

Joint Statement by Cambodian Civil Society on Civilian Protection and Women's Security Amid Border Tensions

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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We, the undersigned Cambodian civil society organizations working on gender equality and peace, express our deep concern regarding recent reports of grave violations against civilians along the Cambodia–Thailand border, including [recent allegations of sexual violence \(gang rape\) against a Cambodian migrant woman](#) and the [alleged fatal shooting of unarmed villagers by the Thai military](#). These incidents, if verified, represent serious breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights obligations, and risk undermining regional stability and trust. We are further alarmed by heightened risks faced by children, adolescents, unaccompanied minors, and youth migrants, who remain extremely vulnerable during heightened military activity and border closures.

Civilian protection is a legal and moral imperative. Under Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, parties to any armed conflict must protect civilians from violence, including outrages upon personal dignity. Women and girls are afforded special protection under Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which explicitly prohibits rape and other forms of sexual violence. Both Cambodia and Thailand are parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which require states to prevent, investigate, and punish gender-based violence, including acts committed by state agents. Additionally, both countries are parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), obligating States to protect children from all forms of violence, exploitation, trafficking, and harmful detention practices (Articles 19, 34, 35, and 37). Violations affecting children during border tensions or migration constitute serious breaches of these obligations.

We further note with regret that these violations occur despite ASEAN member states' adoption of the Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (RPA-WPS), which commits governments to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, protect women and girls in conflict and crisis settings, ensure survivor-centered response, and integrate gender-sensitive approaches into peace and security efforts. These commitments are not aspirational. They are actionable standards that should guide responses to current tensions. Yet, the failure to operationalize these commitments, particularly the Protection and Prevention pillars, has left women and girls vulnerable and undermines ASEAN's credibility as a community committed to peace and security. This gap between legal and policy framework, and practice must be urgently addressed to

restore confidence in regional mechanisms and uphold the rights and dignity of all civilians.

Recommendations:

1. Establish independent and transparent investigations: Create a joint fact-finding mechanism with ASEAN oversight (e.g., ACWC/AICHR) by ensuring the mechanism includes gender, child protection, and trauma-informed experts to investigate allegations of sexual violence and civilian killings.
2. Continue to guarantee survivor-centered protection and support: Provide immediate, confidential access to adequate medical care, psychosocial counseling, and legal assistance for survivors in accordance with international child protection standards and GBV guidelines.
3. Issue clear orders and enforce compliance: Both militaries must reaffirm obligations under IHL and human rights law, issue standing orders prohibiting sexual violence and attacks on civilians, and enforce rules of engagement aligned with Geneva Conventions. Commanders must ensure dissemination of these rules to all personnel, including border police, immigration officers, and auxiliary forces.
4. Operationalize ASEAN RPA-WPS Commitments: Activate the Protection and Prevention pillars of the ASEAN RPA-WPS by establishing cross-border referral pathways, training security forces on gender-sensitive approaches, and engaging women rights organizations in ceasefire monitoring and peace dialogues.
5. Ceasefire and confidence-building measures: Immediately halt military operations near civilian areas, restore the ceasefire, and resume dialogue under ASEAN facilitation. Both Cambodia and Thailand are signatories to the Ottawa Convention, which prohibits the use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines by all parties. The use of cluster munitions in civilian areas has previously been criticized as unlawfully indiscriminate, including by [Human Rights Watch](#).
6. Strengthen accountability and oversight: Apply command responsibility principles to ensure accountability at all levels. Suspend implicated personnel pending investigation and guarantee non-retaliation for victims and witnesses by ensuring public reporting of investigation outcomes to build community trust and engagement.
7. Protect migrant workers and border communities: Ensure freedom of movement, prevent collective punishment, and provide safe return for displaced civilians by strengthening humanitarian access, ensure non-discriminatory treatment of undocumented migrants, and coordinate with civil society to establish safe reporting and referral channels .
8. Strengthen the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers: uphold their dignity and ensure comprehensive protection from exploitation, discrimination, and all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

The safety, dignity, and rights of civilians, especially children, women and girls, and other vulnerable groups must remain at the center of all security decisions. These incidents underscore the urgent need for all parties to translate commitments into concrete action, uphold international and regional norms, and demonstrate that impunity will not be tolerated.

This statement is endorsed by:

1. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
2. Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID)
3. Wellbeing Advancement Organization (WELL)
4. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association
5. Mondulkiri Indigenous People's Association for Development (MIPAD)
6. Cambodian Health and Education for Community
7. Urban Poor Women Development.
8. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
9. Klahaan
10. Kdei Karuna Organization
11. Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association
12. Gender and Development for Cambodia
13. Women Peace Makers
14. Banteay Srei
15. SILAKA
16. Rainbow Community Kampuchea Organisation