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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE
HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION



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INTRODUCTION



HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOTION: A MAP TO A MOVEMENT'S FUTURE

Lucia Nader (Executive Director, Conectas)
Juana Kweitel (Program Director, Conectas)
Marcos Fuchs (Associate Director, Conectas)

Sur Journal was created ten years ago as a vehicle to deepen and strengthen bonds between academics and activists from the Global South concerned with human rights, in order to magnify their voices and their participation before international organizations and academia. Our main motivation was the fact that, particularly in the Southern hemisphere, academics were working alone and there was very little exchange between researchers from different countries. The journal's aim has been to provide individuals and organizations working to defend human rights with research, analyses and case studies that combine academic rigor and practical interest. In many ways, these lofty ambitions have been met with success: in the past decade, we have published articles from dozens of countries on issues as diverse as health and access to treatment, transitional justice, regional mechanisms and information and human rights, to name a few. Published in three languages and available online and in print for free, our project also remains unique in terms of geographical reach, critical perspective and its Southern 'accent'. In honour of the founding editor of this journal, **Pedro Paulo Poppovic**, the 20th issue opens with a biography (by João Paulo Charleaux) of this sociologist who has been one of the main contributors to this publication's success.

This past decade has also been, in many ways, a successful one for the human rights movement as a whole. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has recently turned 60, new international treaties have been adopted and the old but good global and regional monitoring systems are in full operation, despite criticisms regarding their effectiveness and attempts by States to curb their authority. From a strategic perspective, we continue to use, with more or less success, advocacy, litigation and naming-and-shaming as our main tools for change. In addition, we continue to nurture partnerships between what we categorize as local, national and international organizations within our movement.

Nevertheless, the **political and geographic coordinates** under which the global human

rights movement has operated have undergone profound changes. Over the past decade, we have witnessed hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets to protest against social and political injustices. We have also seen emerging powers from the South play an increasingly influential role in the definition of the global human rights agenda. Additionally, the past ten years have seen the rapid growth of social networks as a tool of mobilization and as a privileged forum for sharing political information between users. In other words, the journal is publishing its 20th issue against a backdrop that is very different from that of ten years ago. The protests that recently filled the streets of many countries around the globe, for example, were not organized by traditional social movements nor by unions or human rights NGOs, and people's grievances, more often than not, were expressed in terms of social justice and not as rights. Does this mean that human rights are no longer seen as an effective language for producing social change? Or that human rights organizations have lost some of their ability to represent wronged citizens? Emerging powers themselves, despite their newly-acquired international influence, have hardly been able – or willing – to assume stances departing greatly from those of “traditional” powers. How and where can human rights organizations advocate for change? Are Southern-based NGOs in a privileged position to do this? Are NGOs from emerging powers also gaining influence in international forums?

It was precisely to reflect upon these and other pressing issues that, for this 20th issue, SUR's editors decided to enlist the help of over 50 leading human rights activists and academics from 18 countries, from Ecuador to Nepal, from China to the US. We asked them to ponder on what we saw as some of the most urgent and relevant questions facing the global human rights movement today: 1. Who do we represent? 2. How do we combine urgent issues with long-term impacts? 3. Are human rights still an effective language for producing social change? 4. How have new information and communication technologies influenced activism? 5. What are the challenges of working internationally from the South?

The result, which you now hold in your hands, is a **roadmap for the global human rights movement** in the 21st century – it offers a vantage point from which it is possible to observe where the movement stands today and where it is heading. The first stop is a reflection on these issues by the founding directors of Conectas Human Rights, **Oscar Vilhena Vieira** and **Malak El-Chichini Poppovic**. The roadmap then goes on to include **interviews** and **articles**, both providing in-depth analyses of human rights issues, as well as **notes from the field**, more personalized accounts of experiences working with human rights, which we have organized into **six categories**, although most of them could arguably be allocated to more than one category:

Language. In this section, we have included articles that ponder the question of whether human rights – as a utopia, as norms and as institutions – are still effective for producing social change. Here, the contributions range from analyses on human rights as a language for change (**Stephen Hoggood** and **Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro**), empirical research on the use of the language of human rights for articulating grievances in recent mass protests (**Sara Burke**), to reflections on the standard-setting role and effectiveness of international human rights institutions (**Raquel Rolnik**, **Vinodh Jaichand** and **Emílio**

Álvarez Icaza). It also includes studies on the movement's global trends (**David Petrusek**), challenges to the movement's emphasis on protecting the rule of law (**Kumi Naidoo**), and strategic proposals to better ensure a compromise between utopianism and realism in relation to human rights (**Samuel Moyn**).

Themes. Here we have included contributions that address specific human rights topics from an original and critical standpoint. Four themes were analysed: economic power and corporate accountability for human rights violations (**Phil Bloomer, Janet Love and Gonzalo Berrón**); sexual politics and LGBTI rights (**Sonia Corrêa, Gloria Careaga Pérez and Arvind Narrain**); migration (**Diego Lorente Pérez de Eulate**); and, finally, transitional justice (**Clara Sandoval**).

Perspectives. This section encompasses country-specific accounts, mostly field notes from human rights activists on the ground. Those contributions come from places as diverse as Angola (**Maria Lúcia da Silveira**), Brazil (**Ana Valéria Araújo**), Cuba (**María-Ileana Faguaga Iglesias**), Indonesia (**Haris Azhar**), Mozambique (**Salvador Nkamate**) and Nepal (**Mandira Sharma**). But they all share a critical perspective on human rights, including for instance a sceptical perspective on the relation between litigation and public opinion in Southern Africa (**Nicole Fritz**), a provocative view of the democratic future of China and its relation to labour rights (**Han Dongfang**), and a thoughtful analysis of the North-South duality from Northern Ireland (**Maggie Beirne**).

Voices. Here the articles go to the core of the question of whom the global human rights movement represents. **Adrian Gurza Lavalle** and **Juana Kweitel** take note of the pluralisation of representation and innovative forms of accountability adopted by human rights NGOs. Others study the pressure for more representation or a louder voice in international human rights mechanisms (such as in the Inter-American system, as reported by **Mario Melo**) and in representative institutions such as national legislatures (as analysed by **Pedro Abramovay and Heloisa Griggs**). Finally, **Chris Grove**, as well as **James Ron, David Crow and Shannon Golden** emphasize, in their contributions, the need for a link between human rights NGOs and grassroots groups, including economically disadvantaged populations. As a counter-argument, **Fateh Azzam** questions the need of human rights activists to represent anyone, taking issue with the critique of NGOs as being overly dependent on donors. Finally, **Mary Lawlor and Andrew Anderson** provide an account of a Northern organization's efforts to attend to the needs of local human rights defenders as they, and only they, define them.

Tools. In this section, the editors included contributions that focus on the instruments used by the global human rights movement to do its work. This includes a debate on the role of technology in promoting change (**Mallika Dutt and Nadia Rasul**, as well as **Sopheap Chak and Miguel Pulido Jiménez**) and perspectives on the challenges of human rights campaigning, analysed provocatively by **Martin Kirk** and **Fernand Alphen** in their respective contributions. Other articles point to the need of organizations to be more grounded in local contexts, as noted by **Ana Paula Hernández** in relation to Mexico, by **Louis Bickford** in what he sees as a convergence towards the global middle, and finally by **Rochelle Jones, Sarah Rosenhek and Anna Turley** in their movement-support model. In addition, it is noted by **Mary Kaldor** that NGOs are not the same as civil society,

properly understood. Furthermore, litigation and international work are cast in a critical light by **Sandra Carvalho and Eduardo Baker** in relation to the dilemma between long and short term strategies in the Inter-American system. Finally, **Gastón Chillier and Pétalla Brandão Timo** analyse South-South cooperation from the viewpoint of a national human rights NGO in Argentina.

Multipolarity. Here, the articles challenge our ways of thinking about power in the multipolar world we currently live in, with contributions from the heads of some of the world's largest international human rights organizations based in the North (**Kenneth Roth** and **Salil Shetty**) and in the South (**Lucia Nader, César Rodríguez-Garavito, Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah** and **Mandeep Tiwana**). This section also debates what multipolarity means in relation to States (**Emilie M. Hafner-Burton**), international organizations and civil society (**Louise Arbour**) and businesses (**Mark Malloch-Brown**).

Conectas hopes this issue will foster debate on the future of the global human rights movement in the 21st century, enabling it to reinvent itself as necessary to offer better protection of human rights on the ground.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that this issue of Sur Journal was made possible by the support of the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, the Oak Foundation, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Additionally, Conectas Human Rights is especially grateful for the collaboration of the authors and the hard work of the Journal's editorial team. We are also extremely thankful for the work of Maria Brant and Manoela Miklos for conceiving this Issue and for conducting most of the interviews, and for Thiago Amparo for joining the editorial team and making this Issue possible. We are also tremendously thankful for Luz González's tireless work with editing the contributions received, and for Ana Cernov for coordinating the overall editorial process.



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Human Rights in Motion

Tools

GASTÓN CHILLIER AND PÉTALLA BRANDÃO TIMO

The Global Human Rights Movement in the 21st Century: Reflections from the Perspective of a National Human Rights NGO from the South

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INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS BICKFORD

Convergence Towards the Global Middle: "Who Sets the Global Human Rights Agenda and How"



SOPHEAP CHAK

Sopheap Chak is Executive Director at the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR). Sopheap holds undergraduate degrees in International Relations and Economics, and a Masters in International Peace Studies from the International University of Japan. As a Cambodian leading human rights blogger, she contributes to Future Challenges and Global Voices Online.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of new ICTs on activism in Cambodia and the effect this has had on human rights organisations, drawing upon experiences of CCHR, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights. It first examines the context of new ICTs and the status of freedom of expression in Cambodia. Subsequently, the impact of new ICTs in the country is assessed, in particular the impact on activism. The shifting role of human rights organisations in an era of digital media is then addressed and finally the future of online activism in Cambodia is considered. Essentially this paper contends that whilst there remains a crucial need for human rights organisations to engage in traditional forms of action, ICTs have shaped a new era of online activism, to which organisations must respond.

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KEYWORDS

ICTs – Human rights – Online activism – Freedom of expression – Access to information – Cambodia



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ESSAY

NEW INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES' INFLUENCE ON ACTIVISM IN CAMBODIA

Sopheap Chak

1 Introduction

New information and communication technologies (ICTs) are increasingly recognised as having a potentially positive influence on activism in the developing world. This is particularly true for Cambodia, where traditional forms of media are stringently censored and fundamental freedoms frequently denied. Growing internet penetration and the development of new ICTs have contributed to increased youth involvement in social, political and economic activism. Though ICTs are not yet available to all, they are essential, providing much needed access to information, resources and the wider international community.

In Cambodia, online activism as a form of engagement is imperative when considering the lack of civic education and widespread human rights abuses. Ruled by one of the world's longest serving leaders, the country suffers from widespread land grabs by powerful elites, the suppression of workers' rights and from excesses by security forces to quash unrest. Although Cambodia has one of the lowest internet penetration rates in Southeast Asia, disenfranchised citizens are increasingly utilising online activism to challenge these abuses. Despite concerns that censorship of the internet may become a reality, online activism will continue to play an important role in the country.

Although new ICTs have had a largely positive impact on online activism, there are also effects for human rights organisations such as the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organisation that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights throughout Cambodia; they have also impacted the methods and tactics other organisations have traditionally employed. As with individual activists,

Notes to this text start on page 447.

human rights organisations also enjoy the benefits of new ICTs and the speed and efficiency at which information can be shared. However, particularly in developing countries where ICTs are not available to all, organisations need to bear in mind the importance of traditional forms of action, as well as consider the risks involved in communicating online.

This paper seeks to explore the effect new ICTs have had on activism in Cambodia. The first section discusses the context of ICTs in the country and the second, the impact new ICTs have had on social, human rights and political activism. The third section examines the shifting role of human rights organisations in the context of digital activism, while the conclusion considers the future of online activism in Cambodia.

2 ICTs in Cambodia

2.1 Limited but fast growing access to ICTs

Social and political upheaval in Cambodia's turbulent history made early ICT endeavours impossible; the Khmer Rouge destroyed the country's vital infrastructure, including telecommunications. However, in recent years, the government has been proactive in allowing the private sector to provide mobile services. A 2004 report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific observed that Cambodia became the first country in the world to have more mobile than landline telephones (UNITED NATIONS, 2004, p. 60). Such efforts have had a considerable effect: according to the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication, mobile phone subscriptions exceeded 20 million in 2012, surpassing a population of about 15 million (RENZENBRINK, 2013).

Although Cambodia suffers from one of the lowest internet penetration rates in Southeast Asia, there has been a rapid proliferation of internet users in recent years, especially since the emergence of wireless broadband services in 2006. According to recent estimates, 18% of the population have access to, and use the internet, an increase of 17.5% from 2009 (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2013a, p. 1). Increased access to the internet results in greater access to social and new media, the apparatus for online activism. Cambodia has approximately 1,120,000 Facebook users, with 1,100 new users joining every day (SOCIAL MEDIA CAMBODIA, 2014). While factors such as Cambodians having multiple Facebook accounts and foreigners living in the country undoubtedly distort these figures, the statistics indicate that a growing proportion of Cambodians have access to social media, 50% of whom are between 18 and 24 years old (SOCIAL MEDIA CAMBODIA, 2014). While less popular than Facebook in Cambodia, Twitter has also contributed to growing online activism and was used during the 2013 general election and subsequent protests to quickly spread information.

Despite such encouraging statistics, there remains a notable digital divide between urban and rural areas. Adding to the costs involved in purchasing technical equipment, the lack of electricity and computer access means that access to new

ICTs is considerably concentrated in urban centres. Bearing in mind that 79.8% of Cambodia's population is rural (UN DATA, 2014), this is a considerable issue. Nonetheless, due to the affordability of mobile phones, inhabitants of Cambodia's most rural, poverty stricken areas are now increasingly using text-messaging technology. Furthermore, the growing popularity of smartphones and the gradual expansion of 3G coverage in the country enable many of those in remote areas to access the internet, without the cost of purchasing a computer.

2.2 Locked down traditional media

New ICTs are crucial for Cambodia when considering the government's tight grip on traditional forms of media. Rigorous censorship is commonplace, despite guarantees of the right to freedom of expression in Cambodian and international law. Article 41 of the Constitution of Cambodia specifically states that all citizens shall be entitled to freedom of expression, and, in 1992, Cambodia ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Laws regulating the media in Cambodia are vague, unevenly enforced and stifle the right to freedom of expression (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2014a, p. 4). Television, radio broadcasters and newspapers require a license from the Ministry of Information, effectively providing the government with total jurisdiction over these media. In 2012, The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL) report confirmed that all eleven TV stations and more than 100 radio stations are either owned by the government itself or by those affiliated with the ruling party (THE COMMITTEE FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS IN CAMBODIA, 2012, p. 30). Only four independent radio stations were identified.¹ Similarly, Freedom House found the same conclusions regarding Khmer language newspapers, determining the status of Cambodia's press as 'not free' (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2013a). Such stringent censorship makes new ICTs the only media accessible to dissenting opinions and free from executive influence.

2.3 New media: a space to protect from censorship

Unlike traditional media, new media in Cambodia enjoys moderate freedom, especially in relation to other countries in the region such as Thailand and Myanmar, notorious for internet censorship. However, despite this relative freedom and Freedom House deeming the internet as 'partly free' (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2013b), the Government has made sporadic attempts to control internet usage. For instance, in November 2012, the Government issued a circular demanding the closure of all internet cafes within 500 meters of educational facilities – effectively all existing internet cafes. The proposed ban was eventually reversed in December 2012 due to popular outcry.

It is also reported that the Government has routinely requested that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) block certain websites, in particular those critical of the government, such as the Khmerization blog, which is inaccessible on certain ISPs. Additionally, in two cases members of the public have been threatened with

defamation charges due to criticising police on Facebook.² More recently, Duong Zorida, actress and TV presenter, was convicted on charges of defamation over a dispute on Facebook with another salon owner. This case underscores, underscoring the courts' willingness to criminalise online content (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2014b, p. 3). The perceived possibility of arrest could lead some bloggers and social media users to self-censor due to fear of reprisal (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2013c, p. 3).

Of additional concern is the impending Cyber Crimes Law, the first of its kind in Cambodia, announced in May 2012 and likely to be passed in the first half of 2014. According to the government, the law is being drafted solely to protect internet users from hacking and the destruction of online data, in accordance with European Union guidelines. However, civil society requests to review the draft to ensure it does not encroach on the right to freedom of expression have been denied (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2014b, p. 1) and there are concerns that the law will be used as yet another tool for government censorship, especially as Deputy Prime Minister Sok An said the law was being drafted in order to put a halt to the spreading of "false information" online.

3 Impact of ICTs in Cambodia

New ICTs offer a wide range of opportunities to advocate for democracy and human rights. Digital communication has the potential to improve transparency and accountability, as individuals are able to access information more easily and quickly; share information about human rights violations and methods of resistance; express their concerns; and access a wider international audience (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2012, p. 14).

3.1 Accessing and sharing diverse and independent information

The most obvious way in which new ICTs have the potential to influence activism is through the ability to share and access information instantaneously. The internet affords users access to a wealth of knowledge and resources. All major newspapers and radio programs in Cambodia have comprehensive websites where broadcasts, articles and videos can be accessed. They are also often connected to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, through which they further disseminate news. This also holds true for independent newspapers such as *The Cambodia Daily* and *The Phnom Penh Post*, effectively allowing internet users greater access to unbiased information.

In addition, advances in mobile phones and other devices with video and photography capabilities have allowed online activists to document and record human rights violations and share them online. Once this information is out, it has the potential to go viral and it is impossible to prevent this occurrence (KHOURY, 2011, p. 80-83). This phenomenon has become increasingly prevalent in Cambodia and violations are frequently posted on the internet. Surya P. Subedi, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in

Cambodia, has remarked: “access to online videos of incidents of shooting and forced evictions has increased [...] as the use of social media and the ability to record such incidents and promptly display them on the internet has developed” (UNITED NATIONS, 2012, p. 49).

A noteworthy example is Venerable Luon Sovath, a Cambodian Buddhist monk who has successfully documented human rights violations throughout the country using his mobile phone. Despite being regularly threatened and even detained, Sovath, also known as the ‘multimedia monk,’ has become a prominent presence at major land protests and evictions. In 2009, as local authorities forcibly evicted villagers from their homes in Siem Reap province, Sovath captured video evidence on his mobile phone of police shooting at defenceless villagers and submitted the footage to a local human rights NGO (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2013b, p. 24). Such captured evidence is hard to deny and as such, increases accountability.

3.2 Mobilising and organising the opposition

A major way in which new ICTs have had an effect on activism in Cambodia is that they have been used as an effective organising tool. As previously noted, the majority of Cambodians – even those living in rural areas – possess mobile phones; as such, Short Message Service (SMS) has become a widespread method of communication in Cambodia and is becoming an indispensable advocacy tool.

Effective organisation through social media was evidenced during the run-up to the 2013 general election. The Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), despite having limited resources, was able to amass vast crowds to advocate for political change through social media. According to CNRP parliamentarian Mu Sochua, “85 to 90 percent of [CNRP] youth in the city areas were able to mobilise everyday, and they were all organising on Facebook” (WILLEMYSNS, 2013). In spite of allegations of election irregularities, the opposition made significant gains in the National Assembly, winning 55 seats out of 123, most likely due to their organising strategy.

3.3 Bringing forth new forms of activism

Cambodia has a burgeoning blogging community, known as ‘cloggers’, who employ blogging to exercise freedoms that are denied within conventional media. Emphasising the pervasiveness of blogging in Cambodia was the 2012 BlogFest Asia, which was hosted in Siem Reap (BLOGFEST ASIA, 2012). Furthermore, due to the late development of Khmer Unicode (computer font for Khmer language), most blogs in Cambodia continue to be written in English, affording greater accessibility to the international community.

Common forms of online protests are campaign blogging and online petitions, which have become a popular advocacy tool. In Cambodia, the renowned ‘Save Boeung Kak’ blog provides updates on developments at Boeung Kak Lake in Phnom Penh, which has seen numerous land rights violations. Additionally

the blog urges visitors to sign a petition demanding compensation for the victims of the eviction, as well as a halt to continuous land right violations in Cambodia (SAVE BOEUNG KAK, 2014).

In Cambodia computer networks and the anonymity of the internet has led to another, more contentious form of activism directed at the government, known as 'hacktivism'. These attacks have been led by Anonymous Cambodia, a branch of the notorious international network. On 15th September 2013, Anonymous Cambodia 'declared war' on the ruling party in response to violent post-election clashes. They have since launched numerous Distributed Denial of Service (DDOS) attacks against several government websites. While hacktivism as an effective or even legal form of activism has been widely debated in the literature, it leads us to consider how technology transforms 'ordinary' transnational activism (WONG; BROWN, 2013, p. 1016).

Although digital media in Cambodia is still largely used for entertainment purposes, in recent years ICTs have had a growing impact on online activism. In this context, many commentators have questioned whether Cambodia will see its own 'spring'. Writing for Al Jazeera, CCHR former President Ou Virak argues that:

All the necessary ingredients [for a 'spring'] are present. First, it has one of the youngest populations in the world [...] Second, very rapid urbanization has taken place over the past decade [...] with economic growth, widespread availability of cheap smartphones, internet coverage and more than a million Facebook users, Cambodian citizens are increasingly eager to express themselves.

(VIRAK, 2014)

Although he concludes Cambodia is not quite ready for a 'spring', the fact that the 'necessary' factors for such an event are present points to the huge potential impact of new ICTs and new media for the country in the future, as access to such technologies continues to increase.

4 The role of human rights organisations in the new media era

As shown above, new ICTs have enabled young Cambodians to access and share information on human rights violations and advocate for change online. As individuals can now access information and organise autonomously through social networks, the role of human rights organisations in this shifting context must be critically re-examined.

4.1 *New opportunities for human rights advocacy*

ICTs and the internet in particular have enabled NGOs to disseminate information and highlight human rights violations at an accelerated rate and to a wider audience. CCHR for instance, posts all its publications on the CCHR and Sithi websites and via social media to its 126,000 fans on Facebook and 3,869 followers on Twitter.³ Sharing information via social media also allows organisations to reach

an international audience. Among CCHR's followers on Facebook, 63% are from Cambodia, 13.4% from Indonesia, 7.3% from Vietnam and 2.8% from Laos.⁴ In addition to using social media, CCHR's Human Rights Defenders Project created a smart phone application which serves as a source of legal information providing legal factsheets, case analyses, step-by-step guides and answers to FAQs on the most pressing legal threats to civil society. Sharing information online not only ensures it will reach a wider audience, but allows to reducing spending within an organisation: rather than being printed it can be shared online. Additionally, blogs and social media allow a greater online audience to actively engage with human rights organisations, as social media users can easily share petitions and comments on posts. It also allows followers to have an interactive experience with organisations who are able to respond to comments.

With the advent of online activism, there is now a space for human rights organisations to provide capacity building to online activists. CCHR has adapted to address this need with the Sithi Hub, a physical space providing a platform for young innovators and human rights advocates to converge, where they can share ideas and exchange information about applying ICTs to human rights. CCHR also empowers Sithi Hub members through on-going training and capacity-building activities related to new ICTs and tools for human rights documentation and information sharing. For instance, in December 2013, the Sithi Hub members received training on strategies for using Facebook for human rights. Young activists can also download ICT resources to build upon their capacity, such as the *Social Media Best Practices Booklet for Activists* (SITHI HUB, 2013).

4.2 ICTs shortcomings

The speed at which information is now disseminated via SMS and online means that statements and press releases issued by human rights organisations are no longer breaking news. However the speed with which information is shared generates a risk of inaccuracy. For instance, in February 2014, during a bail hearing for 21 workers and human rights defenders who were arrested the previous month during garment workers' protests, one individual tweeted that all 21 were to be released prior to the judges rendering their judgment, when in fact none were awarded bail. This inaccurate information was re-tweeted several times as people trusted the person tweeting the information. It is important to note information shared online can often be unreliable, and there is still a need for more in-depth, detailed, verified reporting and analysis by human rights organisations.

Moreover, while Facebook and other forms of digital media are effective in disseminating information, they cannot substitute movement building and strategic planning (VIRAK, 2014). Activism ought to be taken as a whole; there should be no differentiation between traditional and digital activism, which must enhance each other (KHOURY, 2011, p. 84), rather than making each other redundant. As such, CCHR employs both traditional and new forms of action, to ensure the greatest impact possible. For instance, CCHR still uses radio broadcasting as an effective way of raising awareness on human rights issues affecting people throughout

the country; it has been estimated that the seven radio stations CCHR users have a combined potential audience of up to 85% of the Cambodian population (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2012, p. 7).

It is also vital that organisations consider who benefits from its actions. CCHR's traditional forms of action, centred on the production of detailed reports and analysis, are necessary and useful for practitioners, academics and other NGOs, but are not so useful in engaging the general public. On the other hand, CCHR's more recent forms of action such as sharing videos, leaflets and factsheets via social media not only ensures engagement, but also that vital information will be disseminated to a much wider audience.

Furthermore, human rights organisations have to consider the consequences and risks involved with the use of ICTs and to ponder how they can assist activists in increasing their online security. Digital means of communication cannot be relied upon to ensure that sensitive information linked to human rights violations and potential perpetrators remains private and secured, especially when used by activists who may have been targeted for surveillance by the authorities. Although activists in Cambodia consider their physical security, their digital security is often overlooked. As such there is a need for organisations to provide awareness and training on how to secure sensitive digital communications and data storage.

Finally, along with an increasing use of the internet and social media comes the potential rapid propagation of threats and offensive or racist discourse, thanks to the anonymity offered by internet. For instance, CCHR President Ou Virak received death threats after CCHR issued an open letter online which condemned the derogatory remarks made in a speech by CNRP leader Sam Rainsy towards women and the Vietnamese community in Cambodia. The anonymity of the internet and social media enabled staunch racists to relay their xenophobic views with alarming speed in reaction to the letter and led to a personal smear campaign against Virak.

5 Conclusion

The advancement of new ICTs in Cambodia has had a mobilising effect amongst a largely youth population in an environment blighted by widespread human rights abuses. The internet has enabled Cambodians to actively advocate for change online through various forms, including blogging, online petitions and hacktivism. New media has empowered citizens to access information, express themselves, and participate in public debate more than ever (UNITED NATIONS IN CAMBODIA, 2011). The effect of ICTs on online activism has the potential to break traditional barriers and reach new frontiers for freedom of expression (CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2013b, p. 22).

The future of online activism in Cambodia faces several challenges, the greatest being the looming Cyber Crimes Law, which has the potential to severely infringe upon citizens' right to freedom of expression and provide the government a legal basis to crack down on online activists. Moreover, for online activism to move forward, it is of great importance that the digital divide between urban and

rural areas is bridged. This is particularly true when considering that many of the most serious human rights violations, especially those related to land, occur in remote rural areas.

Although it is difficult to measure tangible impacts of ICTs on human rights, it may be said that, judging by the proliferation of Facebook users in Cambodia, it is undeniable that ICTs and social media play an intrinsic role in the lives of many young Cambodians. As such, the human rights community cannot ignore the huge potential of ICTs as an advocacy tool; if organisations wish to move forward they must ensure they adopt strategies that support and build capacity of online activists.

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NOTES

1. Beehive Radio, Radio Free Asia, Radio Voice of America and Radio France International.
2. The teacher Phel Phearun, after criticising police, was summoned and threatened with defamation in February 2013. Cheth Sovichea was arrested in November 2013 for a post that was critical of the police. He was also threatened with defamation charges.
3. As of 28 February 2014.
4. As of the end of 2013.

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