

Press Release — December 11, 2015



NGO-CEDAW



We are a coalition of Cambodian NGOs and networks working for the advancement of the rights of women. We call upon the Government of Cambodia to strengthen and ensure the CEDAW compliance of the laws affecting survivors of household and family violence.

We also urge all authorities to protect every victim of abuse, whether the abuse leaves visible marks or causes emotional or financial harm. All Cambodians should report any incident of abuse to the authorities because abuse begins with small acts, then grows worse, resulting in many deaths. Letting abusers get away without punishment teaches children that abuse is normal and acceptable. It is time to break this cycle.

Ten years after the DV Law was passed, the limitations of the law have become apparent. The law is rarely implemented effectively, and many people including authorities in charge (such as police and commune chiefs) do not understand the law well. Currently, local officials only give spoken warnings to abusers or ask them to sign a pledge not to be violent again. Protective orders and administrative decisions are an effective and cost-efficient tool to protect victims of violence from further abuse. The order can include requirements that the abuser stay away from the victim's house or work while still paying for the support of family members. Violators can be immediately arrested. A temporary decision or order should be mandatory every time a woman fears future violence.

Next, the law needs to be expanded to include not only spouses living with the abuser, but also unmarried partners and former partners. Often an abuser will stalk a woman who tries to end the relationship and move away. Only a protective order or jailing the abuser will help.

Currently, many judges and prosecutors in domestic violence cases only apply Criminal Code Article 222, which outlaws violence against a spouse, claiming that other articles which call for longer sentences do not apply because they don't mention spouses specifically. Both the criminal code and the DV law need to be revised to clarify that the fact that a victim is a relative is an aggravating factor, not a separate crime, allowing for longer, not shorter, jail sentences for abusers.

Finally, even the best law will not protect women until every police officer and other authority learns about the law, understands the law, and fully uses the law. We urge the government to provide mandatory training to every authority at the local and national levels.

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