

## Statement on Women's Rights in Cambodia for the Pre-Session of the UPR Working Group

### [Slide 1]

Greetings. I am here today, representing nine feminist CSOs in Cambodia.

### [Slide 2]

#### Issue 1 – Women in leadership

Women are well-represented in political activism, unions, and the defense of land rights and the environment in Cambodia. But when it comes to government leadership positions, women are mostly shut out of the system. Due to deeply rooted negative gender stereotypes, there is no political will to promote women on party candidate lists or to nominate women to appointed positions.

The 2023 national election was a missed opportunity for Cambodia to bring more women into leadership as many older politicians retired to be replaced by younger male candidates. Women's representation, which was stagnant for the last 20 years at about 20% of parliamentary seats, dropped to only 12.8% of parliamentary seats after the 2023 elections.

The civil service was greatly expanded in 2023. Yet, women represent only 10% of ministers and 15% of secretaries of state and undersecretaries of state despite being 42% of the civil service as a whole.

Only a change in law will correct this imbalance.

### [Slide 3]

**We recommend** to amend the election laws at the local and national levels by 2026 to require the sandwich system, alternating women and men candidates on all party lists, with women at the top of half of the lists and women representing 50% of all candidates.

We also recommend to amend the relevant laws and policies by 2025 to require quotas of 50% women in all top ministry positions, including ministers and deputy ministers, in every ministry.

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#### Issue 2: Gender-responsive budget

In 2019 the CEDAW Committee noted that while Cambodia has a framework within the government to coordinate gender mainstreaming, that framework is largely ineffective in part because the government does not provide sufficient direct funding to it. For example, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has the second lowest allocation of funds from the national budget of any ministry. Yet, the government expects the Ministry of Women's Affairs to lead all efforts related to gender equality. At the local level, police have no budget to provide direct services to survivors of gender-based violence. The new budget law sets out several priorities, but gender equality is not one of them. Without clear systems in place to ensure sufficient funding, gender mainstreaming will never be achieved.

### [Slide 5]

**We recommend** to add a gender-responsive budget line for every line ministry/agency to be funded from the Royal Government of Cambodia's national budget by 2025, with an additional 5% of the budget devoted to these new lines. Local commune governments must be required to allocate 20 percent of their annual development budgets to support the administration and activities of the Commune Committees for Women and Children.

## [Slide 6]

### **Issue 3: Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**

1 in 5 women in Cambodia under the age of 50 has experienced partner abuse, while the rate of survivors who dare not to seek help was higher in recent years, from 49% to 53%.

Progress is made as Cambodia has opened one-stop referral centers in some hospitals for GBV survivors and expanded the action plan on violence against women to be binding on all line ministries. However, no significant progress has been made to reform the law on domestic violence. Domestic violence cases mostly were resolved out of court, without a survivor-centered approach. Compensation for survivors and access to courts is rare.

Victim-blaming is pervasive, both in the community and among police and government officials in charge of protecting them. Survivors are frequently encouraged to remain with their abusers rather than to seek divorce or prosecution. Protection orders are incredibly rare – only 6 per year over the last decade for all of Cambodia.

## [Slide 7]

Rates of partner violence are higher in rural areas and areas with high populations of indigenous and minority women ranging from 26% to 45%. Discriminatory social norms; limited access to GBV education/awareness, safe shelters and services; male-centric controlling behaviors; and poverty contribute to this high prevalence.

## [Slide 8]

**We recommend** that the government:

Reform the Law on Domestic Violence by 2025 in line with the CEDAW and CCPR recommendations made since the last UPR cycle.

By 2025, use national budget funds for long-term investment in GBV support services at the local level including safe shelters, a hotline, legal support, protection orders, psychological, economic, and other services so that they are accessible and available at the community level even in remote areas to the most marginalized communities, including women who are stateless, sex workers, ethnic minorities, indigenous, LGBTQI+, or who have disabilities.

## [Slide 9]

**We also recommend that the government:**

Ensure effective capacity enhancement and implementation of survivor-centered, rights-based, and gender-responsive approach among local service providers and include equal representation of female service providers in their GBV service delivery.

Decriminalize sex work by 2025.

## [Slide 10]

Thank you from all of the organizations in our feminist movement.