

KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

Nation – Religion - King

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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AT THE U.S. CONGRESS HUMAN RIGHTS CAUCUS, WASHINGTON D.C., MARCH 8, 2001

I – POVERTY ASSOCIATED WITH CORRUPTION AND BAD GOVERNANCE KILLED MORE PEOPLE UNDER HUN SEN (1985-2001) THAN UNDER POL POT (1975- 1979)

In spite of billions of dollars of international aid over the last few years, social indicators remain appalling:

- **Life expectancy:** 53 years (Vietnam: 68, Thailand: 71). More than 200,000 people die prematurely each year.
- **Infant mortality:** 103 deaths under age one per 1,000 live births (Vietnam: 29, Thailand: 26).
- **Malnutrition:** 56% of children under age five suffering from stunted growth.
- **Per-capita GDP:** \$280 (Vietnam: \$370, Thailand: \$1,949).
- **Poverty:** 36% of the population living under poverty line, i.e. less than one dollar per day (India: 25%).
- **Average salary of civil servants:** \$20 per month.
- **Landlessness:** 13% of farmers (who make up 80% of the population) have lost their land. Increasing percentage.
- **Unemployment rate:** over 30% (including disguised unemployment: landless farmers, unpaid family jobs, petty and occasional jobs, beggars, scavengers, prostitutes).
- **Illiteracy rate:** 63 %.
- **HIV-AIDS contamination rate:** over 4%. Highest rate in Asia. Also highest HIV-AIDS propagation rate.
- **Forest cover:** 25% of total land area in 2000 (versus 50 % in 1993 and 73% in 1969). Deforestation leads to floods and droughts that cause crop destruction and aggravate poverty.

II- WHY INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE HAS FAILED TO REDUCE POVERTY

The current approach by international financial institutions and donor countries is based on macro-economic figures – such as a “satisfactory” GDP growth of 4-5% per year – that do not take critical factors into account:

- A population growth of 3% per year.
- The large geographical and social disparities in wealth and income distribution.
- The non-sustainable nature of a growth based on deforestation, prostitution and cheap labor industries.
- The heavy environmental and social costs generated by such a growth.
- The reluctance of the Cambodian government to implement needed reforms.

III – FUNDAMENTAL REFORMS ARE STALLED, WHICH PREVENTS ANY REAL PROGRESS

The Cambodian government manages to defend entrenched interests and preserve the status quo by continuously postponing promised reforms and effectively fooling the international donor community.

- 1- **Land reform:** Redistribute land to address the issue of landlessness. Ensure transparency in the management of State assets. As a legacy of the communist system in place until the late 1980's, two thirds of the country's land is still controlled by the State embodied by the former communist party.
- 2- **Army reform:** Eliminate ghost and fake soldiers and ensure the political neutrality of the armed forces. Re-orient national resources from defense and security to social sectors, particularly health and education.

- 3- **Civil service reform:** Recruit and select civil servants on the basis of competence, not political affiliation.
- 4- **Judiciary reform:** Free the justice system from political interference and corruption. Put an end to the culture of impunity. Establish a tribunal meeting international standards of justice to prosecute former Khmer Rouge leaders for crimes against humanity.
- 5- **Administrative reform:** Start the decentralization process. Promote democracy at the grassroots level in order to foster economic and social development. Organize critical local elections in 2002.

IV – DEMOCRACY IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE REMEDY TO CURE CAMBODIA’S ILLS

Good governance associated with democracy and based on the rule of law, transparency and accountability, is absolutely required to ensure a sustainable development, reduce poverty, deliver adequate public and social services, improve the people’s quality of life, and defend human rights, starting with the right to life.

The first post communist elections to establish local governments at the commune level, are scheduled for January 2002. Commune chiefs have been so far appointed by the ruling party to run Cambodia’s 1,615 communes in the most authoritarian and ineffective manner, reflecting a top-to-bottom style of government based on intimidation and corruption. Establishing democracy at the grassroots level is a crucial step in the country’s democratization process since the general elections scheduled for 2003 will depend on the outcome of the 2002 local elections.

Because the ruling Cambodian People’s Party totally controls the army, the police, the civil administration, the economy, and the electronic media, the Cambodian democrats need the support of all democratic countries to help establish a level playing field and bring about much needed democracy to Cambodia. [End].