

Japan Relief for Cambodia

A NON-PROFIT, VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION COOPERATING WITH PRINCE NORODOM SIHANOUK TO BRING HOPE TO THE CAMBODIAN PEOPLE THROUGH PRIVATE AND CORPORATE DONATIONS, DISTRIBUTED DIRECTLY TO THE NEEDY. PACKING, TRANSPORT AND ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS ARE CONTRIBUTED BY DONORS IN THE SHIPPING AND TRADING INDUSTRIES. CERTIFIED AS A TAX-EXEMPT FOUNDATION BY THE GOVERNMENT OF CAMBODIA.

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BERNARD KRISHER
Chairman

March 4, 1993

Mr. Carl Gershman
President
National Endowment for Democracy
1101 Fifteenth Street, N.W.
Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Gershman:

Thanks to the pioneering work of the National Endowment for Democracy and other institutions, Cambodia is moving from the ravages of war and annihilation toward rehabilitation and reconstruction. Despite previous setbacks, the peace process is irreversible. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the Head of State and Chairman of the SNC is dedicated to establishing a democracy and market economy. The first-ever elections will be held in May which should set the future course. Even if the Khmer Rouge do not participate in this election they will remain an ostracized minority without any mandate to claim that they represent the Cambodian people.

The path to establishing a solid democracy, as well as the process of democracy itself even in the most democratic countries, is not always steady nor an easy process. If it were, we would call it totalitarianism. The very process requires delays and obstacles but the end justifies those obstacles. Cambodia will have to experience such hurdles as have all democracies.

Cambodia today already enjoys legal freedom of the press but there are considerable social pressures which hold people back from expressing themselves fully and more serious, there exists no independent daily newspaper. The country is ill informed, relying on word of mouth, rumor and the trickle of foreign newspapers available at hotels, arriving late and they do not focus on Cambodia. The other sources of information are the thin daily government propaganda sheet and the State-run TV.

TOTAL LIE!!

expert A daily independent newspaper for Cambodia, initially, predominantly in English (with several Khmer and Japanese pages, the latter for the Japanese resident community which is investing one-third or the largest share of the cost for the rehabilitation of the country) will prove the need and benefit of such a newspaper. It will gradually grow into a more Khmer-oriented paper and hopefully encourage competition. It is aimed at being the model which will spread the seeds of a competitive free press. We hope that once we jump into the cold pool, others will follow and a true free marketplace of ideas will emerge.

I envisage a daily objective, independent, not politically affiliated newspaper, providing international, domestic, business, sports and cultural news; and essays on democracy, human rights and other values to instill a sense of justice in this beleaguered country. Its multi-function would be to inform, as an informed society (Khmer and those foreigners there to help Cambodia) need to be knowledgeable in order to function soundly and vote intelligently. Also to inspire, and to act as a catalyst for correct information on job and business opportunities, educational programs, to connect people with like-minded interests; to be a watchdog, as well. In other words, help Cambodia pull its act together. The result should help to develop a better country.

Most important, our newspaper will be responsible and fair: it will not support any particular policy at the expense of another (as long as it has no competition) but instead open its pages to all responsible views through a healthy, live letters to the editor column and Op-Ed pages.

The initial goal is 10 to 12 pages a day (eight or more in English, two or three in Khmer and two in Japanese). The format will be modest A-4 size, like Timesfax, except we will run photos. It will be distributed by car or fax to subscribing hotel, embassies, business firms and UNTAC units. The Khmer working there will be able to see the paper which they otherwise might not be able to afford to buy. It will also be delivered to homes and sold by street news hawkers. The estimated price will be kept low to 25 or 50 cents. Copies can also be read on bulletin boards in the market and other public areas for those unable to afford purchasing the paper. Copies will be mailed to outlying districts. Sponsors will be solicited to pay for subscriptions to targeted persons and institutions who would benefit from receiving this newspaper but might not be able to afford it. Some advertising will help offset printing and paper costs. The Khmer pages will increase gradually and the aim is to encourage a 100 percent Khmer edition.

A skeleton staff (Khmer and foreign) already exists, waiting for the launch. The Renakse Hotel in Phnom Penh has offered free space for the office. Fuji Xerox in Japan has provided a generous supply of paper and a Tokyo printing firm has supplied a couple of A-4 size offset presses, a cutter, and trained two Cambodian Camp Site-B residents last year to learn to operate these machines in Tokyo. They will be our printers. (The equipment has already arrived in Cambodia, shipped free of charge by NYK Lines and the customs authorities in Sihanoukville waived any import duties because they respect our organization). Yokogawa Hewelett-Packard in Tokyo is in the process of favorably considering donating some scanners and laser printers. And sending a desktop publishing

expert with me on my next visit to Cambodia. John Sculley of Apple unfortunately turned down our request this week for a donation of several desktop Macintosh Apples to help produce the paper because they "could not service them in Cambodia". We will now have to purchase these which is a reason for the delay in officially sending you this grant request. I was waiting to get a response from Apple which would have helped me to judge how much cash we would need to get started.

Donald Graham, the publisher of the Washington Post has agreed to provide us the free use of the L.A. Times-Washington Post news service for one year and is very supportive of this project. The Kyodo news service, likewise, will provide us their news service without cost.

I have contacted the World Press Freedom Committee but they replied their policy prohibits them from helping startups. Al Neuhart's organization also has our request but no decision has been reached.

We basically need some seed money for salaries, training, equipment, telecommunications expenses, supplies, etc. \$100,000 will guarantee that this paper can survive for two years, if it does not make a profit of itself, which is likely.

I am donating my own time, effort, funds to this project and am continuing to seek supplies and contributions from various sources.

If the National Endowment for Democracy could pledge \$50,000 for this project, in installments, I am confident I can obtain matching funds in cash or kind elsewhere. The foreign journalists who are willing to help us realize this newspaper, are ready to accept modest salaries. I am planning to offer \$10,000 a year to one or two of the top foreigners. There are dedicated journalists in the area who wish to be involved in this. After an item about this project appeared two weeks ago in the Media Industry Newsletter I received three international calls from American journalists who want to join up and not for the money. We will pay the senior Cambodian journalists around \$100 a month which is a very good salary and will keep them honest and dedicated.

We will maintain a back-up operation in Tokyo, staffed by volunteers, incurring only minor expenses, to be ready to produce a paper on any day if a situation arises in Cambodia which prevents the paper from being published there. This could be anything from the breakdown of equipment, lack of an operating generator, to sabotage, violence or other pressure to keep us from publishing. The backup paper, which would be faxed to 20 fax machines in Phnom Penh, will assure that the paper will be duplicated and distributed there and will be a further lesson that democracy can't be stifled.

The National Endowment for Democracy grant, if realized, would be our most important and precious support and will help us to launch this paper much sooner than is now possible and in time to have a beneficial effect on the election.


I am leaving in a few hours for Phnom Penh to begin organizing this project and also to distribute donations from Japanese firms (clothes, pharmaceuticals, food and a minibus from Mercedes Benz) directly to Cambodian institutions and to the needy.

I will be reachable, if you have any questions, at the Renakse Hotel (address and phone/fax numbers, above).

I am faxing you this letter and airmailing you the same plus a copy of our Japan Relief for Cambodia newsletter, the book I co-authored with Prince Sihanouk, etc., for your background.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope that together we will be able to play an import role in establishing a solid foundation for democracy and human rights in Cambodia.

Sincerely yours,


Bernard Krisher
Suite 701
Washington, D.C. 20005

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