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THE REAL ISSUES OF CAMBODIA FROM MY REAL PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

As a government official, I have an obligation for the people of Cambodia to give an objective account of the real issues of Cambodia based on my real personal experiences. In Cambodia, I don't try to understand everything; some things will just never make sense. I accept that it is an ugly reality of life and until I can change it, that's the way it will stay. I have learnt not to be discouraged by failure and not to be threat by the success of others. I have learnt to return to the starting point; reevaluate the situation and seek new path. This has been one of the most amazing, inspiring, at times horrifying, but always fascinating experiences.

When people talk about Cambodia, they mostly talk about Pol Pot's genocide regime, human rights violations, land mines victims, the U.N. sponsored election of 1993 at the cost of \$ 2.2 Billions, 5-6 July of 1997 fighting and looting, the result of 26 July 1998 free but not fair election, the violent event that lead to the formation of the new government 30 November 1998. And when investors talk about Cambodia they don't just talk about the tremendous possibility, the lucrative opportunity but they also talk about poor public safety, security problems, under developed human resources, unnecessary red tape, endemic corruption, uncontrollable bribery, serious deficiencies in infrastructure, political stability and uncertainties. People only hear about these valid points and as a result they create a deceptive perception of Cambodia. They start asking themselves; why were the Cambodians, who are Buddhists, be able to commit such unreasonable acts? Can the society as a whole accept these disgraceful, absurd and immoral acts? What are the real causes, the real issues, and the opportunities to restore the Country's lost honor, dignity and people ways of life? I would like to address these questions and to identify some pressing issues on hand. I shall be speaking based on my perspective as well as on my real personal experiences. First and foremost, I believe the answer to these questions lies on the hand of the bigwigs and the people of Cambodia because they are not big enough people to disagree on individual issues and work together for their common goal; restoring the Cambodian dignity and pride.

The main cause is war created by irresponsible politicians. Cambodia has been littered with ineffective and incompetent leaders. The superiors who hold powers think only their own welfare, their personal benefits and not the real needs of the people. Most Cambodian leaders who serve the country place individual and political party interest over the national interest. The culture of violence, lawlessness, injustice, and impunity permeate Cambodian society. Knowing that transformation is a slow process, corrective action must be taken. The powerful leaders must learn to identify and to recognize that the value of people's life is best measured not by years spent in accumulating power, wealth and possessions, but the moments spent giving one's self to place and to put the interests of the Cambodian people first and foremost; to inspire hope for a better future, to implement fair and pragmatic governance, to set a workable standard of economic development, to deliver sustainable progress in all fields, to ensure political stability and physical security, to establish rule of law and order, but most importantly, to improve education and to invest in training. They also should strive to improve Cambodia by performing good and honest works, struggling for social justice, treat everyone fairly and equally. The current administration has failed to make the Cambodian people freer, safer, and securer. I don't think people who haven't lived through military dictatorship can really understand what it means to have democracy. And I am sure I will go to heaven; I spent my time in hell for two days at Tang Krasang on 5-6 July 1997. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. The universal values of justice, freedom, and peace can not be emphasized enough as the guiding principles. In an era of coexistency and co-prosperity not only in the region but also in the global framework, the Royal Government of Cambodia should continuously and tirelessly help the business and the investors to create a more conducive investment climate without bureaucratic hurdles to enjoy economic growth. RGC must focus with discipline, determination, endurance, and continuity on what is essential and critical to lay the foundation on the real sustainable development of Cambodia. RGC must produce acceptable results by eliminating barriers to growth. The culture of violence, lawlessness and impunity must be replaced forcefully with the culture of laws and order by not producing them on the piece of paper but by implementing and enforcing them from the top down. Only action speaks louder than words. Intelligence, vision, and knowledge are essential resources but only effectiveness and competency can convert them into productive results. Elected leaders are the servant not the master of the people. There are no bad people; there are bad leaders.

On the other hand, the other cause is most Cambodian people have forgotten the value of ethics and moral behavior. The Cambodian people are lacking confidence in joining together to improve the society as a whole. They have lost their personality, their integrity, and their identity. They become enmeshed in battles and influences from the political parties and from the outsiders. They don't know what is the truth anymore. They are socially, economically, and politically corrupted. They sell and buy everything to reach the top; their soul, their conscience, their set of values and their family life. And once they tasted power, they change. Cambodia now is a country weary of hopeless existence. It is a country where the impossible becomes possible, the immoral becomes acceptable and the insane becomes normal; just look at the crazy traffic in Phnom-Penh, listen to people, talk to the investors. Cambodia is a country where a dual morality, hypocrisy, and nonsense have been allowed to dominate the politics and the mass media for years. On many cases, governmental authority has to choose between enforcing the rule of law and protecting rich and powerful cronies with whom they have had a long and lucrative relationship. The high and the powerful officials also have shown Cambodian people the desecration of the universal values and respect. It is amazing Cambodia. Undoubtedly, the Japanese, the French, the Vietnamese, the American, the Thai and the Chinese have had a hand in the tragedy but it is ultimately the Cambodian people's unwillingness to put aside their difference and work things out in a peaceful, civilized and Buddhist manner that is destroying the society and the country. In Cambodia what hinders progress, prosperity is more than anything else; deep rooted mistrust. When mistrust of others is directly against oneself, one experience powerlessness. When directed against others, it takes the form of refusal of dialogue and ultimately violence. Doing what they have to do to survive can result in devastation to one's self-concept and self-esteem. Only education, mutual understanding, accepting the reality and making change can help to liberate them from this self-destruction. Since convictions are the main springs of action, the driving powers of life, Cambodian people needs to change their own conviction; such as no body is above the law. This environmental crisis offers not only a challenge but also an opportunity to transform the foundation of the society. Cambodian people get what they give.

The future of Cambodia depends on how the rest of the world perceives it; as market places, as a tourist destination or still a battlefield. The country also faces overwhelming challenges in addressing broader issues such as economic and public administration reforms, corruption, legal system, and massive illegal logging and environmental destruction. The Royal Government is lacking of means, resources, and competence. The vast majority of the people accept corruption as part as their daily life. Inadequate salaries in part have fueled a system of informal fees and bribes collected by everyone including police officers, soldiers, custom officers, teachers, health practitioners, dishonest government officials at all level. Corruption becomes not only a habit but also a character. How does one begin to reform such a messed up system? Does the government have the financial resources to carry it out? Can the people of Cambodia change and adapt to the Buddhist way of living in peace, compassion and harmony? Yet, Cambodia can do much better. Effective, competent, and strong government is the surest way to prosperity. The country can be build through pursuing and implementing effective reforms. Realism is essential to maintain the international community support, to unify all efforts and to solidify progress. Political factors more than anything has played and will continue to play a pivotal role in Cambodia's economic, judicial and social performance. Future endeavors could succeed if they are built on humility not arrogance, on hard and honest works not on complacency and on share prosperity and definitely not on a winner take all game. So don't be intimidated by position or power or wealth. If little people work together, they can do a great deal to transform Cambodia. They must call for all leaders' efforts and commitment to ensure that present generation lives by the standards of legal, political, economic and social justice. The world defines peace as the absence of hostility. In Cambodia, peace also means prosperity, mutual trust, health, and people's happiness.

The real issues mentioned above are not only problems for the leaders and the Cambodian people to overcome but also the opportunity for all of us to restore the national honor and to attain a life of real peace, harmony, and prosperity. The ultimate goal of democracy, after all, is not to pursue material abundance but to nurture the dignity and values of each individual. May the leaders of Cambodia serve the country with their heroic mind and their compassionate heart. May the people of Cambodia learn to trust each other and work together to transform Cambodia to a state of realism. And may Lord Buddha bless Cambodia. All of us can make a big difference for our present and our future generation. Don't just say it, do it, and make it happen before it is too late.

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