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Cambodian Center for Human Rights

Press Release, Phnom Penh, 16 January 2012

CCHR calls for Cambodia to show strong national and international leadership regarding the promotion of human rights for LGBT people

[The Cambodian Center for Human Rights](#) (“CCHR”), a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights – primarily civil and political rights – throughout the Kingdom of Cambodia (“Cambodia”), welcomes the progressive foreign policy on the part of the United States (“US”) government to “promote and protect” the rights of LGBT people around the world, and calls on the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) to show strong national and international leadership regarding the promotion of human rights for LGBT people.

Addressing the United Nations Human Rights Council, before an audience including people from the Arab and African worlds and other countries with poor records on gay rights, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, following a memorandum issued on Tuesday, 6 December 2011 by President Barack Obama, called on all countries to respect the civil rights of LGBT individuals. The goals regarding global LGBT rights as outlined by the presidential memo are to: (1) combat the criminalization of LGBT status; (2) protect vulnerable LGBT refugees and asylum seekers; (3) leverage foreign assistance to protect human rights and advance non-discrimination; (4) ensure swift and meaningful US responses to human rights abuses of LGBT people abroad; and (5) engage international organizations in the fight against LGBT discrimination.

In Cambodia, despite some degree of improvement in terms of social understanding and tolerance, LGBT people still face an array of challenges, most particularly the discrimination that they encounter from all quarters, in particular from their families, employers and local officials, such as the police.

CCHR should like to highlight this recent initiative by the US government, under the administration of President Barack Obama, to promote the rights of LGBT people. CCHR particularly applauds the US’s public declaration to fight discrimination against gays and lesbians abroad by using foreign aid and

diplomacy to instigate reform. Often the rights of LGBT people are overlooked or undermined. However, the progressive stance taken by the US represents a true step forward in protecting LGBT people's rights on a global level. It is truly commendable that these initiatives attempt to aid development in a variety of different countries, such as Uganda – a country notorious for its intolerance of LGBT individuals – Honduras, Malawi, and others. This recent progress on President Obama's watch is enlightening, and offers guidance and support to Cambodia.

The RGC could take inspiration from this US initiative and help LGBT people in three ways: it could (1) echo President Obama's words and speak out in favor of the rights of LGBT people and against discrimination; (2) instigate the passage of anti-discrimination legislation in Cambodia which is currently lacking; and (3) use Cambodia's position as Chair of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to encourage reform across the region, including lobbying for the inclusion of provisions protecting the human rights of LGBT people in the draft ASEAN human rights declaration that is currently being discussed and finalized.

With strong national and international leadership from the RGC, CCHR believe that the situation in Cambodia will continue to improve for LGBT people and their enjoyment of their rights, and that Cambodia can establish a legacy in the region.

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