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## **Cambodia's government must protect victims of sexual violence as reports of rape increase**

Survivors of rape in Cambodia face limited access to justice, medical services and counselling, Amnesty International said in a report issued today, as rapes of women and girls appear to be increasing.

*Breaking the silence: Sexual violence in Cambodia*, issued to mark International Women's Day, exposes how corruption and discrimination within the police and courts prevent survivors of rape from receiving justice and required assistance, while most perpetrators go unpunished.

"Dozens of survivors told us that they face extortion, ignorance and disbelief from officials whose job it should be to assist them and protect their rights," said Donna Guest, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Deputy Director. "For too many survivors of rape, the pursuit of justice and medical support adds further distress to the initial abuse."

Amnesty International researchers found sex workers and women living in poverty faced serious obstacles in seeking justice and medical services. They were unable to pay bribes which were often required of them from the police and others, and could not afford legal or medical services.

The report includes 30 interviews with women and girls aged between 10 and 40. The family of a 19 year-old girl with a learning disability explained how police officers ignored their complaint when Mony was raped in late 2009.

"The police only work if you have money, if you can pay. With around 100,000 riels [approx 25 USD] perhaps we could have secured an arrest, but we don't have that," said her father.

He said that Mony lived in constant fear of the perpetrator, who remained at large. The family also struggled to afford the medicine she needed, and described transportation costs to court and police as very difficult.

Cambodian society, like many around the world, exhibits deeply engrained gender discrimination that stigmatizes survivors of sexual assaults, while perpetrators, who mostly remain at large, face limited, if any, sanction.

"With the lack of social support towards victims, it is crucial that the government breaks the silence and publicly condemns sexual violence, to show that it will not tolerate such serious crimes and to acknowledge the pain of the survivors," said Donna Guest.

With a new Penal Code entering into force in late 2010, Amnesty International calls on the Cambodian government to firmly address inadequate law enforcement, extra-judicial settlements, weak prosecution and

widespread corruption in cases of suspected sexual violence.

Amnesty International also urged the government to train and equip the police, utilise female police officers, and allocate necessary budgets so that they can investigate allegations of crimes promptly, professionally and sensitively.

Data provided by police and NGOs indicates that incidents of rape are increasing in Cambodia, but the extent of the increase is hidden by a lack of monitoring and limited reporting and coordination of statistics.

Authorities should accurately obtain such information and use it to inform policy and plans of action.

“Cambodia has made important inroads into tackling gender-discrimination, with a focus on domestic violence and human trafficking,” Donna Guest said. “It is time the government incorporated sexual violence against women into these categories to address its failure to meet the human rights obligations under the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.”

The 60-page report presents extensive research and recommendations to reverse increasing sexual violence against women. The analysis was released as part of Amnesty International’s global campaign to Stop Violence against Women.