Resolution on the situation of rights defenders and opposition activists in Cambodia and Laos

2014/2515(RSP) - 16/01/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 52 votes to 0 with 2 abstentions a resolution on the situation of rights defenders and opposition activists in Cambodia and Laos.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, ECR, GUE/NGL, and EFD groups.

Cambodia: Parliament **condemned the disproportionate and excessive use of force by security forces** in Cambodia, on 3 January 2014, at peaceful demonstrations of textile industry workers for increased wages, killing five people and injuring more than 30. The Cambodian authorities were called upon to exercise restraint towards protestors and to immediately release the 23 people unjustly arrested on 4 January 2014 when security forces forcefully cleared Freedom Park, where opposition activists were gathered.

Members stated their concern about the situation of rights defenders and opposition activists in Cambodia. They called on the Cambodian authorities to immediately drop the summonses issued to the **CNRP leaders, Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha**, and union leader Rong Chhun of the Cambodia Independent Teachers' Association (CITA) and the Cambodian Confederation of Unions (CCFU).

In addition, Parliament called on the Cambodian Government to accept an independent, **internationally assisted investigation into allegations of vote fraud** and other irregularities around the July 2013 elections, noting the need for reform of the voter list, access to the media and balanced reporting, and judicial reform. It also urged the establishment of a National Human Rights Institution.

Noting allegations that many international companies, including European companies, have allegedly been involved in **land right violations**, notably in the sugar sector, Members called on the Commission to act on the findings of the recent human rights impact assessment of the functioning of the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative in Cambodia and to consider including, in the criteria for exporters from least developed countries seeking to take advantage of EBA privileges, an **obligation to testify that they have not evicted people** from their land and homes without adequate compensation.

Parliament welcomed initiatives such as the recently launched Garment Industries Transparency Initiative (GITI), aimed at finding agreement on comprehensive, jointly monitored labour standards and called for the EU institutions, the Member States and European and multinational companies actively to support this and similar initiatives and to engage in **ethical, socially responsible corporate practices.**

Laos: Parliament called on the Lao Government to **clarify the state of the investigation** into the whereabouts of **Sombath Somphone**, a human rights and environmental rights activist and civil society leader, co-chair of the 9th Asia-Europe People's Forum, who was allegedly the victim of an enforced disappearance on 15 December 2012 in Vientiane. The Lao Government must answer the many outstanding questions around the disappearance, since the **lack of reaction from the Government raises suspicions that the authorities could be involved in the abduction**. European partners of Laos regarded the unexplained disappearance of Sombath Somphone as a very serious matter and regarded the statements made by the government on this case as neither sufficient nor convincing.

The VP/HR was asked closely monitor the Lao Government's investigations into the disappearance of Sombath Somphone, and Member States must continue raising the case with the Lao Government.

Parliament stressed that enforced disappearances – there have been several other cases - remain a major impediment to Laos joining the UN Human Rights Council. It also expressed concern at forced expropriations and evictions without compensation and corruption in Laos.