

UN Special Rapporteur is pleased with Cambodian rights

PHNOM PENH, Jan. 25, 2010 (PQRU) – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia informed His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Sok An on Monday that he has seen real progress in this Kingdom's rights respect.

Mr. Surya Prasad Subedi told Dr. Sok An in the meeting as saying: "I am familiar with the progress you have made over years, which is very encouraging ones."

Subedi, who is visiting from 18 - 30 January for his second mission to Cambodia, to focus on the functioning of state institutions that should promote and protect rights, ensure checks and balances on the power of the executive, and promote and protect democratic development.

He also informed His Excellency Sok An that he is "not coming here to criticize Cambodia to do this or that", but rather to work together with Cambodia as partnership in term of promoting human rights and the rule of laws.

In response, His Excellency Sok An told Subedi that "the judicial aspect is very important issue", which has been taken seriously by the government for reform.

Regarding the issue of defamation, Dr. Sok An, who is also Minister in charge of the Office of the Council of Ministers, said that Cambodia de-criminalized last year so as to contribute the freedom of expression and speech in the kingdom.

"So it is very positive one compared with other countries."

"They (the government's critics) even insulted the leaders," he said.

His Excellency Sok An, who is also co-chairman of the legal and judicial reforms, said Cambodian government has set up school of magistracy, registrar and notary so as to improve the country's judicial system.

"Judiciary is a very big task, so we have to start from the foundation," Dr. Sok An explained the UN envoy.

"The number of new judges is not sufficient, so we need to train more judges to work in the judicial system."

Cambodia has produced an estimated 55 judges per year.

"You have laid down good foundation for judiciary to work properly in the future," said Surya Prasad Subedi who was briefed by His Excellency.

Sok An also said Cambodia, which has been on the radar screen of investment, is also going to establish the commercial court to solve the commercial disputes, which has been raised by investors.

At the same time, His Excellency also highlighted the smooth operation of the UN-funded tribunal—known as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) commonly referred to as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT). Legal experts and staff from 38 countries have been recruited to work along with Cambodian staff at the tribunal.

"They have different legal system and mentality, but they can work together smoothly. It is very impressive," Dr. Sok An said.

In response, Subedi said "I agree with you, it (the ECCC) is a good model court."

The UN Special Envoy also raised concern about the law on regulating the non-governmental organization (NGO) that Cambodian government should make the draft available for the NGOs contributions, but at the same time Subedi told His Excellency Sok An that: "We cannot satisfy every concern."

Dr. Sok An said that the National Assembly of Cambodia has produced 149 laws in recent years more than other countries in the region.

"When we produced laws and implemented them, that means the rule of laws is there."

"We also hold a number of seminars for disseminating the laws," said Dr. Sok An.

In response, United Nations Special Rapporteur said he is "pleased to hear from you (His Excellency Dr. Sok An) about the progress you have made on the disseminating of laws".

Sok An also said that Cambodian government has been regularly holding elections on time and the result of which have been firmly supported by the international communities including Japan, European Union and the United States.

“I remembered the U.S. team said that the 2008 election was the best election compared to the previous ones in Cambodia,” Dr. Sok An told Subedi.

Cambodian general election has been held in every five years since the first UN-sponsored election in 1993.

“I am now better informed. I will continue to hear from you,” Subedi told His Excellency Sok An.

Surya Prasad Subedi also informed Dr. Sok An that he wanted to go to the countryside, where he could see the real situation with his own eyes for which Dr. Sok An encouraged him to do so.

“I am happy to hear that you want to see reality in Cambodia. If you listen to media it seems we have two Cambodia, one is in the media, another is real Cambodia as you see,” said Dr. Sok An.

(Press and Quick Reaction Unit)