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*Translated from Khmer
Please check against delivery*

SPEECH BY SAMDECH CHHA SIM
Chairman of the National Assembly
and
Eminent Representative
of
HIS MAJESTY THE KING
At the 7th National Buddhist Congress
Chaddomuk Hall
25 June 1998

- Your Holiness's Sangha Rajas of both Orders,
- Very Distinguished Guests,
- Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the onset of this most illustrious opening of the 7th National Buddhist Congress, and on behalf of His Majesty the King, our sacred monarch and Samdech Preah Akka-Mohesey, I wish to express my profound gratitude to Your Holiness's Sangha Rajas of both Orders, to the Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs for the superb convocation, organized in the spirit of upholding Buddhism as our State religion.

I wish to convey the profound regards from His Majesty, our very respected Monarch and from Samdech Preah Akka-Mohesey and Their very warmest wishes for the brilliant success of this Congress.

Along with the Buddhist followers throughout the land, I am very pleased to see this Congress organized. I firmly believe that each member of the Buddhist clergy will do your utmost to resolve the difficult task or to remove any obstacle ahead of you which can constitute the barrier to the progress of Buddhism at this present time. I am certain you will find the best means to support the advancement of Buddhism.

From time immemorial, Buddhism has played a historical role. It has always contributed to the glory, progress and prestige of the Angkor period. It has kept the identity of Cambodia, and has preserved the language, literature, culture, virtue and the superb Cambodian costumes. It has led us in the way of safe living in our effort to reach for peace, prosperity and happiness in the avoidance of violence, unfortunate circumstances and bad deeds.

In the long and tortuous march of our history, Buddhist temples, monks, doctrines, the body of rules and disciplines have been subject to changes in order

to continue to perpetuate Buddhism in its advancement in accordance with social realities and in common steps forward with the development of our country. This progress has given us national pride and Buddhism has a profound influence in the hearts of all levels of people in our society and of all diversities to the point that this contribution has been recognized publicly. Subsequently Buddhism was proclaimed the religion of State.

In the present time, Buddhism which was almost extinguished in 1075-1979 has returned. The religion has prospered with new impetus, with the support of charitable local and over-seas Buddhist followers.

It is true that, along with this expansion of Buddhism, new problems arise and require new and reasonable solutions.

I wish to contribute to the work of this Congress by calling to the attention of this gathering the reinforcement of the role of Buddhism in our society through the roles of the temples, monks and the education and dissemination of the Buddhist teaching, words, virtues and moral to instill belief in the followers in Buddhism and to orient the society and young generations to continue accepting the teaching of our Lord the Buddha. In order to achieve this aspiration, we will need to reorganize realistic and correct teaching of Buddhism along with enabling the capacity of the Buddhist Institute in publishing and distributing Buddhist doctrine, the words of Buddha, Buddhist rules and disciplines as well as other documents.

More important than everything else is the building of unity amongst Buddhist followers, especially amongst the Buddhist monks of the two Orders. They should play the model roles for our people. The monks must uphold the role which made the promotion of Buddhism as the religion of State possible. The choice of Dhammayudh-nikay or Moha-nikay Order will depend on the belief of our people.

Because our capabilities are still limited, and because the life of our people in rural areas are still very difficult, I wish to appeal to the Buddhist provincial chiefs, district chiefs and the chief of every temple to please continue to achieve the works which are not prohibited by Buddhism, for the public good. Along these works, I am asking you to please support humanitarian and charitable works such as the care for childless elderly, care for orphans and for the general public who has met natural disasters.

Whether big or small, numerous or few, the above works have a profound influence on the society and can enhance the advancement and the future role of Buddhism.

Samdech Sangha Rajas and Respected Members of the Buddhist Clergy,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since today coincides with the inaugural day of the electoral campaign, I wish to take this opportunity to make an appeal to all respected members of the Buddhist Clergy throughout the country to please provide advice to our people and educate the Buddhist followers and voters, to always keep their dignity and use the teaching of Buddha as the light in upholding the value of understanding and tolerance; and to repress threat, pressure, violence or any other abnormal activity which can harm the rights and freedom of our citizens in exercising their freedom of expression through the secret balloting within the framework of the free and fair election.

During these 30 days of electoral campaign, I wish to repeat my appeals to all the political parties, to all candidates, to all members of the political parties and their supporters as well as to all our fellowmen and women to please rigorously and consistently abide by the measures, regulations and guidelines which are spelled out in the legislative election laws, and by the ethic codes, regulations and legislative measures issued by the National Election Commission. Once again, I ask you to please abide by the principles of the respect for human rights and democracy as spelled out in our Constitution.

As a rule, any political party wants to win. But any party must win in honor and dignity, with both internal and outside recognition. Our people have the full rights and privileges to elect and support any political party they freely choose and which they believe in.

Political parties and active supporters of each of these political parties must not transform the electoral campaign into a forum for mutual exhortation for revenge and confrontation or to cause social friction which will all lead to poisoning the atmosphere and to destroying social stability.

Most of our people are now experiencing a terrible living hardship. Therefore, notwithstanding our desire to win, I wish to ask all politicians and political parties not to have recourse to any scheme, any exploitation or any demagoguery trick which will further add hardship to our long-suffering compatriots.

I wish also to take this opportunity to appeal to the Royal Government, to the armed forces and to all levels of authorities to please be on your additional preparedness and take efficient measures in order to ensure security, safety and public order and, in so doing, to ensure the progress of the electoral campaign and the election itself so that the campaign and the election will take place in peace without any abuse being committed, without anarchy being caused, without intimidation and threat being made, and without any violence which

will only hand the chance of organizing a free and fair election over to the opportunistic elements instead.

Finally, I wish to reiterate my firm belief that each member of the Buddhist clergy will make your precious contribution to the electoral process by educating our people and by upholding the correct position during the forthcoming electoral campaign and during the election. Besides, there is no discrepancy between the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy on one part, and the teaching of our Lord the Buddha on the other part.

I am requesting Your Holiness's of the two Orders, members of the Buddhist Clergy, Excellencies, our very distinguished and honor guests as well as all our fellowmen and women, to please accept from me the very Five Buddhist Blessings: Long life, High Position, Good Health, Good Strength, and Excellent Intelligence.

Looking ahead with hope and optimism toward the brilliant success of this meeting, and in the August Name of His Majesty the King, I declare the 7th Buddhist Congress open.

Thank you.