



*Press
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**MEANING OF THE
 "DECLARATION OF THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF CAMBODIA
 ON ILLEGAL LOGGING"**

On October 29, 1996 Cambodia's two Prime Ministers Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen signed a "Declaration of the Royal Government of Cambodia on Illegal Logging" whose integral translation is presented below, accompanied with a few comments overleaf.

In the policy of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) the forest is considered as an important natural resource for the country which absolutely requires a most serious management, protection and preservation.

In the past as in the present, illegal cutting of new wood and illegal timber export along the border have been taking place on a scale that causes concern, even though the RGC is determined to take all sorts of measures and has established close cooperation with friendly neighboring countries in order to combat these practices.

The negative developments in relation to the forest in Cambodia have become a source of concern, in particular for the national and international opinion.

Before such a situation and in line with the spirit of the plenary meeting of the Council of Ministers on October 24, 1996 the RGC wants to solemnly make the following declaration:

- 1- [The RGC] adopts the Forestry Policy Assessment as suggested by the World Bank, the FAO and the UNDP;
- 2- [The RGC] adopts the Forestry Code as proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Fishing;
- 3- [The RGC] absolutely forbids, from now on, all companies to export logs to Thailand through unsecured or uncontrolled zones along the border between Cambodia and Thailand;
- 4- Concerning old logs that remain after the moratorium (April 30, 1995), [the RGC] allows logging companies to export those old logs, provided the exporters abide by the procedures in force as stated in the June 19, 1996 joint statement by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Finance, and in the October 10, 1996 communiqué (number 1160) of the Council of Ministers, and provided the corresponding exports take place absolutely before December 31, 1996;
- 5- These exports must be placed under the supervision and require the cooperation of a reputable auditing firm;
- 6- The RGC counts on and believes in the continuation of assistance and good cooperation from neighboring countries in order to continue to help curb the illegal cutting and export of new wood along all Cambodia's border, with the objective of preserving the environment.

The RGC strongly hopes to get the support of the national and international opinion for the advancement of this great cause.

Phnom Penh, October 29, 1996

[signed]
 NORODOM RANARIDDH
 First Prime Minister

[signed]
 HUN SEN
 Second Prime Minister

COMMENTS ON THE RGC DECLARATION OF OCTOBER 29, 1996 ON ILLEGAL LOGGING

This latest RGC Declaration is made up purely of fine words, as donor countries and lending institutions are used to hearing when inquiring about illegal and uncontrolled logging in Cambodia. It is an empty gesture -- nevertheless a little masterpiece of hypocrisy and cynicism -- destined to show that the RGC is prepared or has taken steps to comply with the demand for "concrete actions" expressed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) two days before the deadline (October 31, 1996) the Washington-based lending institution had set for the RGC to fulfill its commitments. With a suspension of the IMF assistance looming, possibly bringing about far-reaching implications, the Declaration shows the embarrassment of the RGC which is embroiled and entangled in inextricable and insoluble contradictions in its so-called forest policy. But everybody realizes now that, in fact, the RGC has no forest policy. It has only made a long and tortuous series of inconsistent decisions, according to a piecemeal approach based on a systemic corruption, with government officials at all levels being interested only in taking personal or partisan benefit from the country's most valuable natural resource. Finally, the RGC has lost all credibility, being entangled with the many lies it has made to the "national and international opinion" whose support it is now begging shamelessly. With this October 29, 1996 Declaration, the RGC continues to distort facts and fails to address any of the most fundamental points related to illegal and uncontrolled deforestation:

1- Inconsistency in government decisions

In 1994, 1995 and 1996 the government on the one hand publicly announced a (new) moratorium on logging and a (new) ban on timber exports, but on the other hand it secretly granted huge forest concessions to foreign logging firms, knowing perfectly well that the latter would not remain idle and would not abide by the moratorium and the ban since they have paid high entrance fees (bribes) and need to recoup their "investments".

2- Secret forest concessions

All Cambodia's remaining forest covering approximately 6.5 million hectares have been sold off (see Global Witness Report dated February 1996). Therefore, in order to devise any serious forest policy, all secret forest concessions and logging deals must be made public and, if need be, revised or canceled on the basis of legal, environmental, economic and financial considerations.

3- Secret timber export licenses

In 1994, 1995 and 1996 the secretive and arbitrary way in which export licenses were granted meant that they were inevitably followed by the cutting of new wood to fulfill the quotas permitted in the license. Rather than policy being shaped by the amount of timber already felled, it was the amount companies were allowed to export which determined how much timber is actually cut. Thus the proliferation of export licenses which, as mere pieces of paper, sell at very high prices for corrupt government officials who can secretly issue or approve them (Prime Ministers, Defense Co-Ministers, Agriculture Minister, provincial Governors, ...). The final result of this back-to-front and never-ending process is a dramatic intensification of logging (see the most recent Global Witness reports and press releases). To assess the situation properly before devising any measure to address the illegal logging issue, it is imperative that a list be made public of all export licenses which have been issued, bearing in mind that some newly-issued licenses are backdated. A clear definition of "old wood" must also be agreed upon, since a large amount of logs from newly-felled trees have been exported fraudulently.

4- Diversion of State revenues

Whereas more and more wood are cut and exported (several millions cubic meters worth several hundreds millions of US dollars every years), the State collects less and less logging revenues: US \$ 34.4 million in 1994, 21.6 million in 1995 and probably less than 10 million in 1996.

KONG KORM

KNP Acting President

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs

Former Minister of Control of State Affairs.

P.S. The KNP will publish a 12-page White Paper on the logging issue in the next few days.