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EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 HRS GMT 22 SEPTEMBER 1998

Cambodia: Protestors crushed by brutal force - governments must end silence

As "Friends of Cambodia" governments meet in New York, Amnesty International said it was time they ended their silence on the new wave of human rights abuses in Cambodia since the elections.

"Once again peaceful protestors, including Buddhist monks, have been shot on the streets of Phnom Penh," Amnesty International said. "These latest violations are the consequence of near total impunity for authorities who abuse their power, reinforced by the complicit silence of the international community."

Amnesty International called on "Friends of Cambodia" governments to condemn the recent upsurge in human rights violations and to use their influence with the Cambodian authorities to urge restraint and the lifting of restrictions on the freedom of movement for opposition politicians and Buddhist monks.

"These governments seem ready to wash their hands of Cambodia in the aftermath of the contested elections. But they must not shirk their responsibility to guarantee human rights to Cambodia's people, irrespective of the political crisis."

The human rights organization today released a report detailing deaths and injuries to protestors following the use of excessive force to disperse demonstrations from 7 September 1998. It expressed concern for the safety of dozens of people who were arrested during the crackdown, but whose current whereabouts is unknown.

"Given Cambodia's recent history of political killings, 'disappearances' and torture, it is imperative that the authorities publicly account for those they have arrested, ensure they are properly treated, and release anyone held for their peaceful political activities."

In its report, Amnesty International called on the opposition parties involved in the protests to exercise restraint and contribute to respect for human rights.

"We regret the inflammatory rhetoric that opposition figures have used against Cambodia's ethnic Vietnamese minority, and condemn recent racist attacks. But these do not excuse a more generalised crackdown on legitimate and peaceful protest and expressions of public discontent."

Amnesty International also expressed concern about ongoing threats from the security forces against human rights workers, including staff of the Cambodia Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. ENDS.../

For further information, please see Amnesty International report: *"Kingdom of Cambodia: Demonstrations crushed with excessive use of force"* (AI Index: ASA 23/26/98)