



CAMBODIA'S THIRD UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW : ALMOST FOUR YEARS ON



Progress of implementation of accepted recommendations to combat discrimination and violence against women and girls and promote gender equality

DEFINITION

The **Universal Periodic Review ("UPR")** is a **United Nations ("UN") mechanism to review the human rights practices of all Member States**. During the UPR, States under review explain what they have done to uphold human rights and other UN member States give **recommendations** on how it could improve their human rights situation.

Outcome of **Cambodia's Third UPR 2019:**



THIRD UPR CYCLE OF CAMBODIA

- In January 2019 Cambodia **received 198 recommendations** from 73 UN Member States.
- In July 2019, the Royal Government of Cambodia ("RGC") **accepted 173 of the recommendations** on a **wide range of issues**, such as land rights, fair trial rights, the protection of human rights defenders, children's rights, women's rights...

Among the recommendations related to women's rights accepted by the RGC, **several related to the need for increased efforts to address discrimination and violence against women and girls ("VAWG") and promote gender equality.**

ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS

110.132. Overcome obstacles to access to justice for women victims of violence.



110. 171. Intensify efforts to improve the human rights of women and to combat human trafficking, domestic violence, and the exploitation of women and children.

110. 173. Continue ongoing mechanisms for gender parity and women's empowerment.



110. 174. and 110.176. Continue to implement the gender equality policy to ensure gender mainstreaming in all sectors and programs.

110. 175. Further strengthen programs to address discrimination against women and girls, and to promote gender equality.



110. 177. Redouble efforts to eradicate discrimination against women in the legal sphere and put an end to harmful practices and discriminatory stereotypes of which Cambodian women are victims.



110. 178. Continue to step up measures aimed at promoting women's rights, including the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

110. 179. Ensure efforts to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence ("GBV") and discrimination, and ensure empowerment of all vulnerable groups.



110.180. Strengthen efforts to protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children and persons with disabilities, also in order to prevent and combat child labor and sexual exploitation, as well as other forms of violence, including domestic violence.



110.181 Strengthen the role and status of women, and promote and protect the rights of children and persons with disabilities in society.

110.182. Provide mandatory training on prosecution procedures for cases of gender-based violence for law enforcement and judicial officers.



110.183. Allocate sufficient human and financial resources to establish at least five one-stop service centres by 2024, to provide support services free of charge to victims of GBV.



110.184. Conduct comprehensive investigations of cases of domestic and sexual violence, and ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted and victims are adequately compensated.



110.185. Reform national legislation with a view to strengthening the protection of women and children against domestic violence.



110.186. Reinforce judicial mechanisms to fight sexual and family violence and human trafficking, and carry out a program for raising awareness and education on these issues.

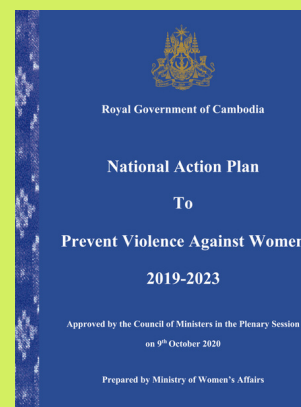
By accepting these recommendations, the RGC made a political commitment to implement them before the next review in 2024.



AREAS OF PROGRESS

Since 2019, the RGC has adopted policies to **address discrimination and VAWG** and **promote gender equality** in the country, such as:

- The launch of the **National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2019 – 2023** in 2021, which seeks to better prevent, respond, and address violence against women and girls;
- The adoption of a new **five-year gender strategic plan 2019-2023 - the Neary Rattanak 5** - by the Ministry of Women's Affairs ("MoWA") in 2021, which seeks to strengthen gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women and girls, including through the elimination of all forms of VAWG;



- The signature of a **memorandum of understanding** between the Cambodian National Council for Women and the Bar Association of Cambodia in March 2021 to strengthen and expand legal defense services to indigent GBV survivors and provide legal training on GBV-related laws to enforcement authorities.



AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

While it has made some commendable progress since 2019, the RGC has so far **failed to take significant concrete actions to fully implement the accepted recommendations** relating to the elimination of discrimination and VAWG and the promotion of gender equality:

- **Harmful social and cultural norms and negative gender stereotypes** remain pervasive within Cambodian society, **nurturing discrimination and VAWG in all walks of life**;
- There is **no clear law defining discrimination** and banning all its forms, including against women and girls;
- **Shortcomings in the existing national legal framework prevent the full protection of women and girls against all forms of violence:** the *Law on Domestic Violence* does not adequately define domestic violence, thus failing to protect women and girls against many instances of domestic abuse; the *Human Trafficking Law* contains broadly defined offenses resulting in the criminalization of sex work; and the *Labor Law* does not define sexual harassment and what types of actions amount to sexual harassment, thus inadequately addressing the issue;
- The **insufficient financial and technical resources allocated to the MoWA** impede the full implementation of its gender-related plans and actions at the national and sub-national levels;
- The **lack of comprehensive legal aid policy, lawyers, and budget** impedes GBV survivors from accessing justice. There is also a **lack of other essential services** to support survivors;
- The **entrenched culture of victim-blaming, lack of investigation and legal action in GBV cases** due to the **absence of specialized courts and specially trained police units** and **lack of gender-sensitivity training for the police** in general, hinder survivors from reporting cases and filing complaints due to a lack of trust in the authorities;
- **Women from marginalized communities** (e.g., indigenous women, women in remote areas, LGBTQ+ women, women with disabilities, sex workers) keep facing **additional barriers in accessing justice**;
- **Women are underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions** in all sectors of Cambodian society, including in the **government, the judiciary, and law enforcement**;



- **Cambodian authorities regularly resort to violence**, including **sexual harassment, against women exercising their fundamental rights**, such as women engaged in peaceful strikes and assemblies (e.g., NagaWorld strikers, Friday Women), **in all impunity**.

CONCLUSION

While the RGC's efforts to promote gender equality and eliminate all forms of discrimination and VAWG through the adoption of certain policies are commendable, **more concrete action must be taken to fully implement the accepted recommendations and ensure that discrimination and VAWG are eliminated, and gender equality is achieved in Cambodia.**



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