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Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Technical assistance and capacity-building

Role and achievements of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in assisting the Government and people of Cambodia in the promotion and protection of human rights

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

Submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 54/36, the present report outlines the role and achievements of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Cambodia from 1 June 2024 to 31 May 2025.

During the reporting period, OHCHR maintained cooperation with various government ministries, the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, the National Committee against Torture, the Disability Action Council and other governmental actors to provide technical assistance and advice. OHCHR also built the capacity of civil society actors, including to strengthen their role in engaging with international human rights mechanisms and advancing economic, social and cultural rights. The report highlights restrictions to civic space and the right to participate in public affairs, among other rights.

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline for technical reasons beyond the control of the submitting office.



I. Introduction

1. In the present report, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 54/36, the Secretary-General outlines the role and achievements of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in assisting the Government and people of Cambodia in the promotion and protection of human rights from 1 June 2024 to 31 May 2025.
2. OHCHR provided technical support to the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, the National Committee against Torture, the Disability Action Council and the National Social Assistance Fund.
3. OHCHR continued to monitor the human rights situation in Cambodia, in compliance with its methodology.¹ OHCHR supported the United Nations country team in mainstreaming human rights into national programming frameworks and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Cambodia 2024–2028.
4. OHCHR also continued to assist the Government in making progress towards implementing its international human rights obligations and recommendations of international human rights mechanisms. Moreover, OHCHR provided advice on legislative initiatives, including the draft law on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, the Royal Decree concerning the National Authority for Alternative Dispute Resolution and the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims.

II. Context

5. The work of OHCHR in Cambodia continued in a context characterized by both progress and challenges. While the economic recovery of the country following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has continued on a positive trajectory, concerns have heightened about civic space erosions, sometimes transcending borders.
6. The reporting period saw particular civic space restrictions in relation to journalists reporting on environmental issues, as well as the Cambodia-Lao People's Democratic Republic-Viet Nam Development Triangle Area. After a press conference in July 2024 in which Hun Sen, President of the Senate, ordered the authorities to find and take strong action against all critics of the Development Triangle Area, the authorities imposed measures unduly restricting the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and negatively affecting other human rights. At least 68 people were reportedly arrested in connection with planned protests regarding the Development Triangle Area in August 2024. Seven people were also forcibly returned from Thailand to Cambodia in November 2024 and criminally charged for comments made on social media regarding the Development Triangle Area. This is part of an emerging pattern of transnational repression² in South-East Asia.³

III. Economic, social and cultural rights

A. Macroeconomy and budget allocations

7. The post-COVID-19 economic recovery of Cambodia continued along a positive trajectory, driven by the resurgence in exports of garments, travel goods and footwear, along

¹ See www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/manual-human-rights-monitoring-revised-edition.

² "Transnational repression" denotes acts conducted or directed by a State, or its proxy, to deter, silence or punish dissent, criticism or human rights advocacy towards it, expressed from outside its territory.

³ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/06/we-must-urgently-find-our-way-back-peace-says-high-commissioner> and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/03/turbulence-and-unpredictability-amid-growing-conflict-and-divided>.

with a steady revival of the tourism sector.⁴ These industries have underpinned economic momentum, contributing to an estimated gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 5.5 per cent in 2024, with projections indicating a further increase to 5.8 per cent in 2025.⁵

8. The average inflation rate in 2024 was contained at 0.79 per cent, a decline of 1.35 percentage points compared with the previous year.⁶ However, total government revenue, including subnational revenue, declined by nearly 16 per cent,⁷ which may affect the availability of resources to expand public investment and access to essential services.

9. According to figures from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the public debt of Cambodia remained largely stable. External debt servicing remained manageable, with the country allocating 7.8 per cent of its revenue to it in 2024, up from 7.5 per cent in 2023. In 2024, Cambodia continued to be classified as a country with low external debt stress.⁸

10. Estimated national expenditure for 2025 has been set at 38.95 trillion Cambodian riel (\$9.7 billion), reflecting a 2.34 per cent increase compared with 2024. Estimated allocations for the health and education sectors increased by 0.1 and 8.44 per cent, respectively, in real terms. However, as a proportion of GDP, the estimated expenditure for the education sector remained at 2.1 per cent and declined slightly for the health sector, from 1.4 per cent in 2024 to 1.3 per cent in 2025.⁹

11. OHCHR continued to support the Government and civil society actors to advance economic, social and cultural rights and to promote a human rights economy. In August 2024, OHCHR collaborated with the Budget Working Group, which is composed of members of civil society, to organize training on a human rights-based approach to budgeting in Cambodia. The training session was attended by 32 participants (12 women and 20 men) from academic institutions and civil society organizations. In November 2024, OHCHR partnered with the NGO Forum on Cambodia and the Budget Working Group to hold a workshop on analysing the national budget for 34 civil society representatives (11 women and 23 men). The training and workshop were aimed at strengthening the capacity of these groups as a foundation for future engagement with the Government.

B. Right to social security

12. The Government continued efforts to establish a more inclusive and comprehensive social protection system. On 20 February 2025, it launched the National Social Protection Policy Framework 2024–2035,¹⁰ aimed at guiding the development and sustainability of the social protection system, in line with the recommendation of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.¹¹

13. OHCHR continued engagement with the Government to promote the right to social security. In May 2024, OHCHR presented the findings of a study entitled “Estimating willingness to contribute to the health insurance program by workers in the informal sector in Phnom Penh” to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. The study found that informal sector workers, although vulnerable, mostly lacked the

⁴ World Bank, “From recovery to resilience: harnessing tourism and trade as drivers of growth”, Cambodia Economic Update December 2024.

⁵ International Monetary Fund (IMF), “Cambodia”, Country Report No. 25/22, available at www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2025/English/1khmea2025001-print-pdf.ashx.

⁶ OHCHR calculation based on National Bank of Cambodia, Monetary and Financial Statistics Data, Consumer Price Index and Inflation Rate, available at: www.nbc.gov.kh/english/economic_research/monetary_and_financial_statistics_data.php.

⁷ OHCHR calculation based on Budget Law 2023 and 2024 (draft law on finance and management). Data available at <https://mef.gov.kh/documents-category/budget/page/2/>.

⁸ See <https://www.imf.org/external/Pubs/ft/dsa/DSAlist.pdf>.

⁹ OHCHR calculation based on Ministry of Economy and Finance data (see <https://mef.gov.kh/download-counter?post=11914> (in Khmer)).

¹⁰ See https://data.opendatacambodia.net/library_record/national-social-protection-policy-framework-2024-2035/resource/42cef6ad-7e4c-4530-afaf-a54fbc7fa408.

¹¹ E/C.12/KHM/CO/2, para. 33.

government-issued identification cards for poor households¹² and were therefore excluded from the COVID-19 cash transfer programme¹³ and other benefits. For those who received such benefits, support proved insufficient to meet their basic needs, and their willingness to contribute to a health insurance scheme fell significantly below required contribution levels. Many workers remained unaware of available social protection schemes, indicating the need for targeted awareness-raising programmes.

14. As part of the follow-up to the recommendations contained in the study, OHCHR collaborated with the National Social Assistance Fund to produce three videos aimed at increasing public understanding of social protection.

IV. Equality and non-discrimination

A. Gender equality and the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons

15. In coordination with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Population Fund, OHCHR continued its support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the process of the amendment of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims,¹⁴ pursuant to the recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.¹⁵ The Ministry continued to consider a road map for reform and an analysis of the law, provided by the United Nations in 2023, and expressed readiness to amend certain articles to improve compliance with international human rights standards.

16. In September 2024, at the invitation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, OHCHR joined the Technical Working Group on Gender-Based Violence and provided inputs on the draft fourth national action plan to prevent violence against women (2024–2030), including regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities to ensure an intersectional approach.

17. In March 2025, OHCHR marked International Women's Day with a week-long campaign featuring the voices of diverse women leaders, including deaf women and human rights defenders. OHCHR collaborated with the United Nations country team to launch a music video by a female rapper challenging harmful gender stereotypes and advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment.

18. During the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review of Cambodia, the outcome of which was adopted by the Human Rights Council at its fifty-seventh session, the Government accepted all 12 recommendations regarding the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons, including seven recommendations to legalize marriage equality for same-sex couples.¹⁶ This acceptance signaled an ongoing commitment by the Government to advance the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons, who suffer discrimination and social exclusion in the absence of specific legal protections. OHCHR continued to collaborate with all stakeholders to consider pathways towards marriage equality for same-sex couples in Cambodia.

19. On 29 June 2024 and 24 May 2025, OHCHR and the United Nations country team supported two editions of Pride Fest Cambodia as part of efforts to promote equal rights for LGBTIQ+ persons. The United Nations country team engaged with the public at the events, raising awareness about the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons under international human rights law. The event attracted over 5,000 persons each year.

¹² A/HRC/54/72, paras. 9 and 12; and A/HRC/57/78, para. 17.

¹³ Replaced in April 2024 with the family package programme.

¹⁴ See <https://asset.cambodia.gov.kh/mowa/2016/12/DV-Law.pdf> (in Khmer).

¹⁵ CEDAW/C/KHM/CO/6, para. 25 (b).

¹⁶ See Human Rights Council decision 57/114.

B. Rights of Indigenous Peoples and minorities

20. OHCHR continued to raise awareness of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and work with their representatives to promote and protect their rights. The Office focused on building the capacity of Indigenous Peoples on human rights and Indigenous Peoples' rights, and on supporting them to engage with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

21. In July 2024, OHCHR held a training programme on international human rights mechanisms for Indigenous Peoples, empowering 21 participants (8 women and 13 men) from Indigenous communities to engage with the mechanisms designed to protect and promote their rights. In November 2024, OHCHR trained 22 Indigenous representatives (12 women and 10 men) on economic, social and cultural rights for Indigenous Peoples. A third programme, in May 2025, included a member of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, who trained 20 Indigenous representatives (13 women and 7 men) on bridging local issues with the international human rights framework.

22. In August 2024, OHCHR supported the Ministry of Rural Development in commemorating International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. OHCHR also held a week-long social media campaign to amplify the voices of diverse Indigenous Peoples.

23. On 1 July 2024, the Act on Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identification entered into force, a major advancement toward securing legal identity for all individuals in Cambodia. Nevertheless, many ethnic Vietnamese and undocumented families continue to encounter administrative hurdles to obtaining birth certificates, including due to insufficient inclusive administrative procedures and limited public awareness about the benefits and procedures of birth registration, leaving them vulnerable to statelessness and hindering their access to essential services such as education, healthcare, formal employment and social support systems.

C. Rights of persons with disabilities

24. As part of a joint United Nations programme on accelerating the promotion of disability rights in Cambodia, OHCHR continued to engage with the Disability Action Council and organizations of persons with disabilities to promote a human rights-based approach to disability. OHCHR provided technical advice to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation on the pending draft law on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and on the National Disability Strategic Plan for 2024–2028, which was adopted on 3 December 2024.¹⁷ In February 2025, OHCHR organized a meeting for the Disability Action Council Secretariat General to discuss the Strategic Plan with civil society organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities.

25. OHCHR supported the Disability Action Council in strengthening coordination with government ministries for mainstreaming disability inclusion across sectors. Joint meetings were held with the Council and the Ministry of Justice with the aim of extending a training programme on access to justice for persons with disabilities. In October 2024, the programme was delivered in Kampong Cham to 42 participants (11 women and 31 men), comprising judges, prosecutors and officials from eight courts of first instance, law students and representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities. The trainers included persons with disabilities.

26. At the request of the Disability Action Council, OHCHR has been developing a national manual on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to support the capacity-building of national policymakers. In November 2024, OHCHR organized a training session for 16 members (2 women and 14 men) of the Secretariat General of the Council to pilot the manual. OHCHR held a consultation on the manual in March 2025 with 30 representatives (11 women and 19 men) of civil society organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities, including 10 persons with diverse disabilities.

¹⁷ See <https://dac.gov.kh/en/download/33/national-disability-strategic-plan-2024-2028.html>.

27. OHCHR continued to support the Disability Action Council in finalizing the initial State Party report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was due in January 2015. The Government held several meetings to finalize the report, with a view to submitting it in late 2025.

28. OHCHR supported the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation and the Disability Action Council in raising awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities, including at events to mark the National Week of Deaf Persons in September 2024, International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December 2024 and Cambodia Autism and Down Syndrome Day in April 2025. OHCHR also featured women with disabilities in a social media campaign for 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, highlighting the theme “Disability inclusion in all sectors in the era of digital transformation”.

V. Public participation and civic space

29. OHCHR documented challenges to meaningful, safe and inclusive civic participation by civil society organizations, journalists and media outlets, including reports of heightened surveillance, threats and harassment, arbitrary arrests and abuse of criminal or civil proceedings, restricting their freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association. OHCHR continued to receive reports that journalists faced challenges in completing the electronic registration to access press cards from the Ministry of Information, restricting their ability to work, thus their freedom of expression.¹⁸

30. On 6 August 2024, the Ministry of Information announced the adoption of the Charter for Professional Journalism, which was reportedly aimed at enhancing journalistic ethics and standards. Civil society organizations, members of independent media outlets and journalists noted the lack of meaningful and comprehensive consultation and rapid adoption process that had failed to fully consider inputs by relevant parties. In September 2024, several special procedure mandate holders called for the suspension of the Charter, raising similar concerns, including regarding the scope of application of the Charter, its implementation and enforcement and that the Charter may violate the right to freedom of expression and, more specifically, freedom of the press.¹⁹

31. Journalists covering issues such as environmental degradation, trafficking in persons and other human rights concerns have been particularly at risk of violence. On 4 December 2024, Chhoeung Chheng, a journalist from the online media outlet Kampuchea Aphivath, was shot in Siem Reap Province and died two days later in hospital. On 5 December 2024, the police arrested a suspect, who allegedly confessed to the attack, saying that it was related to reporting on illegal logging. This marked the first killing of a journalist in Cambodia since 2014, when Taing Try was killed while also reporting on illegal logging.

32. On 24 May 2024, Soeu Sochea, an online reporter for *Asean Daily*, was detained on charges of “incitement to discriminate”, following a criminal lawsuit filed against him by the director of the Environment Department of Kampong Thom Province in relation to videos posted on the *Asean Daily* social media page about deforestation in the province. On 8 November 2024, Mr. Sochea was released on a suspended sentence after being sentenced to one year’s imprisonment, of which he had served five months and 15 days. OHCHR received reports that, due to his ongoing reporting about environmental issues, a local official had threatened Mr. Sochea with being sent back to prison.

33. On 5 January 2025, Gerald Flynn, a British journalist who had resided in Cambodia for several years and reported on environmental issues for the media organization Mongabay, was denied re-entry to Cambodia at Siem Reap airport. Immigration authorities reportedly considered that he had lied on his visa extension application and permanently banned him from entering Cambodia, without the possibility of appeal. Mr. Flynn had appeared in a

¹⁸ Human Rights Committee general comment No. 34 (2011), paras. 44 and 45.

¹⁹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/cambodia-un-experts-call-suspension-professional-journalism-charter>.

France24 video documentary about deforestation and carbon footprint in Cambodia in November 2024, which was labelled as “untrue” by the Ministry of Environment.²⁰

34. On 18 February 2025, the Ministry of Information issued a notification on the use of the national Internet domain name “.kh”,²¹ pursuant to Subdecree No. 287 on the Management and Use of National Domain Names on the Internet. The notification was addressed to media outlets, associations and broadcast organizations working in the information and audiovisual fields, as well as the general public, and “encourages” them to use the domain “.kh”. Some media organizations have raised concerns about the compatibility of such notification with the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, as use of the domain would subject them to governmental regulation and oversight, which could lead to restrictions on content or censorship.

35. On 19 February 2025, the Ministry of Interior issued a fourth notification²² under the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), reminding local associations and NGOs to provide information to the authorities concerning their bank accounts, annual reports, donor-approved plans, programmes and financial arrangements, and changes in statutes or management. It reiterated prohibitions against activities contrary to their statutes, for profit or personal interests, or endangering security, stability and public order. OHCHR is concerned that the law and its implementation may undermine freedom of association.

36. Reportedly, some civil society organizations were required to seek prior permission from authorities before conducting activities, which were then closely monitored by the authorities by taking photographs and gathering information. Such actions may violate Notification No. 2006 (2018) of the Ministry of Interior, which notifies governors that legally registered organizations can carry out their activities without interference.²³

37. In July 2024, authorities reportedly visited the offices of two NGOs and raised questions about plans to participate at gatherings in memory of Kem Ley, an independent political analyst shot dead on 10 July 2016. On 17 July 2024, local authorities ordered the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association to remove a banner from the front of their office in Kampong Cham Province. The banner called for the release of Koeut Saray, President of the Khmer Students Intellectuals League Association, who had been arrested on charges of “repeat misdemeanour” and “incitement to commit a felony or disturb social security” in April 2024 for reporting on a dispute in Kunlen District.²⁴

38. Shortly after the release of its report entitled “Barriers to representation: freedom of association in Cambodia” on 4 June 2024,²⁵ the Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL) faced several actions that, taken together, appear to amount to harassment or intimidation. The report contained an assessment of the Better Factories Cambodia programme, a joint initiative of the International Labour Organization and the World Bank International Finance Corporation, identified a failure to adequately monitor violations of freedom of association in garment factories and contained recommendations to improve transparency and grievance mechanisms. On 24 June, the Ministry of Interior announced an investigation into CENTRAL, concerning its operations and use of foreign funds. On 27 June, the president of the Collective Workers Rights Protection Union of Cambodia filed a criminal lawsuit against Khun Tharo, CENTRAL programme manager, for defamation, slanderous denunciation and “incitement to discriminate” against unions, in connection with his interview with Radio Free Asia on 15 June. On 28 June and 2 July, the National Labor Confederation of Cambodia and National Trade Unions Coalition, respectively, submitted formal complaints to the Ministry of Interior against CENTRAL. On 8 July, CENTRAL received a letter from the National Audit Authority informing it of an

²⁰ See www.facebook.com/share/p/1CH7ERQRs8/ (in Khmer).

²¹ See <https://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/announcements/notification-on-the-use-of-the-national-domain-name-kh/>.

²² See <https://www.interior.gov.kh/news/bLecRqwGTrXN> (in Khmer).

²³ See www.facebook.com/share/p/1CiTyDDcG/ (in Khmer).

²⁴ A/HRC/57/78, para. 41.

²⁵ See <https://central-cambodia.org/archives/6989>.

audit to be conducted covering the period 2021–2024. The audit has taken place; however, the report has not yet been made available.

39. During the reporting period, OHCHR documented at least 64 demonstrations, mostly related to ongoing protests by the Labour Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees of NagaWorld for a solution to their demands from the NagaWorld Casino Corporation. On 21 February 2025, about 30 members of the Labour Rights Supported Union gathered at the Ministry of Labor to follow up on the complaints filed since 2022, seeking the authorities' intervention. Meanwhile, Chhim Sithar, the President of the Labour Rights Supported Union, was released from prison on 16 September 2024 upon completion of a two-year sentence for "incitement to disturb social security" in relation to the exercise of her rights to peaceful assembly and association.²⁶

40. OHCHR observed a deterioration of civic space characterized by the arbitrary detention and prosecutions targeting political dissidents, human rights defenders, activists and journalists exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association or peaceful assembly. In August 2024, OHCHR received reports of at least 68 individuals (16 women and 52 men) arrested in connection with a protest announced on social media against the Cambodia-Lao People's Democratic Republic-Viet Nam Development Triangle Area. Based on information gathered by OHCHR, 27 of the arrested individuals were charged with "plotting", which is punishable by 5–10 years' imprisonment. While some remain in detention, many others were reportedly released on bail after making a public apology to the leadership of the country. These cases were raised by several special procedure mandate holders in a letter in May 2025.²⁷

41. On 23 November 2024, six environmental activists investigating illegal logging and deforestation in Sre Sami Village, Talat Commune, Sesan District, were arrested by authorities in Stung Treng Province. They were released two days later, reportedly after being made to sign an agreement not to publicly share the information that they had collected, under threat of being criminally charged with espionage.

42. During the reporting period, OHCHR received reports that at least 26 political opponents (5 women and 21 men) had been arrested or summoned for questioning over criminal charges including "incitement to commit a felony or disturb social security", "incitement to discriminate", lèse-majesté and plotting.²⁸ Five of them (all men) were released on bail with charges pending, after they reportedly publicly apologized and joined the ruling party. OHCHR has recorded that, since 2020, at least 34 political prisoners (6 women and 28 men) remained in detention, mostly on charges of treason, plotting, incitement and lèse-majesté.

43. On 20 September 2024, Rong Chhun, adviser to the opposition Nation Power Party and a union leader, was charged with "incitement to disturb social security" and being a repeat offender under articles 494, 495 and 88 of the Criminal Code. The charges related to his remarks during the opening of the party's office in Kandal Province in July 2024, in which he criticized the Government for failing to restore democracy, as well as his interview with Radio Free Asia in August 2024, in which he criticized the Development Triangle Area. On 5 May 2025, Mr. Chhun was convicted of all charges and sentenced by the Phnom Penh court of first instance to four years' imprisonment and a fine of 4 million riels, as well as permanent removal of his rights to vote and stand for election. Mr. Chhun had been previously convicted and jailed from July 2020 to November 2021 for "incitement to disturb social security", in relation to comments regarding alleged land loss in the demarcation of the border between Cambodia and Viet Nam.²⁹

44. On 1 November 2024, OHCHR and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized a conference on International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, which was attended by 180 participants. The

²⁶ A/HRC/51/63, paras. 17 and 18; A/HRC/54/72, para. 39; and A/HRC/57/78, para. 42.

²⁷ See KHM 2/2025. All communications mentioned in the present report are available from <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>

²⁸ Criminal Code, arts. 494, 495, 496, 453 and 437bis.

²⁹ A/HRC/48/49, para. 13.

conference facilitated dialogue between journalists and national authorities, examining international and domestic legal frameworks on the right to freedom of expression, judicial practices in Cambodia, regional good practices and domestic safety initiatives. Concerns were raised with the authorities regarding the misuse of laws to restrict press freedom and other intimidation tactics against journalists and media workers.

45. OHCHR is concerned about reports that human rights defenders, journalists and political actors who had been accused, criminally charged, detained or sentenced following the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association were pressured into publicly apologizing to the Government. Such apologies, which were sometimes accompanied by a request to join the ruling party, appear to constitute a form of undue pressure, which may amount to violation of a range of human rights, including the rights to liberty and security and fair trial. Individuals released after apologizing have reported a sense of legal insecurity, fearing that proceedings could be reinitiated or prison sentences reinstated if they expressed critical or dissenting opinions again.

46. Since early 2024, OHCHR has registered 34 instances of such forced apologies, 4 of which occurred in 2025. The apologies were often handwritten and published or delivered through video statements recorded while the individuals were detained, and at times wearing their prison uniform. In most cases, the apologies were released on social media by individuals linked to the Government.

47. In one such case, in October 2024, a journalist, Mech Dara, was detained and charged with “incitement to disturb social security” over social media posts alleging environmental destruction at a Buddhist temple. He was released on bail and placed under judicial supervision three weeks later, after he had issued a public apology to the Government. A few days later, he announced that he was quitting journalism. At the time of publication of the present report, the charges against him have not been dropped, nor has there been any indication of when his case may be brought to trial.

48. Due to increasing challenges to freedom of expression, and fears of arrest, some human rights defenders and political actors have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. During the reporting period, OHCHR documented the cases of six political and human rights actors and their families, in total 18 individuals (8 women and 10 men), who fled Cambodia to Thailand under such circumstances. The 18 individuals had been recognized as refugees by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and were awaiting resettlement to a third country at the time of reporting.

49. Meanwhile, OHCHR continued to document an increasing pattern of transnational repression. On 24 November 2024, five Cambodian political activists (three women and two men) and two of their family members, including a 5-year-old child, who had fled to Thailand in 2022 were forcibly returned to Cambodia. The activists included members of the dissolved opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party and the opposition Candlelight Party. The activists had been recognized as refugees by UNHCR and one family member was awaiting refugee status determination. Upon arrival in Cambodia, they were charged with “plotting” under article 453 of the Criminal Code, due to remarks on social media regarding the Development Triangle Area.

50. On 24 September 2024, Nuon Toeun, a Cambodian domestic worker, was arrested by Malaysian authorities at the house of her employer in Malaysia, where she had worked for over 15 years. She was deported to Cambodia on 30 September and charged with lèse-majesté and “incitement to discrimination” for comments made on social media. In March 2025, she was convicted and sentenced to 24 months’ imprisonment. She stated to OHCHR that she had not been shown any arrest warrant in Cambodia or Malaysia, nor informed of the reasons for her arrest.

51. On 7 January 2025, Lim Kimya, a dual Cambodian-French national and former parliamentarian from the dissolved opposition Cambodia National Rescue party, was shot dead upon arriving in Bangkok from Siem Reap, accompanied by his wife. The next day, a Thai suspect was arrested in Cambodia and handed over to the Thai authorities at the latter’s request. Two other Cambodian nationals suspected to be linked to the killing had not yet been arrested at the time of writing, despite Red Notices issued by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). The reasons behind the killing remain unclear.

52. During the reporting period, OHCHR monitored 34 trials related to 19 cases of persons criminally charged for publicly expressing dissatisfaction with the Government or criticizing public policies, which are protected by the right to freedom of expression. Ten cases involved charges of “incitement to disturb social security” or “incitement to discriminate” under articles 495 and 496 of the Criminal Code. The vague and broad definition of “disturbing social security” is incompatible with the principle of legality and legal certainty. It has allowed the authorities to interpret and apply it in a way that unduly limits free speech and public participation. Legal restrictions of fundamental freedoms must be necessary and clearly defined, including specific prohibited actions, to prevent arbitrary enforcement.³⁰ During these trials, OHCHR observed violations of the right to a fair trial, including the right to be presumed innocent, the right to equality before the court and tribunal (equality of arms), the right to be tried by an independent and impartial tribunal and other rights of persons criminally charged.

53. From 29 May to 24 June 2024, OHCHR monitored six hearings at the Phnom Penh court of first instance in the trial of 10 activists (four women and six men) from Mother Nature Cambodia. The hearings were attended by only five of the accused. The defendants were not allowed to question parts of the evidence that was used against them, and one defendant was told that not answering questions would indicate guilt. The burden of proof was shifted to the accused, in violation of the presumption of innocence. In addition, the accused had no prior knowledge of the specific activities for which they were being charged within a nine-year period. They were all convicted and sentenced on 2 July 2024 to between six and eight years’ imprisonment for “plotting” under article 453 of the Criminal Code, and three of them under charges of *lèse-majesté* under article 437bis. The fact that some of the defendants had been children (aged 11, 13, 14 and 16) at the time of the events was not considered during the trial or sentencing. Several special procedure mandate holders raised concerns about this trial in a communication sent in May 2025.³¹

VI. Engagement with international human rights mechanisms

A. Institutional and legal reforms

54. OHCHR continued to provide technical assistance to the National Committee against Torture, with a view to strengthening its role as the national preventive mechanism. In June and July 2024, OHCHR cooperated with the Committee to hold training sessions in four provinces for 742 law enforcement, prison, court and provincial government officials (93 women and 649 men) on international and national standards on torture prevention, as well as the role and duties of the Committee. OHCHR also delivered training sessions for the Committee on international law related to torture prevention in November 2024 for 26 participants (6 women and 20 men) and on monitoring places of detention in May 2025 for 29 participants (7 women and 22 men).

55. In February 2025, OHCHR provided the National Committee against Torture with 900 complaint boxes, displaying posters aimed at raising awareness about the rights of detainees. These boxes, to be placed in detention facilities and police stations nationwide and monitored by the Committee, are a tool to empower detainees and their families to report mistreatment.

56. In September 2024, OHCHR held its first annual intensive course on human rights. Bringing together 27 participants (13 women, 11 men and 3 gender-diverse persons) from governmental institutions and civil society organizations, the course was aimed at strengthening capacity to promote and protect human rights.

57. OHCHR continued to advocate and offer technical support for the establishment of a national human rights institution, which remains pending since submission to the Council of

³⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 19 (3). See also Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 34 (2011).

³¹ See KHM 3/2025.

Ministers of the draft law on the organization and function of the National Human Rights Commission in September 2023.

58. OHCHR supported the United Nations country team in finalizing an analytical note on the Royal Decree on the Establishment, Organization and Functioning of the National Authority for Alternative Dispute Resolution,³² which was presented to the Ministry of Justice and development partners in June 2024.³³

B. International human rights mechanisms

59. OHCHR continued to advise Cambodia on the implementation of recommendations issued by international human rights mechanisms. OHCHR also continued to support the dissemination of those recommendations and to translate relevant documents from the mechanisms into Khmer.

60. In August 2024, OHCHR supported the Cambodian Human Rights Committee in disseminating the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination³⁴ to 351 officials and civil servants (92 women and 259 men) in Svay Rieng and Prey Veng Provinces. In November 2024, OHCHR and the Cambodian Human Rights Committee organized a national dissemination workshop on the concluding observations of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances,³⁵ which brought together 96 representatives (21 women and 75 men) from the Government, civil society and development partners.

61. On 1 October 2024, the Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review of Cambodia. Cambodia received 275 recommendations, of which it supported 243 and noted 32. OHCHR translated the documentation into Khmer.³⁶ In November 2024, OHCHR supported the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights in organizing a workshop, attended by 77 participants (30 women, 42 men and 5 gender-diverse persons) from over 60 organizations, to disseminate the recommendations among civil society and equip them to support the Government in implementing the recommendations. In March 2025, OHCHR and the Cambodian Human Rights Committee organized a national workshop on the dissemination of and follow-up to the universal periodic review, which convened 145 participants (49 women, 95 men and 1 gender-diverse person) from the Government, parliament, civil society, development partners and the United Nations country team, to initiate the development of an implementation plan through a consultative process. OHCHR continues to work with national stakeholders to support follow-up to the universal periodic review.

62. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia conducted an official visit to the country in July 2024.³⁷ His annual report was presented to the Human Rights Council at its fifty-seventh session.³⁸

63. OHCHR cooperated with the Cambodian Human Rights Committee to strengthen its role as the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up. OHCHR advised on best practices and tools to plan and track the implementation of recommendations from the international human rights mechanisms and Sustainable Development Goals.

C. Mainstreaming human rights through the United Nations country team

64. OHCHR continued to lead efforts to mainstream human rights through engagement with the United Nations country team. OHCHR provided technical guidance on integrating human rights principles into national programming frameworks and implementation of the

³² See <https://nadr.gov.kh/kh/library> (in Khmer).

³³ A/HRC/57/78, para. 51.

³⁴ CERD/C/KHM/CO/14-17.

³⁵ CED/C/KHM/CO/1.

³⁶ See <https://cambodia.un.org/en/node/267873>.

³⁷ See www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/cambodia-national-action-plan-indigenous-rights-among-measures-needed.

³⁸ A/HRC/57/82.

United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Cambodia 2024–2028.³⁹ As Co-Chair of Results Group 4 on Social Transformation with UNESCO, OHCHR facilitated strategic partnerships among United Nations entities and with the Government to advance human rights, accountability, civic participation and inclusion. As reflected in the 2024 annual results report,⁴⁰ these joint efforts contributed to progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the transition of Cambodia from least developed country status.

VII. Accountability and administration of justice

A. Combating trafficking in persons

65. Cambodia remains a country of origin and destination for trafficking in persons. Although the Government has taken measures to address trafficking, challenges persist. During the reporting period, United Nations entities continued to receive requests for rescue from third country nationals indicating that they had been trafficked and held in online scam centres in Kandal, Poi Pet, Kampot, Koh Kong, Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville, Kampong Chhnang and Svay Rieng Provinces. In March 2025, several special procedure mandate holders sent a communication to the Government concerning victims of trafficking in scam centres in South-East Asia.⁴¹

66. On 1 August 2024, the National Committee for Counter Trafficking launched the National Strategic Plan on Combating Trafficking in Persons (2024–2028).⁴² It has four strategies, addressing prevention, response of the criminal justice system, victim protection, and implementation of laws and policies.

67. In October 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation adopted a guide on standard operating procedures for the protection of victims of trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation, developed with the International Organization for Migration.

B. Conditions of detention

68. According to data from the General Directorate of Prisons, in May 2025, the prison population reached 56,869 persons (3,331 women, 49,312 men, 143 girls and 4,083 boys), an increase of 22 per cent compared with May 2024. The number of juveniles in detention in May 2025 increased by 53 per cent, compared with 2,760 (2,657 boys and 103 girls) in May 2024. Recent years have seen a steady increase in the prison population, and prison authorities projected that the increase would reach up to 60,000 detainees by the end of 2025.⁴³ The number of detainees in pretrial detention remained high, averaging about 30 per cent of the total prison population.

69. During the reporting period, OHCHR conducted 26 visits to 11 prisons to monitor detention conditions. OHCHR interviewed detainees, former detainees and prison authorities, all of whom identified overcrowding as one of the biggest challenges affecting access to essential services and dignified detention conditions.

70. In several prisons, detainees reported having very limited sleeping space. In prisons with higher overcrowding, such as Kandal prison, daily outside time for detainees is limited to 50 minutes (30 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the afternoon). Detainees share a limited number of toilets, with reports of 40 detainees per toilet in some cases, leading to long waiting times and poor hygiene.

³⁹ See https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Cambodia_Cooperation_Framework_2024-2028.pdf.

⁴⁰ See https://cambodia.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/ARR2024_Cambodia_Final.pdf.

⁴¹ See communication KHM 1/2025.

⁴² See <https://download.ncct.gov.kh/plans/ncct-action-plan-2024-2028-en.pdf>.

⁴³ OHCHR meeting with representatives of the General Department of Prisons on 15 May 2024.

71. To increase the space available, some vocational spaces and staff buildings have been renovated and reassigned as cells, thus limiting opportunities for reformation and social rehabilitation. Prison authorities have also transferred detainees from overcrowded to less crowded facilities. For example, on 12 September 2024, nearly 200 prisoners were transferred from Kandal prison to Correctional Centre 4 in Pursat Province. Although such measures help alleviate overcrowding, they bring new challenges for detainees, particularly when transferred to locations that may be challenging for their families and lawyers to access.

72. Overcrowding exacerbates conditions for vulnerable populations such as children detained with their mothers, pregnant women, older persons and persons with disabilities. Many women detained in Correctional Centre 2 stated during interviews that hygiene products, in particular sanitary pads, remained insufficient, and that they depended on family members to send them items or money to purchase them in prison. Both Kandal prison and Correctional Centre 2 lack sufficient space for mothers to breastfeed and bathe their children in private.

73. In many prisons visited, access to healthcare was challenging. Overcrowding reportedly resulted in insufficient medication for detainees. In some locations, a limit of 10 detainees were allowed to visit the health post daily. OHCHR received reports that, in some instances, detainees were required to obtain approval from the cell leader and a prison guard to access health posts.

74. OHCHR has serious concerns about reports of incidents of corruption in some detention facilities. OHCHR received reports that some cell leaders, assigned by prison authorities to report on the situation in their cell, demanded payment in exchange for additional sleeping space. Other reports indicated that detainees had to pay prison authorities for transportation to court, and that food and other items sold in prison were often two or three times the market price. Moreover, family members stated that they had been asked to pay between \$2.50 and \$5 to visit detainees, contrary to both national law and international human rights standards.

C. Legal aid

75. OHCHR observed challenges by detainees in accessing legal aid, in some cases resulting in extended periods of pretrial detention without access to a lawyer. OHCHR documented eight cases in which accused persons lacked legal representation, as a result of a lack of either financial resources or information about their rights to legal assistance.

76. OHCHR continued to support legal aid initiatives, including through grants to two civil society organizations. NGOs that provide these services have identified several challenges, such as funding difficulties and the decreasing number of lawyers available to handle cases involving human rights defenders. Several detained human rights defenders reported that their lawyers had been unable to visit them since the beginning of 2025 due to lack of funds, and that they were unaware of the status of their case.

77. In August 2024, following a request from the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, OHCHR provided a training session on international human rights standards and pretrial detention to 35 of its volunteer legal aid lawyers and staff (11 women and 24 men).

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

78. **The Secretary-General acknowledges the positive engagement of the Government with OHCHR and the United Nations system and highlights the crucial role of OHCHR in assisting the Government and people of Cambodia in advancing human rights for all. The Secretary-General remains concerned by restrictions imposed on civic space and human rights, including the rights to participate in public affairs, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.**

79. The Secretary-General calls upon the Government of Cambodia to:

(a) Allocate the maximum available resources for the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights for all, including by substantially increasing public expenditure in the areas of social security, healthcare and education, with a view to reducing inequalities;

(b) Ensure that the national budget is developed and executed transparently and inclusively, by releasing disaggregated data on allocations and actual expenditure by ministry, programme, economic and functional classifications and by actively engaging the public in budget formulation and implementation processes;

(c) Also ensure that social protection policies and laws comply with international human rights standards, including the principles of affordability, adequacy, universality, transparency and non-discrimination, and are gender-responsive to provide universal social protection for all, especially workers in the informal economy;

(d) Further ensure that allocations for health and education remain proportionate to GDP growth in order to promote inclusive development and the progressive realization of economic and social rights in line with the international human rights obligations of Cambodia;

(e) Amend the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence to define, prohibit and criminalize all forms of gender-based violence in compliance with international human rights obligations;

(f) Legalize same-sex marriage and gender identity recognition, in line with recommendations accepted under the universal periodic review;

(g) Further improve access to birth registration through targeted, practical measures, including fair and inclusive administrative procedures, outreach to underserved populations, public awareness-raising, inter-ministerial collaboration and guidelines and capacity-building for local registry officials;

(h) Finalize and adopt the draft law on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, in compliance with international human rights standards, and submit the initial report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities without delay;

(i) Strengthen civic and democratic space by protecting the civil and political rights of all people without distinction, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, reforming laws and policies to ensure effective and meaningful participation, immediately releasing those arbitrarily detained for exercising their human rights and ending and preventing the intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, civil society actors and political actors;

(j) Adopt laws on the establishment of the national human rights commission and on the National Committee against Torture in compliance with international human rights standards, including by guaranteeing their functional and operational independence;

(k) Continue engaging with United Nations human rights mechanisms and ensure the implementation of their recommendations, including those from the treaty bodies, special procedures and universal periodic review, and ensure that all relevant stakeholders, in particular civil society, are consulted and can effectively and meaningfully participate in these processes;

(l) Take all steps necessary to address the root causes of trafficking in persons, effectively investigate and prosecute those responsible and ensure victim-centred and gender-sensitive policies and rehabilitation programmes, including by strengthening regional cooperation and guaranteeing appropriate resources and coordination among competent authorities;

(m) Reduce prison overcrowding and improve detention conditions by strengthening alternative measures to detention, adopting a national legal aid policy that is implemented with adequate resources and improving the administration of justice, including fair trial rights.