

Drop Amendments to Nationality Law, Don't Strip Citizenship of Cambodians

Phnom Penh, 24 August 2025

We are deeply worried that proposed amendments to the Nationality Law allowing the government to strip Cambodians of their citizenship are vaguely written, and will have a disastrously chilling effect on the freedom of speech of all Cambodian citizens.

Draft amendments to the Nationality Law, set to be voted on at the National Assembly on 25 August, clearly violate international laws, treaties, and the Constitution. Before we discuss these legal aspects, we want to speak from our hearts about why this new law is a terrible mistake that will do permanent damage to our country.

To be a Cambodian citizen means different things to different people. We are all part of a nation that has suffered so much, and has survived and thrived. We are deeply proud of our Cambodian heritage and citizenship, for many different reasons.

To be a Cambodian citizen today also means to live in a country where criticizing the government, protecting the environment, or organizing with a union can lead to a prison sentence. This is a risk that every activist, politician and citizen knows in our hearts. Many people still take these risks and engage in activism out of love for Cambodia. We want to help build a Cambodia for our children and loved ones that respects democracy, human rights, and the environment.

With this new amendment to the Nationality Law, all Cambodians risk losing our identities over our activism. If we are stripped of citizenship, we will lose the foundation for every right we have in our home country. We will lose the right to own land, to access healthcare, to go to school, to marry, to work legally, and to participate in politics. We will not be able to travel outside the country, or not be able to return once we leave. We risk becoming stateless, rightless, and prisoners in our own homeland.

The potential for abuse in the implementation of this vaguely worded law to target people on the basis of their ethnicity, political opinions, speech, and activism is simply too high to accept. The government has many powers, but they should not have the power to arbitrarily decide who is and is not a Cambodian.

It is true that other countries have systems in place to strip citizenship, but they are not the same as those being considered by our government. International law is clear - Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, enshrined in Cambodia's Constitution, states that, "Everyone has the right to nationality" and "No one shall be arbitrary deprived of their nationality". To not be arbitrary, a revocation of citizenship must have a legal process that is predictable, reasonable, necessary and proportional. It must also have the right to an appeal.

The current draft law fails to meet these criteria on all counts. The process is so vaguely worded that anyone merely accused of affecting national security or sovereignty can lose their Cambodian citizenship, even if it is the only citizenship they have. In addition, anyone convicted of misdemeanours affecting "national security" can also be stripped of their citizenship.

If passed, these amendments to the Nationality Law would have a chilling effect across Cambodian society. It would undermine every legal protection for speech, association and assembly currently enshrined in Cambodian law. It would mark an immense step backward for freedom in Cambodia.

We need to be able to meet and discuss about the future of our country as Cambodians without fear of losing our identities. Now is a time for Cambodians to unite and tolerate our differences in opinions. This draft law would only further divide our country. We have a single request to the National Assembly and Senate: Do not pass these amendments. It is not too late to step back and avoid making a terrible mistake that will hurt our country.

This statement endorsed by:

1. 185K Thida Chambork Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
2. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
3. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
4. Amleang Community (Kampong Speu)
5. Boeung Pi Community (Battambang)
6. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
7. Bos Snor Communiy (Tboung Khmum)
8. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)
9. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
10. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
11. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
12. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
13. Cambodian Tourism Workers Union Federation (CTWUF)
14. Cambodian Youth Network Association (CYN)
15. Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL)
16. Chi Kha Kraom Community (Koh Kong)
17. Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (COMFREL)
18. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
19. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
20. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
21. Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUPI)
22. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
23. Klaing Toek 78 Community (Siem Reap)
24. Kuy Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear)
25. Kuy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
26. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Naga World (L.R.S.U)
27. Land Community (Pailin)
28. Lor Peang Community (Kampong Chhnang)
29. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
30. Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC)
31. Nature Protection Oudom Sre Pors Community (Kampong Speu)
32. Ou Bat Moan Community (Oddar Meanchey)
33. Partnership of Environment and Development Organization (PED Cambodia)
34. People Center for Development and Peace-Center (PDP-Center)
35. Phnom Krom Community (Siem Reap)
36. Phum Seila Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
37. Ponlok Khmer (PKH)
38. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
39. Prey Lang Community (Preah Vihear)
40. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
41. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
42. Samaki Chek Meas Community (Svay Rieng)
43. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
44. Srae Prang Community (Tboung Khmum)
45. Sre Ampel Water Fall Tourism Forestry Community (Kampong Chhnang)
46. Stueng Khsach Sa Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
47. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
48. Thnaot Chum Land Community (Pursat)

49. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)

50. Tonlung Community (Tboung Khmum)