

People and wildlife on Earth, including Cambodians, greatly depend on the environment and natural resources. This dependence is particularly evident with regard to indigenous peoples, whose identities, traditions, cultures, and livelihoods are rooted in forests, water and other natural resources, and who themselves play a critical role in caring for these resources, due to their longstanding and intimate knowledge of and relationship to them. These resources are also an important source of life for forest communities, community fisheries along rivers and in coastal areas, and people in rural and urban areas. This interdependence highlights the fundamental importance of conserving the environment and natural resources to ensure the sustainability of all life.

We are highly optimistic about and committed to support the implementation of national policies to protect the environment and natural resources. However, these policies cannot be achieved without spaces where Cambodian people can exercise their rights and freedoms to actively participate in environmental protection and natural resource conservation. This participation is in accordance with applicable laws, including Article 35, Paragraph 1 of the Constitution, which states “Khmer citizens of either sex shall have the right to participate actively in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation”. In addition, article 368 of the Code on Environment and Natural Resources (ENRC) also states, “Local communities, the public, and civil society shall be encouraged to participate, provide, and receive information concerning the management, protection, conservation, and development of natural protected areas.” Therefore, youth and environmental activists who collect and report information on deforestation and environmental pollution are not engaging in illegal actions, as many have been accused of. Rather, they are exercising their rights as provided for by Cambodian law. Regrettably however, in 2024, at least ten young environmental activists were arrested and sentenced to six to eight years in prison for their actions to protect the environment and natural resources.⁶

We believe that the effectiveness of policy enforcement depends not only on good intentions or robust policy, but also on the tools, information, data, and means of verification, monitoring, and coordination that together contribute to implementation. As one example, Artificial intelligence (AI) and technology can both provide information and help to monitor deforestation in specific areas. It is also an innovative tool that helps us make better use of existing resources by limiting the use of financial and human resources in environmental and natural resource protection and conservation. Young environmental activists who understand the importance of evidence-based advocacy have used AI technology to share information and data about environmental pollution and the destruction of forests and other natural resources with the relevant authorities, who can then take timely measures to prevent and address these issues. In summary, encouraging the widespread use of AI technology among young people and environmental activists is necessary to promote the achievement of national environmental and natural resource policies. Conversely, excluding and persecuting these young activists will only discourage them, paving the way for further environmental and natural resource crimes for the benefit of individuals and factions.

⁶ Source: Article of Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (“LICADHO”) [Mother Nature Activists Violently Arrested, Sentenced to 6-8 Years. Released on 02 July 2024.](#)

We are concerned about the negative environmental and social impacts of development projects, particularly in forest, coastal, and riverine areas, that may operate without proper monitoring, accountability, transparency, or inclusion, and which are not widely implemented in accordance with legal standards for environmental impact assessments (EIAs). According to the report on “Environmental and Social Impact Review (ESIR) Focusing on Development Projects in Preah Sihanouk and Koh Kong Provinces in Cambodia” by the NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGOF) and ActionAid Cambodia (AAC), published in February 2025, 72 percent of respondents were unaware of investment projects in their local areas. The research also found that 68 percent were unaware of environmental impact assessments, and 50.4 percent reported being moderately to severely negatively impacted by those development projects.

Another concern is the issue of waste management and the growth in the use of plastic. In general, waste in Cambodia increases by 15 percent each year. In Phnom Penh alone, waste increases by 2,700 to 3,000 tons per day. Out of 100 percent of waste, 68 percent is organic, 20 percent is plastic, and 10 percent is solid.⁷ The use of plastic has increased dramatically in recent years. Phnom Penh uses 10 million plastic bags per day, and on average, each Cambodian citizen uses 2,000 plastic bags per year. It is estimated that people in coastal areas use 12 plastic bags per household per day, and more than 48 percent of that amount ends up in the ocean.⁸ Poor waste management and the growth of plastic waste pose serious threats to the environment, biodiversity, human health, and the national economy.

In light of these abovementioned concerns regarding deforestation, the implementation of development projects and the participation of Cambodian citizens in environmental and natural resource protection, we request that the Royal Government of Cambodia and its relevant ministries please:

1. Cease providing forest cover and forest land in protected areas to private companies, in order to preserve the environment and protect and conserve natural resources. This can be achieved through the climate action plan, which aims to reduce historical emissions and deforestation rates by 2030, as well as restore forest cover to 60% by 2050.
2. Open the space for environmental activists, youth, civil society organizations, and the public so that they can exercise their rights and freedoms to participate in protecting the environment and protecting and conserving the country's forests and other natural resources in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the ENRC. We strongly urge the Royal Government and the courts to drop the charges and release environmental activists who have been arrested and sentenced to prison for exercising their rights and freedoms to participate in protecting the environment and protecting and conserving forests and natural resources.

⁷ Source: [NEWSROOM CAMBODIA, Date 17 June 2021](#).

⁸ Source: Ministry of Environment: [Project to promote a conducive environment for sustainable development in Cambodia from January 2019 to December 2020](#).

3. Increase support and encouragement for youth and environmental activists to use artificial intelligence (AI) technology as a smart tool to monitor, research and find information and data about environmental pollution, forest destruction and other natural resources, which are reported to competent authorities to take timely preventive and suppressive measures. Please take action against corrupt individuals and officials who have harassed and discouraged these activists in order to pave the way for further environmental and natural resource crimes for the benefit of individuals and factions.
4. The Ministry of Environment should commit to promoting greater transparency and accountability in the EIA process. It should provide comprehensive information regarding EIA procedures and processes, and encourage the participation of affected communities. This is especially important in community forest areas where indigenous people live and depend on the forests according to their customs, traditions, and practices. It is also important for local communities, including forestry communities, fishery communities at the coastal and rivers. The Ministry should strictly enforce legal principles for companies and development projects that do not follow EIA procedures. The Ministry should not recommend the Government to provide land to any investment project based on an EIA report indicating serious negative impacts on local communities, environmental pollution, and loss of forest cover and other national natural resources.
5. The Ministry of Environment and other relevant ministries should effectively strengthen and promote the implementation of the 2020-2030 urban solid waste management policy regarding garbage and plastic. The Government and relevant ministries should implement a public tax classification for industrial waste and impose strict fines for littering, such as throwing trash into canals, lakes, rivers, and the sea. They should also reduce plastic use as much as possible. The Ministry of Environment should promote the 4Rs principle—Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle—to reduce plastic waste.

The statement is supported by:

1. Cambodian Youth Network Association (CYN)
2. The Coalition for Partnership in Democratic Development (CPDD)
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4. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
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6. Jesuit Service Cambodia (JSC)
7. Samahkum Teang Tnaut (STT)
8. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)