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CAMBODIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REAFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR UNITED NATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

On the day that the United Nations Special Envoy arrives in the country, Amnesty International reiterated its call for the UN Centre for Human Rights to continue its work in safeguarding human right.

"The UN Centre for Human Rights in Cambodia is an essential means of guaranteeing the human rights of ordinary Cambodian people," Amnesty International said. "Without it's presence, Amnesty International fears that human rights could be quickly eroded in Cambodia."

In March, the Royal Government of Cambodia wrote to the United Nations asking that the mandate of the UN Centre for Human Rights not be renewed beyond the end of this year. While much of the work of the centre is on technical assistance and education, its staff has also been involved in monitoring grave human rights violations taking place in the country since the government took power. The government was apparently angered by some findings of the centre.

In response to widespread international criticism, the government later modified its position and accepted to the centre's continued operation. Nonetheless, UN Special Envoy, Mr Marrack Goulding, has arrived today in Cambodia to discuss the centre's role.

In a recent major report about human rights in Cambodia, Amnesty International called for the mandate of the UN Centre for Human Rights in Cambodia to be expanded. The organization said that the centre continues to play an important role in the country and recommended that sufficient funding be made available to the centre to allow its staff to properly implement their mandate.

"The centre has been extremely active in promoting and protecting human rights, despite underfunding, understaffing and difficult political conditions," Amnesty International said.

Field officers opened the centre in 1993, following the transition of power from the mandate of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia to the Royal Government of Cambodia in 1993. A peace agreement of 1991 stated that the UN Commission on Human Rights should "continue to monitor closely the human rights situation in Cambodia." The field office of the centre continues to fulfill this provision, while in 1993 and 1994 UN General Assembly resolutions strengthened its mandate.

Since that time, the centre has provided expert advice in drafting legislation and provides much-needed support to local human rights non-governmental organizations.

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