

 

**HUMAN RIGHTS & FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION  
EVENTS: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE**  
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BUILDING CAPACITY WORLDWIDE 1

## Why?

- Document the events of late 2005/early 2006
- Identify strengths and weaknesses
- Examine lessons learned and networks established
- Inform other advocacy strategies and citizen movements

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## Methodology

- Input from 73 informants\*
- Period: IHRD (10 Dec) through Jan 2006
- Structured interviews with open-ended questions
- Collected in February-March 2006

\* Coded for anonymity but which included NGOs, labor unions, youth associations, the media, government, the international community, and the private sector.

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## Background

- Anti-Thai riots of 29 January 2003
- May Day (Labor Day, 1 May 2005)
- Mom Sonando interviews Sean Pengse (20 September 2005)
- PM declares “Those people who wrongly claim my fault in border issues may face lawsuits” (Kyodo News, 6 October 2005)
- Supplemental border treaty signed in Hanoi on 10 October 2005
- Rong Chhun signs CWC Statement same day

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## Activities Up to IHRD

- National
  - Conference on Freedom of Expression in Cambodia at PP Hotel (24 Oct 05)
  - AFEC born 28 Nov 05, Yellow Ribbons distributed
  - International Human Rights Day (10 Dec 05)
- International
  - Human Rights Watch Statement (18 Oct 05)
  - UN SRSG for HR Leuprecht (20 Oct 05) and new SRSG (Ghai) visits Cambodia (28 Nov – 5 Dec 05)
  - European Union Demarche led by UK (11 Nov 05)

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## Post-IHRD up to New Year's Eve

- Yeng Virak is summoned to City Hall to explain the "breach of trust" (13 Dec 05)
- Sam Rainsy tried and sentenced to 18 months prison in absentia (22 Dec 05)
- Arrest warrants for Kem Sokha and Yeng Virak reportedly issued 28 Dec 05
- Kem Sokha and Yeng Virak are arrested on 31 Dec 05, diplomats, CTN, HR Defenders, SRP Parliamentarians are present

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## Activities After Arrests

- National
  - Core Committee met at least once/day to plan
  - CCHR Public Forums are ramped-up
  - Thumbprint campaign (180,000 collected by March 05)
  - Saturday events at Prey Sar (7 & 14 Jan 05)
  - Personal visits to Amb. by Te Chanmono
  - Joint and other statements/letters issued
- International
  - ASEAN non-interference
  - EU Troika
  - Numerous statements and letters issued (World Bank, ILO, major garment buyers etc.)
  - Swedish Minister of Justice visits Prey Sar Prison
  - Numerous articles and editorials published
  - US Assistant Secretary of State visits

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## Interplay Between National and International Activities

- Symbiotic relationship between civil society and the international community
- International Community intermediates
- Strength and conviction of civil society enables certain members of the international community to speak-up
- "very dynamic after the [31 Dec 05] arrests" in contrast to earlier arrests

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## What Worked and What Didn't

- Strengths
  - Collaboration and Coordination: Working Together
  - Innovative External Communications, Media and the International Community
  - Thumbprint Campaign
  - Symbolism and Aspiration: Yellow Ribbon
- Weaknesses
  - Lack of Information: Inadequate Internal Communications
  - Inconsistent International/Business Opinion
  - Lack of Leadership in Civil Society: Fear and Mistrust

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## Lessons Learned

- United We Stand, Divided We Fall
- Develop Long-Term Strategy
- Improve Civil Society Rapport with Government and Donors
- Self-Reflection for Donors and Civil Society

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## The Way Forward: Future Actions and Approaches

- Moving Beyond Phnom Penh
- Promoting Civic Engagement and Shifting to Freedom of Assembly
- Advocacy with Historical and Cultural Sensitivity
- **Recommendations (1):\***
  - Regularizing Meetings for Information (Not Demands) Between Civil Society and Diplomats

\* These and subsequent slides' recommendations were developed with Laura McGrew. This is just a sampling as there are many, many more recommendations in the report.

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## Recommendations (2)

- Dialogue and Confidence-Building Measures
  - A Need for Dialogue
  - Confidence-Building Measures Among Government, Civil Society, and the Opposition
  - Share Information
- Expand Information and Public Space in Rural Areas
  - Increase Field-Based Involvement of CSOs and CBOs
  - Improve Access to Information

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### Recommendations (3)

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- Coalition-Building/Planning Ahead
  - Consolidate Newly Formed Coalitions and Gains
  - Focus on victims – Not Organizations
  - Improve Explanations and Marketing of Campaigns
- Expand and Explore Existing Networks
  - Explore Role of Youth Groups
  - Overseas Cambodians
  - Garment Buyers

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### Recommendations (4)

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- Civil Society Institutional and Capacity Building
  - Recognize the Problem/Self-Evaluate
  - Labor and Human Rights Capacity
  - Don't Cry Wolf
- Last But Not Least, Improve Communications Through Technology
  - Blogging (Citizen Journalism), Text Messaging
  - Watching More Television (!)
  - Rumor Control

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