

**Welcoming Speech of Samdech Hun Sen**  
**Second Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia**  
*on the occasion of the*  
**Phnom Penh International Forum on Demining and Victim Assistance**  
*(At the Intercontinental Hotel, Monday, 26 October 1998)*

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen; first of all, on behalf of the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia and on behalf of His Excellency Ung Huot, the First Prime Minister, in my own name and that of my wife, I would like to express my warmest welcome to all delegates who are attending this meeting which is an important forum about issues of world-wide importance and concern. The core topics scheduled to be discussed here are demining and assistance to mine victims. The topics on this agenda has an importance beyond simply reducing the number of victims to mines and unexploded ordnance, because mines were created for killing and maiming people, while mine clearance is intended to save people's lives and to protect them from injury. This conceptualization will lead us toward a zero rate of mine victims.

With this purpose, this intention and wish, many countries in this era worked and struggled for many years to achieve history in Ottawa, Canada, last December, and to achieve the unity and the collaboration necessary to face these sixty to seventy million cruel, hidden weapons ready to harm people in at least seventy countries around the world.

The Japanese initiative in past conferences was to take the next step in this historical process to deal with landmines, on behalf of all humanity. Cambodia has been selected, with financial support from Japan, to set up this International Forum today. It is our desire to bring the human race into another historical moment which will contribute to the development and improvement of real and complete demining programs worldwide by finding and sharing here, during this Forum, the best ideas and practices on assisting of mine victims.

All the delegations attending here are active participants in this historical moment, you are the founders of this historical concept. We would wish that the output of this meeting that we will achieve by meeting together and sharing our ideas will be beneficial for the survival of humanity who so desperately desire peace and prosperity. We are pleased that the United Nations continues to represent the nations of the world responsibly and has provided our International Forum with the close cooperation of the UNDP.

My wife and I would like to once again extend our warmest welcome and respect to all founders, supporters, collaborators, organizers, and all participants. We hope that the meaningful ideas shared and generated during this International Forum in Phnom Penh will respond effectively to the desired goal of achieving zero victims.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Cambodia has been victimized for a long time by war. We have a special point of pride, however, for Cambodia that even though three years ago our country was at war, still our demining activity to liberate land for the farmers has been continuing without stop. We are also proud that we have women deminers who are skillful and effective combatants in the war to reclaim our land who can accomplish the task of demining successfully. It is my pleasure to inform to this International Forum that our women's demining unit is steadily and patiently achieving success in demining operations.

We Cambodians we are also proud that while the Khmer Rouge continued the war, the Royal Cambodian Government has ordered the army not to lay any land mines. We are also proud that only three months after the election of July 1993, at the request of the Royal Government, Her Majesty The King of Cambodia Norodom Sihanouk, signed a decree to appoint the Chairman of CMAC in order to speed-up the mine clearance process.

Last year the Cambodian Royal Government has drafted a law forbidding the use or possession of landmines in Cambodia, because the Royal Government of Cambodia, as well as the people of Cambodia, as well as the rest of mankind hope that our Cambodian Assembly could proceed with its work to approve this draft law as soon as possible.

The political policy of the Cambodian Royal Government is to forge a complete and lasting peace for the whole country in order to improve the political domain, the economic domain, and the field of social development. The Royal Government of Cambodia highly values the demining men and women, highly appreciates CMAC and the different NGOs who are involved in mine and the clearance of unexploded ordnance. The results of their work may not be widely known, but it has an enormously beneficial result and a high value, by contributing to the decrease in the loss of life and mine injuries and by providing land for farming and for other development.

Dear Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, mine clearance work is the intention of the world in this era. As a citizen of a country victimized by landmines, I understand that besides mine clearance, we must also be concerned with mine victims, especially people disabled by mines, and their families. Up to now, our handicapped citizens have been separated from our society, therefore it is necessary for us to reintegrate them into our society again. We can do this by liberating them with their emotional problems. By showing them that they can enjoy sports, that they can be productive in farming and in industry and can provide useful services, they will be able to live in society with a positive attitude and share the same strong sense of purpose as all of us.

I wish to express my profound gratitude to all the countries which are the friends of Cambodia and have been supporting mine clearance in Cambodia. This mine clearance activity is becoming recognized and honored around the world as an effective model [of proper demining activity]. Further, the Cambodian Royal Government is prepared to work hard to become another model in thinking and in helping mine victims as long as Cambodia continues to receive the confidence and support from all countries which are the friends of Cambodia.

Cambodia would welcome [any new assistance], and is grateful to all friendly countries [who have assisted so far].

In light of our deep feeling of gratitude, I am pleased to announce the opening of the Phnom Penh International Forum on Demining and Victim Assistance ["Towards Zero Victims based on Ownership and Partnership"]. My wife and I would like to express our best wishes to all the delegations for good health. We hope that you all will bring fresh ideas and renewed energy and cooperation in the fulfilling of this excellent cause that history is waiting and hoping for.

Thank you.