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Cambodia Gets Slammed in Yearly Corruption Index— Again

by George Wright | January 26, 2017

It was a case of *deja vu* on Wednesday as Transparency International awarded Cambodia the same dismal score as last year in its 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI): The group still identifies Prime Minister Hun Sen's government as the most corrupt in the region.

The anti-corruption organization gave Cambodia 21 out of a possible 100 points, ranking it the lowest in Southeast Asia. Its worldwide ranking dropped six places to 156th out of 176 countries—putting it on par with Congo and Uzbekistan—following the inclusion of eight additional countries in the list.



Anti-Corruption Unit chairman Om Yentieng listens during a meeting in Phnom Penh last year. (Siv Channa/The Cambodia Daily)

Speaking at a presentation of the report in Phnom Penh, Ok Serei Sopheak, chairman of the board of directors at Transparency International Cambodia, said the Cambodian government had once again proven itself to be deeply corrupt.

“I asked myself, how do I feel when I put myself in the position of the government official?” he said.

“I can see that the CPI is like a bone that chokes my throat every year. ‘We are corrupt, we are corrupt, but what we have done has not been appreciated,’” he said, impersonating an official.

“However, I think that if we reflect and mirror what is highlighted in the speech of the government officials at all levels, and if we look at the programs of the government at all levels, they recognize that Cambodia is a corrupt country.”

Despite the bleak analysis, Mr. Serei Sopheak praised Education Minister Hang Chuon Naron for his efforts to stamp out cheating in national exams and Sun Chanthol, the former commerce minister who became transport minister last year, for attempting to eradicate “under-the-table payments” between officials and businessmen.

The judicial system was singled out for the biggest criticism, with Mr. Serei Sopheak saying that Cambodians know they are unlikely to achieve justice “if they do not have full pockets.”

While Cambodia’s score remained the same, there were some notable improvements among its neighbors, including Burma, which improved by 6 points to take its score to 28; Laos, whose score climbed from 25 to 30; and Vietnam, which saw a 2-point hike to 33.

The government’s Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) made headlines last year, largely for the wrong reasons. It pursued deputy opposition leader Kem Sokha over allegations that he made payments to a mistress, possibly using party funds, in a case that was widely thought to have been initiated for political reasons. And in contrast to its investigation of Mr. Sokha, the ACU said it would not look into online allegations that Prime Minister Hun Sen promised \$1 million to support the activities of social media star Thy Sovantha to cause trouble within the opposition CNRP.

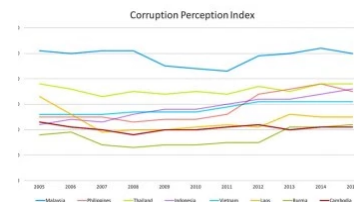
ACU Chairman Om Yentieng could not be reached for comment, but government spokesman Phay Siphon slammed the report, claiming Transparency International had an agenda against Cambodia.

“Well, yes, that is biased,” he said. “They use that one to incite the people against their own government.”

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