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Cambodia: One Year on and Still No Justice

On the first anniversary of the violent ousting from power of Prince Norodom Ranariddh, Amnesty International again condemned the lack of any serious efforts by the Cambodian authorities to investigate the killings of scores of his supporters.

“It’s a disgrace that a whole year has passed, and yet no one has been held to account for these crimes,” Amnesty International said today.

Since 5 July 1997, dozens of Prince Ranariddh’s closest supporters have been arrested and killed. One victim Hor Sok, former Secretary of State at the Ministry of Interior, was arrested, brought to the Ministry of Interior compound and shot dead. His body was cremated at a local temple in the middle of the night.

In another case, in March 1998 the Cambodian military court sentenced Chao Sambath to a lengthy prison term, ignoring the fact that he was killed by government soldiers in July last year.

Campaigning for the 26 July national election is now underway. The safe return to Cambodia of the many politicians who fled in the aftermath of the coup is a welcome development, but holding elections should not be used as an alternative to ensuring justice and accountability.

“Scores of people were killed, hundreds were detained, dozens were tortured. General elections will not make these facts go away,” Amnesty International said. “It’s time for the Cambodian authorities to bring the killers to justice.”

Institutionalised impunity for human rights violators has long been the major human rights problem in Cambodia, and those who commit abuses know that they will not be called to account for their actions. Change is essential -- and long overdue -- if Cambodian people are to be able to exercise their fundamental human rights without fear.

The international community, which is providing most of the funding for the election, must continue to push the Cambodian authorities to bring to justice all those involved in human rights abuses. Regardless of the outcome of the election, the need for justice and accountability remains.
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