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A boat without anchors: statelessness among minority populations in Cambodia

Wednesday 29 October 2014 5.30–7 pm

Christoph Sperfeldt ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Sparke Helmore Theatre 1 ANU College of Law, Building 6A, Fellows Road,
The Australian National University, Canberra



Statelessness is a global phenomenon that affects millions of people worldwide. Those who find themselves without a nationality face daily obstructions in their lack of access to a wide range of rights, which negatively impacts on their livelihood and living conditions.

This presentation considers the legal status of affected ethnic Vietnamese minority populations in Cambodia, building upon four years of field research, conducted between 2008–12, with a specific sub-group of ethnic Vietnamese in Kampong Chhnang province, Cambodia. Although ethnic Vietnamese people have migrated to Cambodia over different periods in history, members of this specific focal group are long-term residents of Cambodia, having been born and raised in the country for generations—with the exception of the period between 1975 and the early 1980s, when they were forcibly deported to Vietnam by the Khmer Rouge regime. Since their return to Cambodia in the early 1980s, individuals within this group have been regarded by Cambodian authorities as ‘immigrants’.

The presentation explores the legal status of this focal group under the applicable domestic nationality laws of Cambodia and Vietnam, describes problems faced by members of this group as a result of an absence of identification or nationality documents, and discusses ways for reducing and/or preventing statelessness among the group. The main findings of this research were published in the legal report *A Boat Without Anchors*, co-authored with Lyma Nguyen.

Christoph Sperfeldt is a PhD Scholar at the Centre for International Governance and Justice (CIGJ) within the Regulatory Institutions Network at The Australian National University. Mr Sperfeldt has worked as Regional Program Coordinator at the Asian International Justice Initiative (AIJI), a joint program of the East-West Center and UC Berkeley’s War Crimes Studies Center, where he supports regional human rights and justice sector capacity-building efforts in Southeast Asia. Prior to this, Mr Sperfeldt was Senior Advisor for the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), working for over four years on human rights projects in Cambodia.

The views expressed at this event are those of the presenter and do not necessarily represent the views of The Australian National University.

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