

## PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

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### **CAMBODIA: Adoption of Law on Associations and NGOs a severe attack on civil society**

**Paris, Geneva, Phnom Penh, July 14, 2015 – The adoption of the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations (LANGO) is a severe attack on Cambodia's independent civil society, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, said today.**

On July 13, all 68 MPs from the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which holds the majority in the 123-seat National Assembly, voted in favour of passing the LANGO. The law is now expected to be adopted by the CCP-dominated Senate before being signed by King Norodom Sihamoni for promulgation.

***"The LANGO has finally given the Hun Sen's government the legal tool it needs to exert its total control over civil society, grassroots groups, and independent human rights groups. It is a dangerous harbinger of other draconian laws that the ruling party can unilaterally adopt in the near future",*** said FIDH President Karim Lahidji.

***"The adoption of the LANGO is a serious attack on Cambodia's vibrant and young civil society. If the law is enacted and implemented in its current form, the Cambodian people will feel its disastrous impact for many years to come",*** said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

The Observatory had previously called for the withdrawal of the law because it was drafted without meaningful consultation with concerned stakeholders. The LANGO contains unnecessary restrictions on the right to freedom of association, excessive penalties, and grants authorities indiscriminate and arbitrary powers over registration and de-registration of civil society groups and NGOs. The LANGO legalizes the control and censorship of activities undertaken by domestic and international associations and NGOs.

The restrictions on the right to freedom of association contained in the LANGO go well beyond the permissible limitations allowed by international human rights law and are unnecessary for any legitimate purpose. The Observatory maintains that the legislation already in force in Cambodia is fully sufficient to appropriately regulate the activities of associations and NGOs and to allow prosecution where criminal acts have been committed.

*The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and OMCT. The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy to situations of repression against human rights defenders.*

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