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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 60/33, 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 2025 to 31 May 2026.

OHCHR maintained cooperation with government ministries, the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, the Disability Action Council and other governmental actors to provide technical assistance and advice. OHCHR also continued to build the capacity of civil society actors to engage with international human rights mechanisms and advance human rights. The report highlights restrictions on civic space and fundamental freedoms, among other rights, including in the context of the armed conflict along the disputed Cambodia-Thailand border.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present report after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 60/33, 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 2025 to 31 May 2026.

2. OHCHR provided technical support to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, the Ministry of Justice, the Disability Action Council, the Cambodian Human Rights Committee and other national institutions, and provided advice on legislative initiatives, to assist the Government in making progress towards implementing its international human rights obligations and recommendations of international human rights mechanisms.

3. OHCHR continued to monitor the human rights situation in Cambodia, in compliance with its standard methodology,[1] and used its findings to engage with and assist the Government and other stakeholders. OHCHR also supported the United Nations country team in mainstreaming human rights in the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Cambodia 2024–2028.

II. Context

4. Cambodia expanded social protection coverage and continued its engagement with international human rights mechanisms. However, concerns persisted regarding judicial independence, broad application of legislation related to public order and national security, and restrictions on freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

5. The reporting period was marked by armed conflict that began in July 2025 along the disputed Cambodia-Thailand border, which resulted in both military and civilian casualties, displacement, and disruption to livelihoods and services in border provinces. Despite a ceasefire agreement on 28 July 2025 and a joint declaration on 26 October 2025, the situation remained fragile. On 27 December 2025, the parties agreed to an immediate ceasefire, committing to halt troop movements, protect civilians and continue border demarcation efforts. By early 2026, approximately 806,000[2] Cambodian migrant workers, not including family members, had returned from Thailand to Cambodia. The conflict exacerbated existing civic space concerns, as authorities imposed restrictions on reporting and the flow of information relating to the border situation, compounding an already challenging environment for journalists and civil society. The Secretary-General[3] and the High Commissioner for Human Rights[4] welcomed the ceasefire and urged both parties to protect civilians, facilitate humanitarian relief and implement confidence-building measures.

[1] See www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/manual-human-rightsmonitoring-revised-edition.

[2] Correspondence received from the Government of Cambodia on 4 August 2026.

[3] See https://press.un.org/en/2025/sgsm22880.doc.htm, https://press.un.org/en/2025/sgsm22945.doc.htm and https://press.un.org/en/2025/sgsm22967.doc.htm.

[4] See https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/turk-welcomes-cambodia-thailand-ceasefire-calls-full-respect-and-confidence and https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/12/turk-alarmed-spiralling-thai-cambodia-conflict-and-impact-civilians.

III. Economic, social and cultural rights

A. Macroeconomy and budget allocations

6. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects a 4 per cent growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Cambodia in 2026, down by 0.8 percentage points from the 2025 growth rate and by 2 points from the 2024 growth rate.[5] This projected decline was linked to export volatility due to uncertain trade policy, declining remittances, a slowdown in tourism and weak domestic demand, with renewed border tensions potentially amplifying these adverse effects.[6] The inflation rate of Cambodia rose from 0.8 per cent in 2024 to 2.55 per cent in 2025, largely driven by food prices.[7]

7. In the context of the estimated annual national expenditure for 2026, which increased by 7.6 per cent,[8] the estimated allocations for the health and education sectors increased in real terms but remained unchanged as a proportion of GDP, at 2.1 per cent for the education sector and declining slightly for the health sector to 1.29 per cent.[9] Spending in these sectors remained lower than global recommendations (i.e. 5 per cent of GDP for health[10] and 4 to 6 per cent of GDP for education[11]) for ensuring inclusive development and the progressive realization of economic and social rights.

8. The total estimated revenue of Cambodia is projected to increase by 4 per cent in 2026 compared with 2025, reaching 33.23 billion riel (approximately $8.26 billion).[12] However, the tax-to-GDP ratio is expected to decline from 13.1 per cent in 2025 to 12.8 per cent in 2026, while the share of value-added tax is projected to rise from 30.6 per cent to 31.8 per cent over the same period.[13]

9. OHCHR supported civil society organizations to analyse and advocate for human rights-based budgeting and for economic, social and cultural rights. It supported two training sessions on climate change budgeting (on 15 June 2025 and 29 March 2026) for 39 participants (22 women and 17 men) from civil society organizations and universities, and conducted a training session on economic, social, and cultural rights (from 1 to 3 October 2025) for 26 youth leaders (18 women and 8 men). These activities enhanced participants' understanding of their rights and their ability to apply principles of transparency, accountability, and participation in budget analysis and advocacy.

[5] International Monetary Fund (IMF), press release on 2025 article IV consultation with Cambodia, 25 November 2025, available at https://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2025/11/25/pr25394-cambodia-imf-concludes-2025-article-iv-consultation.

[6] Ibid.

[7] OHCHR calculation using data from the National Bank of Cambodia: Monetary and financial statistics data: Contribution to inflation – available at https://www.nbc.gov.kh/english/economic_research/monetary_and_financial_statistics_data.php.

[8] OHCHR calculation based on information from the Ministry of Economy and Finance: Law on Finance for Management 2026 – available from https://mef.gov.kh/documents/draft-financial-law-2026/.

[9] Ibid.

[10] World Health Organization, *Leading the Realization of Human Rights to Health and Through Health: Report of the High-Level Working Group on the Health and Human Rights of Women, Children and Adolescents*, available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Health/ReportHLWG-humanrights-health.pdf.

[11] The international community committed in 2015, through the Incheon Declaration, to allocate at least 4 to 6 per cent of GDP and/or 15 to 20 per cent of public expenditure to education. For details, see UNESCO, Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, available at https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656.

[12] OHCHR calculation based on information from the Ministry of Economy and Finance: Law on Finance for Management 2026 – available at https://mef.gov.kh/documents/draft-financial-law-2026/.

[13] Ibid.

B. Right to social security

10. The Government continued to improve the social protection system, with a view to expanding social protection coverage and strengthening support to vulnerable populations. In June 2025, the Government introduced new cash transfer programmes for women in detention who are pregnant or accompanied by children under 2 years of age.[14]

11. During the reporting period, OHCHR, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, began the process of conducting a study on the implementation of the right to social security, based on data collected from 869 workers in the informal economy, including tuk-tuk drivers, domestic workers, street vendors and waste pickers. Preliminary findings suggest that despite progress, gaps remain in coverage and adequacy. The findings will support rights-based social protection policies and programmes.

12. OHCHR delivered a two-day training programme in April 2026 for the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training on data management for social protection programmes, attended by 28 participants (10 women and 18 men). The training strengthened participants' capacity in data management and analysis to support human rights-grounded, evidence-based social protection policies, and effective use of large datasets for decision-making.

C. Rights of displaced persons and returned migrant workers

13. According to government estimates, the armed conflict along the Cambodia-Thailand border resulted in the internal displacement of an estimated 640,000[15] persons in Cambodia in December 2025 and the return of approximately 900,000[16] Cambodian migrant workers from Thailand by early 2026. In Thailand,[17] nearly 190,000 people were displaced in July 2025. Displaced persons encountered barriers to return linked to insecurity, military restrictions on physical access to their homes, the destruction of housing and economic disruption in border areas. As of May 2026, 31,148 persons, including 16,081 women and 10,491 children, remained unable to return to their homes.[18]

14. The displaced population faced challenges, including lack of adequate housing, suspension of health services, unaffordability of food and lack of nutrition, particularly impacting children and pregnant women.[19] Women faced heightened risks of gender-based violence, livelihood loss and disruption of maternal health services.[20] The Government, with the support of development partners, including the United Nations, took steps to address the situation, including facilitating employment for returnees and financial relief measures.

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[14] Cambodia, Sub-decree No. 85: Implementation of a cash subsidy programme for pregnant women and children under 2 years old who are with their mothers in prison, available (in Khmer) at https://data.thailand.opendevelopmentmekong.net/en/laws_record/sub-decree-no-85-on-the-implementation-of-a-cash-subsidy-program-for-pregnant-women-and-children-un.

[15] Ministry of Interior, Government of Cambodia, press release on the situation of displaced persons and impact on civilian areas, 19 April 2026, available at https://www.interior.gov.kh/en/news/H3HPWVu3XwrV.

[16] See www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/manual-human-rightsmonitoring-revised-edition.

[17] Ministry of Interior (Thailand), "Situation report on the Thailand–Cambodia border conflict", Permanent Secretary for the Interior, 29 July 2025, available at https://web.facebook.com/share/p/19BkGJ51X5/. A second wave of fighting in December 2025 resulted in further displacement. Following the ceasefire on 29 December 2025, most internally displaced persons had returned to their places of origin by the end of the year.

[18] See https://www.interior.gov.kh/news/lUDknn4n57Sm.

[19] United Nations Cambodia, *Socio-economic Impact Assessment of Cambodia-Thailand Border Conflict*, April 2026, available at https://cambodia.un.org/en/313222-socio-economic-impact-assessment-cambodia%E2%80%93thailand-border-conflict.

[20] National Committee for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Response Forum, "Joint multi-sectoral early recovery rapid needs assessment: Cambodia-Thailand border conflict", August 2025, available at https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/cambodia/joint-multi-sectoral-early-recovery-rapid-needs-assessment-cambodia.

15. OHCHR field visits in February, March and May 2026 to Banteay Meanchey, Oddor Meanchey and Preah Vihear Provinces confirmed the Government's ongoing construction of temporary housing for displaced persons. OHCHR found that further strengthening of consultation with affected persons throughout the government-initiated relocation process, together with expanded livelihood opportunities in border areas, would support more durable solutions, while more systematic disaggregation of data, including disability data, would enhance the targeting and inclusiveness of assistance provided. The Government extended shock-responsive social protection, including reconstruction support for severely damaged homes, to displaced persons.

16. OHCHR monitoring conducted in August 2025 identified heightened vulnerabilities among returnees, including women, children and migrant workers returning from Thailand who had worked without valid work permits. Returnees faced sudden loss of income, indebtedness and reintegration difficulties due to low wages, skill mismatches and limited decent employment opportunities, affecting the rights to work, social security and an adequate standard of living.

IV. Equality and non-discrimination

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

17. In follow-up to the universal periodic review recommendations accepted by Cambodia in 2024 to legalize marriage equality for same-sex couples,[21] OHCHR met with stakeholders to discuss advocacy strategies and pathways towards legal recognition. As part of the Free & Equal campaign, OHCHR carried out activities in support of equal rights and fair treatment of LGBTIQ+ people, including Pride Fest Cambodia in May 2025. In December 2025, OHCHR provided support to a Siem Reap-based LGBTIQ+ organization to produce public awareness materials which reached approximately 1,500 people.

18. In August 2025, OHCHR provided a one-year grant to the non-governmental organization (NGO) Women Peace Makers to enhance the capacity and agency of minority and Indigenous women in Kampong Chhnang, Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri Provinces on gender equality and legal standards. In March 2026, OHCHR supported the NGO Deaf Development Programme to mark International Women's Day by sharing lived experiences of discrimination based on gender and disability, and related stereotypes of 31 deaf women.[22]

19. OHCHR, together with members of the United Nations country team, continued to engage with national stakeholders on revision of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence to align it with international human rights standards,[23] including by attending multi-stakeholder consultative dialogues. No progress was observed in the revision of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence.

B. Rights of Indigenous Peoples and minorities

20. OHCHR regularly met with Indigenous Peoples' representatives and supported them in strengthening their engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms. OHCHR emphasized the importance of ensuring their effective participation in decision-making processes, including in development, conservation and climate-related initiatives, as well as consultation and free, prior and informed consent in matters affecting them.

21. In September 2025, OHCHR supported the Ministry of Rural Development in commemorating the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

[21] Human Rights Council decision 57/114.

[22] See https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1SQDgLCAhN/.

[23] Pursuant to the recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – see CEDAW/C/KHM/CO/6, para. 25 (b).

C. Rights of persons with disabilities

22. OHCHR engaged with the country's Disability Action Council, government ministries, and organizations of persons with disabilities, including through a United Nations joint programme on accelerating the promotion of disability rights in Cambodia. OHCHR provided technical advice to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation on the draft Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including provisions related to legal recognition of sign language. In July 2025, following a request from the Disability Action Council, OHCHR provided a white paper on the legal recognition of sign language, which included proposed provisions to align the draft law with international standards. In December 2025, OHCHR provided an analytical note on aligning the national coordination framework with article 33 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. By the end of the reporting period, the draft law was under review by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. The National Disability Strategic Plan 2024–2028 is in the process of being implemented and monitored.

23. OHCHR supported the Disability Action Council in finalizing and translating the initial State Party report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was submitted in January 2026.

24. In June and July 2025, OHCHR, the Disability Action Council and the Ministry of Justice conducted two training sessions on access to justice for persons with disabilities, concluding a capacity-building initiative launched in 2023. The final two sessions, which were delivered in Preah Sihanouk and Battambang Provinces, reached 65 participants (18 women and 47 men), including judges, prosecutors and officials from 12 courts of first instance, representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities and law students. In total, the initiative trained 246 justice actors (70 women and 176 men) from across the country.

25. In November 2025, at the request of the Disability Action Council, OHCHR finalized a manual and a facilitator's guide on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to support capacity-building of policymakers and national and subnational authorities. In December 2025, OHCHR and the Disability Action Council piloted the manual through a training programme for members of provincial Disability Action Councils in Takeo and Kampot Provinces. The programme brought together 87 participants (20 women and 67 men) from authorities, organizations of persons with disabilities and NGOs.

26. In September 2025, OHCHR organized a training programme for 27 participants (11 women and 16 men), representing 12 organizations of persons with disabilities from 11 provinces and Phnom Penh, and six NGOs working on disability inclusion. The programme concluded with the first annual dialogue between organizations of persons with disabilities and the Disability Action Council.

27. OHCHR provided a grant to the Centre for Trauma Care and Research, which promotes the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities, for the provision of primary mental health support and information to 193 persons with disabilities (114 women and 79 men), including with psychosocial disabilities.

28. OHCHR, the Disability Action Council and the Deaf Development Programme collaborated to amplify the voices of underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities, including by launching three videos to mark International Week of Deaf People and promote legal recognition of sign language, in September 2025. The videos were screened at an event attended by approximately 250 people. In November 2025, OHCHR supported the Deaf Development Programme to organize a seminar on Cambodian Sign Language and cultural and linguistic rights, attended by 22 participants (8 women, 13 men and 1 non-binary person).

V. Public participation and civic space

29. OHCHR documented reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions, abuse of legal proceedings and other forms of intimidation against civil society groups, journalists, media, and opposition activists, unduly restricting freedom of expression,[24] peaceful assembly[25] and association.[26]

30. In July 2025, in the context of the armed conflict in the Cambodia-Thailand border areas, the Minister of Information cautioned the public, media outlets and journalists that information related to the conflict should only come from official government sources.[27] Since then, as at May 2026, OHCHR received reports that at least 16 journalists (all male) had been summoned, arrested or detained for questioning, 15 of them for reports on the border conflict. Ten of them had been released on the same day without charge following brief questioning, while one had been charged with incitement to commit a felony under article 494 of the Criminal Code, and then released on bail. The other five journalists had been charged with various offences under the Criminal Code, including "demoralization of the army" under article 472 of the Code, "incitement to commit a felony" under article 494, "intercepting or recording private conversations" under article 301 and "supplying a foreign State with information prejudicial to national defence" under article 445, and had been remanded in custody. OHCHR also received information that authorities had pressured journalists to remove photos, videos or other content deemed sensitive (including content related to the armed conflict) from social media platforms.

31. In December 2025, following a one-day trial, the first-instance court in Siem Reap sentenced two of the journalists to 14 years in prison for supplying a foreign State with information prejudicial to national interests, under article 445 of the Criminal Code. The sentence was upheld on 26 March 2026 by the Court of Appeal. The journalists had published a photograph on social media in which they appeared with Cambodian soldiers near a temple in Oddar Meanchey border province.

32. OHCHR documented the revocation, by the Ministry of Information, of three online media licences held by SLM News, Four Powers Asia and CCN Daily. Two of the licences were revoked in June 2025 on the basis of alleged disrespect for the Law on the Press Regime and the Code of Conduct on Professional Journalism, while no reason was given for the third revocation on 21 August 2025.

33. At least four "citizen" journalists[28] based in the provinces reported facing intimidation, threats and surveillance while publishing on issues of public interest. In one case documented by OHCHR during the reporting period, a journalist received indirect threats in May 2025 from local education authorities after publishing information on shortages of teachers at the local school, prompting him to temporarily suspend reporting. In June 2025, another citizen journalist in Stung Treng Province was shot at by two unidentified men while returning from reporting on illegal environmental activities carried out by a private company. The police arrested two men two days after the attack, later sentencing them to three years in prison for attempted murder and illegal possession of weapons. Although the journalist survived the attack, the incident raised serious human rights concerns regarding the safety and protection of journalists, particularly those reporting on environmental concerns. Two women "citizen" journalists in Kratie Province described to OHCHR continuing gender-based discrimination from male community members and local authorities, who did not consider the women as legitimate journalists. They were reportedly threatened with rape

[24] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 19.

[25] Ibid., art. 21.

[26] Ibid., art. 22.

[27] Post by the Minister of Information, Neth Pheaktra, dated 24 July 2025, available at https://www.facebook.com/realNethPheaktra/posts/pfbid02tDf4J7vJDmjqoZDUVFDYtMftfFNDHX2tCAcCkRnYeQjMxez3BZtftY8h81hf1sqVl?rdid=lqK58UeA7qbE7c5X.

[28] Citizen journalists are not necessarily professionally or formally trained but report on issues of public interest. In the context of Cambodia, they are not required to have press cards issued by the Ministry of Information.

or harassment if they continued their work. Additionally, they reportedly experienced surveillance, particularly when reporting on issues involving local authorities or alleged official inaction.

34. At least 12 (9 men and 3 women) human rights defenders, environmental activists and union leaders detained since 2024 remained in detention during the reporting period. Six were charged with incitement to commit a felony, to disturb public security or to discriminate, under articles 494 to 496 of the Criminal Code, while the others were charged with plotting, under article 453. The most recent arrest occurred on 1 April 2026, involving Chea Vuthy, a monk and environmental activist. Following his arrest, he was reportedly forced to disrobe and was subsequently charged with incitement to commit a felony in connection with social media posts expressing criticism and frustration regarding the Government's handling of the border conflict with Thailand.

35. OHCHR received reports that, despite having no legal basis for requiring authorizations or notifications, authorities demanded that at least six civil society organizations based in the provinces seek authorization or provide written notification prior to conducting regular activities.[29] In addition, in violation of the right to freedom of assembly, the Phnom Penh Municipal Administration prohibited civil society organizations from gathering to mark International Teachers' Day on 5 October 2025 and International Women's Day on 8 March 2026. Under the 2009 Cambodian Law on Peaceful Demonstration, demonstrators are not required to obtain permission from the authorities, although they must notify them in advance. However, authorities notified the organizers that their events could not be held at the proposed venue, on the grounds that it was considered unsuitable for public assemblies.

36. OHCHR continued to receive reports of local authorities interfering in the work of civil society organizations, particularly in provinces outside of Phnom Penh. On 12 June 2025, authorities in Stung Treng reportedly prevented local communities from meeting with civil society organizations to discuss land and deforestation issues. Private companies and district authorities threatened to file complaints against community members involved in land disputes if they made their concerns public. In addition, in August 2025, local authorities in Preah Vihear reportedly questioned human rights defenders about their political affiliation, demanding to see their identification cards and other documents when they attempted to gather to discuss community land issues.

37. OHCHR continued to document a pattern of arrests targeting political opponents and individuals perceived as affiliated with opposition actors when there was a link with the expression of opinions or comments critical of government decisions, policies or programmes. During the reporting period, at least 18 opposition-affiliated individuals were arrested on charges such as incitement to commit a felony or to disturb social security, incitement to discriminate, plotting, forgery of public documents, public insult and lèse-majesté. According to OHCHR, these arrests appear to violate the right to freedom of expression as enshrined in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and therefore to be arbitrary, in violation of article 9 (1) of the Covenant. Another 20 opposition actors (3 women and 17 men) remained in detention, some since 2020, awaiting final decisions on their appeals. During the reporting period, three political activists were released, two after completing their prison terms and one by royal pardon after reportedly issuing a public apology and joining the ruling party. While the royal pardon removed the custodial component of the sentence, restrictions on political participation and other legal consequences of the conviction remained in force.

38. On 31 March 2026, the Phnom Penh Appeal Court held an appeal hearing in the case of Rong Chhun, an adviser to the Nation Power Party, without his presence, in violation of his fair trial rights under article 14 (3) (d) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The appeal concerned his conviction on 5 May 2025 by the Phnom Penh Court of First Instance for incitement to commit a felony, for which he was sentenced to four years in prison and permanently deprived of his rights to vote and stand for election. The charges

[29] In interviews held by OHCHR with civil society actors during fields missions from July to December 2025 in Preah Vihear, Steng Treng, Ratanakiri, Banteay Meanchey and Siem Reap Provinces.

related to remarks made during the opening of the party's office in Kandal Province in July 2024, in which he reportedly criticized the Government for failing to restore democracy, and in a radio interview in August 2024, criticizing the Cambodia-Laos-Viet Nam Development Triangle Area initiative.[30] He had previously been sentenced to 15 months in prison on similar charges in August 2021.

39. On 5 December 2025, the Phnom Penh Appeal Court upheld the two-year prison sentence of Mer Seng Hor, a deputy head of the Nation Power Party in Kampong Cham Province, on charges of public insult and incitement to discriminate under articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code, following a 2024 social media post in which he criticized the ruling party for pressuring opposition actors to join the party. He was released in March 2026 after completing his sentence. Mr. Seng Hor had previously been convicted and sentenced to one year in prison in 2019 on similar charges.

40. During the reporting period, OHCHR monitored 36 trials in 17 legal cases involving 66 individuals (56 men and 10 women) accused of crimes related to the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and participation in public and political affairs. Among these, 13 cases involved charges of incitement either to commit a felony (including to disturb public security)[31] or to discriminate under articles 495 and 496 of the Criminal Code, and for plotting and lèse-majesté under articles 453 and 437 bis. The vague definition of "disturbing public ('social') security" may allow broad interpretations, which would be in violation of article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and which would subsequently lead to arbitrary detentions in violations of article 9 (1) of the Covenant.

41. In connection with these cases, OHCHR documented cases of prolonged pretrial detention, undermining the presumption of innocence as enshrined in article 14 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which may render the detention unlawful under human rights law under article 9 (1) of the Covenant. In one such case, Thy Thorn, a 24-year-old youth activist from the Khmer Students Association for Intellectual Development, who was arrested on 18 August 2024 for plotting due to his criticism of the Cambodia-Laos-Viet Nam Development Triangle Area initiative, was taken into custody and held without trial, which at the time of writing had already lasted 19 months.

42. Proceedings against 33 activists and social media users charged with incitement to commit a felony under articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code, in connection with announced protests against the Cambodia-Laos-Viet Nam Development Triangle Area initiative and other political activism, began in August 2025 and concluded on 24 February 2026. On 29 April 2026, all the accused were found guilty as charged and sentenced to between 18 and 24 months in prison. The 33 accused had been arrested in July and August 2024, 14 of whom had remained in pretrial detention for over 20 months, close to the maximum sentence of 24 months for the charges.

43. OHCHR documented delays in judicial proceedings at both first instance and appeal. Such delays erode an individual's access to justice, the right to be tried without undue delay and the right to an effective remedy. The appeal hearing of five Mother Nature Cambodia activists, scheduled for 2 June 2026, was adjourned, further delaying the right to be tried without undue delay and the right to an effective remedy. In February 2026, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that their deprivation of liberty was arbitrary, in violation of the right to a fair trial, due process and the freedoms of expression, association and assembly.[32] The five activists had been convicted for their environmental activism and sentenced on 2 July 2024. Yim Leanghy was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment on charges of "plotting" and "lèse-majesté". Ly Chandaravuth, Thorn Ratha, Long Kunthea and Phuon Keo Raksmey were sentenced to six years on charges of "plotting". They appealed the decision on 22 July 2024.

[30] The Development Triangle Area is a regional cooperation initiative between Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam aimed at promoting economic growth, infrastructure, trade, investment and poverty reduction in less-developed border provinces.

[31] Referred to in the English-language translation of the Criminal Code as "social security".

[32] See A/HRC/WGAD/2025/67.

44. On 25 May 2026, a former leader of the Cambodia National Rescue Party, Kem Sokha, was granted a royal pardon in relation to his 27-year prison sentence. The pardon applies only to the custodial sentence, while the permanent loss of his rights to vote, stand for election and engage in political activities, and a five-year international travel ban, remain. Mr. Sokha was arrested on 3 September 2017 and charged with treason and conspiracy with a foreign power under article 443 of the Criminal Code, on the basis of a 2013 speech alleged to have promoted a "colour revolution". He was sentenced on 3 March 2023, and his conviction was upheld by Phnom Penh Appeal Court on 30 April 2026.

45. On 30 March 2026, the Appeal Court upheld the 2022 court of first instance decision, confirming six-year prison sentences for Kak Kumphea and Heng Chansothy (arrested in May and June 2020 respectively), Voeung Samnang (arrested in 2021 after deportation from Thailand) and Seng Chantheary (arrested in 2022) for plotting and incitement to commit a felony. The four individuals are part of a group of 129 former leaders of the dissolved opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party and activists who in 2020 were detained and charged with plotting and incitement to commit a felony in relation to the announced return of former party leaders, including Sam Rainsy and Mu Sochua in 2019 and 2020.

46. OHCHR engaged with authorities in relation to these cases and their human rights implications. In June 2025, OHCHR conducted its second Annual Intensive Course on Human Rights, engaging 25 human rights defenders, civil society representatives and government officials (12 women and 13 men), which led to strengthened human rights support to communities and created space for dialogue.

VI. Institutional and legal reforms

47. In October 2025, OHCHR supported the Cambodian Human Rights Committee in convening a national workshop on the right to liberty, as a follow-up to the training held in 2024 for its volunteer lawyers. The workshop brought together 45 participants (13 women and 32 men), including judges, prosecutors, lawyers and members of the Cambodian Human Rights Committee and representatives of the National Committee Against Torture.

48. In November 2025, OHCHR provided feedback on a draft policy on the management of homelessness, developed by the National Social Protection Council. OHCHR emphasized that a human rights-based approach, rather than criminalization, was essential for ensuring that interventions respected human dignity, protected fundamental freedoms and prioritized equitable, non-coercive and sustainable solutions centred on the needs, autonomy and rights of those affected. The policy had not yet been adopted by the end of the reporting period.

49. The reporting period saw the adoption, with limited consultation with those affected, of new pieces of legislation that further contributed to restricting civic space. On 5 September 2025, the Law on Amendments to the Law on Nationality was promulgated in an expedited procedure following the adoption in July 2025 of a change to article 33 of the Constitution, which opened the possibility for loss or revocation of citizenship. Under the amended law, the right to nationality may be revoked for reasons of national security or sovereignty under broadly formulated grounds that may permit arbitrary application and increase risks of statelessness, contrary to international human rights standards. The law does not provide for the possibility of appeal. OHCHR formally raised concern with the authorities on these issues.

50. On 27 November 2025, the Ministry of Information published the Prakas on Qualifications and Professional Journalism. The Prakas introduces a State-controlled licensing and qualification regime that may enable political control over the journalism profession. The use of vague criteria, such as "inappropriate Khmer language" and disqualification based on complaints without clear safeguards, risks arbitrary enforcement. The Prakas does not provide due process guarantees, such as appeals, independent review or proportionality in sanctions.

51. OHCHR continued engaging with national authorities and other stakeholders to promote press freedom and safeguard journalists. In December 2025, OHCHR and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) co-organized,

with the Ministry of Information, the Cambodian Human Rights Committee and civil society, a commemoration for the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, focusing on journalists' safety in the context of artificial intelligence, disinformation and online harassment. The event highlighted challenges posed by existing laws and the recent Prakas, and promoted strategies to strengthen protections, including for women journalists.

VII. Engagement with international human rights mechanisms

52. In September 2025, OHCHR supported a workshop on the implementation of the fourth cycle of universal periodic review recommendations on access to justice, organized by the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights. The workshop brought together 26 representatives (11 women, 14 men and 1 gender-diverse person) from 14 civil society organizations working on access to justice, fair trial rights and judicial reform. OHCHR facilitated integration of the recommendations into NGOs' annual programming.

53. In February 2026, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Manet, participated in the high-level segment of the sixtieth session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva and met with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

54. In March 2026, OHCHR organized a meeting on the universal periodic review mid-term report and the role of civil society organizations. The meeting brought together 26 civil society representatives (8 women and 18 men) working on the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons, women, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples, and on freedom of expression, to encourage their active participation in the review process.

55. In March 2026, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women found that Cambodia had violated the rights of a child victim of rape to an effective remedy, following more than 12 years of proceedings marked by significant delays.[33] It also found that the authorities had failed to enforce the Supreme Court's judgment, allowing the perpetrator to remain at large for nearly a decade. Following a press release[34] issued on 16 March 2026, OHCHR raised with relevant government authorities the obligations of Cambodia to give due consideration to the Committee's views and recommendations, and to submit a written response, including information on any measures taken to implement them.

56. In July and September 2025, OHCHR provided technical assistance to six civil society organizations for their engagement at the sixtieth session of the Human Rights Council held in September and October 2025. This included two preparatory briefings to provide practical guidance on engagement with the Council.

VIII. Mainstreaming human rights

57. OHCHR provided technical guidance on integrating human rights into national programming frameworks and on implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Cambodia 2024–2028.[35] In this context, OHCHR supported the integration of a human rights-based approach to the country's third nationally determined contribution, submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in July 2025, helping to ensure that the rights of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities were reflected in the final submission.

[33] *C.Y. and B.Y. v. Cambodia* (CEDAW/C/92/D/187/2022).

[34] See https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/cambodia-responsible-impunity-and-lack-reparation-child-rape-case-un.

[35] See https://cambodia.un.org/en/252482-united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-2024-2028.

IX. Accountability and administration of justice

A. Combating trafficking in persons

58. During the reporting period, online scam operations[36] linked to trafficking in persons for forced criminality, fraud, money laundering and broader transnational organized crime continued to pose a serious challenge in Cambodia and the region. In response, in July 2025, the Government announced a nationwide crackdown, followed by raids, closures and inspections across multiple locations, with enforcement actions intensifying in late 2025 and early 2026. It also promulgated the Law on Combating Online Scams, by royal decree, in April 2026. National authorities strengthened victim protection frameworks through dissemination of the Standard Operating Procedures for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation, supporting more consistent implementation of coordinated referral and reintegration mechanisms.

59. Despite these steps, significant challenges persist. Mass releases of migrants, many of whom were victims of trafficking in persons, from scam centres created serious protection gaps, leaving many individuals without documentation, income, shelter or immediate access to assistance and heightening risks of re-trafficking, reprisals and further exploitation. According to information received, systematic victim identification and screening remain inconsistent; the principle of non-punishment for victims who committed unlawful acts as a direct result of trafficking is not reliably applied; and access for humanitarian partners to provide trauma-informed care, psychosocial support and legal aid has been uneven in its application. In addition, prevention efforts were insufficient in addressing root causes, including unsafe recruitment practices, misinformation and economic vulnerability.

B. Conditions of detention

60. Overcrowding in places of detention remained concerning during the reporting period. According to data from the General Directorate of Prisons,[37] the prison population in May 2026 reached 64,947, an increase of over 14 per cent (22.5 per cent for women and 13.6 per cent for men) compared to May 2025 (when it stood at 56,869). The number of juveniles in detention decreased by 27 per cent, from 4,226 to 3,063 between May 2025 and May 2026. Despite efforts by the Ministry of Justice to address case backlogs since 2024, pretrial detainees continued to represent approximately 30 per cent of the total prison population, and 44 per cent of juveniles. OHCHR has linked overcrowding to overincarceration and a failure to institutionalize alternatives to imprisonment; lack of legal aid for pretrial detainees; limited use of judicial supervision, diversion for juveniles, pardons and paroles; delays in court proceedings; and complicated release processes.

61. During the reporting period, OHCHR conducted 25 visits to 22 prisons, and interviewed detainees, former detainees and prison authorities, who identified overcrowding as a primary challenge to the provision of essential services and dignified living conditions. Persistent overcrowding raises concerns regarding compliance with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. OHCHR received continued reports of insufficient sleeping space, limited nutritious food, particularly for children accompanying their mothers, insufficient sanitation and inadequate healthcare.

62. According to the General Department of Prisons, transfers of prisoners have been used to alleviate overcrowding, such as for the Kandal provincial prison, one of the most overcrowded prisons in Cambodia. In September 2025, over 200 juveniles were transferred to the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre in Kandal Province. In October 2025, 200 detainees were transferred to Kampot and Takeo Prisons. In February 2026, another 300 detainees were

[36] See https://searchlibrary.ohchr.org/record/35246/files/report-a-wicked-problem.pdf.

[37] Monthly data on the total prison population are provided to OHCHR by the General Department of Prisons.

transferred to Correctional Centre 4 in Pursat Province. In many cases, this moved detainees far from their families and lawyers, making visits difficult.

63. In September 2025, at least 13 people arrested in the context of criticism of the Cambodia-Laos-Viet Nam Development Triangle Area initiative were transferred from correctional centres in Phnom Penh and sent to prisons around the country, each placed in different facilities far from family members and lawyers, raising concerns in relation to article 10 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and rule 59 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). No reasons for the transfers were provided.

64. The border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand impacted prison overcrowding, according to the General Department of Prisons. More than 1,000 detainees were transferred from Oddor Meanchey Prison to Siem Reap Prison in July and December 2025 to relocate them from areas of active conflict. Women detained with their children reported that living conditions had significantly worsened, with reduced sleeping space making it increasingly difficult for their children to rest adequately. As of February 2026, two thirds of the detainees had returned to Oddor Meanchey Prison, while the rest remained in Siem Reap Prison.

65. In September 2025, OHCHR and the General Department of Prisons held a one-day seminar on international human rights standards relating to detention as a measure of last resort. The event brought together 109 participants (24 women and 85 men) from government, the judiciary, law enforcement, prison authorities, NGOs and United Nations entities. The recommendations included amending laws to ensure legal aid, expanding alternatives to pretrial detention, strengthening parole and sentence reduction programmes, and establishing a working group on rehabilitation, diversion and restorative measures for juveniles.

C. Legal aid

66. OHCHR documented challenges for detainees in accessing legal aid, including for bail hearings. Information shared by authorities in one prison showed that about 92 per cent of the detainees at that facility did not have a lawyer prior to the hearing at the first instance court. During the reporting period, OHCHR supported legal aid organizations through grants, to provide free legal assistance and representation to nine individuals (six women and three men) in five cases involving restrictions on freedom of expression.

X. Conclusions and recommendations

67. **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, including on the rights to participation in public affairs and freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.**

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

(a) **Continue its positive engagement with OHCHR to advance human rights for all;**

(b) **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;**

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

(d) **Ensure that social protection policies and laws comply with the principles of affordability, adequacy, universality, transparency and non-discrimination, and are gender-responsive, in order to provide universal social protection for all, especially workers in the informal economy;**

(e) **Engage in human rights-based confidence-building measures that will help to build trust;**

(f) **Ensure that all persons displaced by conflict can return voluntarily, safely and with dignity to their homes or places of habitual residence, while strengthening human rights-based reintegration support including expanded livelihoods, restored essential services, and gender-responsive programming tailored to the needs of women, children and persons with disabilities;**

(g) **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 law;**

(h) **Combat discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, and ensure legal recognition for same-sex couples through marriage equality, in line with accepted universal periodic review recommendations and international human rights standards;**

(i) **Finalize and adopt the draft Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in compliance with international human rights law;**

(j) **Strengthen civic and democratic space, by protecting civil and political rights, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association; ensuring meaningful and inclusive participation in public affairs; ending the criminalization of human rights defenders, journalists and political actors through charges such as plotting, lèse-majesté, public insult and incitement and through overbroad national security laws; and immediately releasing all those arbitrarily detained for exercising their human rights;**

(k) **Align the criminal justice and legislative framework with international human rights standards, by: amending the Criminal Code to ensure precise legal definitions; strengthening protections for freedom of expression and political participation; restricting pretrial detention to exceptional cases, with judicial oversight and periodic review; guaranteeing prompt access to legal counsel and remedies against arbitrary detention; and developing all human rights legislation through transparent, inclusive public consultations;**

(l) **Reduce prison overcrowding and improve detention conditions, by expanding alternatives to detention, adopting a national legal aid policy that is implemented with adequate resources, and improving the administration of justice to prevent unnecessary or prolonged detention and to promote fair trial rights;**

(m) **Revoke the Prakas on Qualifications and Professional Journalism and bring regulations on journalism into compliance with international human rights standards;**

(n) **Bring the amended Law on Nationality into compliance with international human rights standards, by narrowing the grounds for revoking nationality, introducing safeguards against arbitrariness and statelessness, and ensuring due process guarantees, including the right to appeal and to independent review;**

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

(p) **Take all necessary steps to address the root causes of trafficking in persons, effectively investigate and prosecute those responsible, and ensure victim-centred, accessible and gender-sensitive policies, including strict non-criminalization of trafficking victims, timely access to shelter, medical care and legal aid, secure pathways for victims with international protection needs, and dignified voluntary return. Strengthen regional cooperation and guarantee appropriate resources and coordination among competent authorities.**