporations. This scheme resulted in forced land eviction leading to 3,500 families or 17,500 people becoming homeless. This government policy did not just deprive families of homes but it also intensified violations of all 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The Hun Sen government recently established the Hun Sen Law Group to provide legal representation for women seeking justice. However, this is another governmental practice to harass and/or intimidate the victims. There is still a lack of protection when dealing with human rights defenders and impoverished women.

Cambodian women and girls are commonly undermined, whether it be at home or outside. Though some progress has been made to remedy this, this type of discrimination still requires full attention. We seek guidance from the Commission on the Status of Women on bringing attention to Cambodian women and girls who are commonly undermined, assist in protecting women's human rights defenders, and open to learning the different protocols on how to get governments to successfully tackle gender-based violence. We seek partnerships with the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in bringing awareness about gender-based violence in Cambodia to the international community and hearing success stories of how to eliminate such violence.
