Resolution on the continuous crackdown of political opposition in Cambodia

2022/2658(RSP) - 05/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 526 votes to 5, with 63 abstentions, a resolution on the continuous crackdown of political opposition in Cambodia.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA groups and Members.

The resolution recalled that since the Supreme Court dissolved the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in anticipation of the 2018 elections, the Cambodian Government has been waging a crackdown against members of the political opposition, which has pushed these members into exile due to fear of arbitrary arrest or retaliation. The government crackdown on independent media, civil society organisations and political opposition that began in 2017 has continued throughout 2021 and 2022.

Prime Minister Hun Sen has been almost uninterruptedly in power for 37 years and the ruling Cambodian People's Party holds absolute power over the state and legislative bodies.

Cambodia is holding communal elections in June 2022 and the next general elections are expected to take place in July 2023. Ahead of the communal elections in June 2022 and next year's national elections, Cambodia's human rights situation has reached a crisis point, as the government has been carrying out an intensified crackdown on the political opposition, journalists, independent media and civil society under the guise of COVID-19 measures. More than 100 candidates from the opposition Candlelight Party have been removed from the list of those running in the country's communal elections on 5 June 2022.

In March 2021, the government adopted a new broad law on measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other serious, dangerous and contagious Diseases, which allows for up to 20-year prison sentences and other disproportionate penalties for violations of COVID-19 measures.

Parliament condemned the prosecution of opposition politicians, trade unionists, human rights defenders, journalists, environmentalists, students and others for expressing their opinions, orchestrated by Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodian Peoples' Party. It called on the Cambodian Prime Minister and his government to immediately put an end to all forms of intimidation and harassment, including judicial harassment, of members of the opposition, trade unionists, human rights defenders, the media and civil society actors. Security forces are urged to refrain from using unnecessary and excessive force against those engaged in peaceful protests.

The Cambodian authorities are urged to:

- immediately release all prisoners of conscience, as well as prisoners detained for conducting their legitimate work or exercising their rights;

- conduct independent investigations into all allegations of harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and acts of violence and torture against members of opposition parties and civil society actors, and to bring the perpetrators to justice;

- reform the politicised judiciary, secure the right to due process for all and immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners;

- safeguard the full independence and impartiality of the judicial system and take effective legal and other measures to address the dramatic overcrowding of prisons, including by ending pre-trial detentions;

- ensure that all allegations of extrajudicial killings are promptly and impartially investigated and that the perpetrators are prosecuted;

- end all unlawful restrictions on people's participation in public affairs and to ensure that all political parties can carry out an equal, free and transparent electoral campaign;

- abolish the law on a national internet gateway, which allows the government to monitor all internet activity and advance legal proceedings against persons reporting on governmental or police actions.

Members also expressed concern about the intensifying crackdown on environmental activists, including land right activists, who have been notably targeted in recently held mass trials. They strongly regretted the reported acceleration of illegal logging in Cambodia's protected forests during the pandemic and called for the EU and the Member States to foster international coordination in order to prevent any unauthorised goods from being illegally exported from Cambodia.

Parliament reiterated its call for targeted sanctions and urged the Council to adopt restrictive measures, including travel bans and asset freezes, against political leaders and leaders of the security forces.

For its part, the Commission should:

- monitor the upcoming local elections very closely and be prepared to use all tools available, including a complete suspension of Cambodia's EBA status and other sanctions, should the electoral observers find evidence of unfair elections;

- insist on clearly defined human rights benchmarks in all its interactions with the Cambodian Government;

- monitor all bilateral financial support to the Cambodian Government and ensure that bilateral financial support goes to Cambodian civil society organisations and opposition parties.