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WORKING GROUP FOR WEAPONS REDUCTION IN CAMBODIA

May 4, 1999

PRESS RELEASE

Light weapons - including rifles, grenades, handguns and machine guns - are responsible for the most deaths, soldier and civilian, in armed conflicts worldwide. This is also true for Cambodia. Although these weapons were not a direct cause, they certainly fueled the intensity and duration of almost three decades of armed conflict in Cambodia.

From years of fighting and mistrust, Cambodia has inherited a tragic legacy of small arms and light weapons. A fragile peace now exists but it is threatened by the lingering presence of these weapons. Their effects are felt in many different ways: killings, robberies, kidnappings, domestic violence, illegal activities, and banditry. Peace will not be secure until these weapons are effectively destroyed and controlled.

On Wednesday, May 5 the Royal Government of Cambodia will publicly destroy over three thousand weapons collected by the municipality of Phnom Penh. The Working Group for Weapons Reduction in Cambodia (WGWR), a coalition of local and international NGOs and individuals committed to reducing the number and use of weapons in Cambodia, commends and supports the government's commitment to the collection of weapons and their public destruction.

The public destruction of weapons is crucial. Lessons learned from other national programs indicate that it is not enough to merely collect weapons; the tragic and violent recycling of small arms can only end with their destruction. WGWR encourages the government to hold public weapons destruction ceremonies more often to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to ensure that all weapons removed from society are destroyed so that they are never used anywhere again.

The weapons to be destroyed are only a fraction of the weapons that still remain in Cambodia. Today's public destruction is only the beginning of the long-term process required to deal with the weapons problem. We must continue to remove and destroy small arms and light weapons from society. More importantly and lastingly, we must transform the desire to own and use weapons into commitment and skills for nonviolent problem solving and livelihoods.

To be effective, a long-term solution to the problem of weapons in Cambodia must be comprehensive in scope and integrate programs at all levels: community, national, regional, and international. Coordinated action by citizens, communities, national government, NGOs, and global bodies are imperative for successfully addressing the issue. The United Nations and several governments have identified light weapons as a crucial issue and are supporting national weapons reduction efforts. This month, an international NGO network will be launched to tackle the devastating consequences of small arms worldwide.

Issued by the Working Group for Weapons Reduction in Cambodia (WGWR)

WGWR is a coalition of concerned Cambodian and international organizations and individuals who envision Cambodia as a place of justice and security where neither weapons nor violent means are used to solve problems and where people at all levels of society enjoy peace within themselves and in their communities. The mission of WGWR is to cooperate as a coalition to:

- Transform the desire to own and use weapons into commitment and skills for non-violent problem solving.
- Reduce the number of small arms and light weapons.
- Promote the proper control of weapons which do exist.
- Work so that all weapons removed from society are destroyed so that they are never used anywhere again.

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