

Cambodia still most corrupt country in Southeast Asia, says Transparency International

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While some government ministries have made progress in the fight against corruption, Cambodia continues to languish in the lower reaches of Transparency International's 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index



general view shows the National Assembly building in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 30 October 2015. Photo: EPA/MAK REMISSA

Cambodia has been ranked 156th out of 176 countries in Transparency International's 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index, earning it the title of the most corrupt country in Southeast Asia and the third most corrupt country in the wider Asia-Pacific region.

The index, which focuses solely on corruption within the public sector, is based upon the perception of experts, scoring countries on a scale of zero (very corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Denmark topped the rankings with a score of 90; Cambodia's score of 21 was unchanged from last year.

While acknowledging that concrete improvements had been made by some ministries, Preap Kol, executive director of Transparency International Cambodia (TIC), highlighted the judiciary and natural resource management as the two major problem areas.

"We are still seeing gaps and shortcomings in the management of public expenditure and natural resources," he said at a press conference held at Phnom Penh's Raffles Le Royal Hotel yesterday morning, before adding that "corruption in the judiciary is the key issue that needs to be addressed".

Kol's criticism of the judiciary follows similar comments made by Om Yentieng, chairman of the government's Anti-Corruption Unit, last Thursday at the inauguration for the new president of the Bar Association of the Kingdom of Cambodia. Yentieng used the chicken-and-egg analogy to describe the vicious cycle of corruption within the judiciary, with judges accusing lawyers of forcing them to take bribes and lawyers accusing judges of demanding them.

During the conference, Pech Pisey, TIC's senior director of programmes, was quick to emphasise the index's credibility.

"We did not just talk to men on the street," he said. "We studied in detail each institution to make sure that [their] data is usable and that [the] institutions are specialised, highly reputable, independent from political interference and use scientific