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# CAMBODIA

## A Decade after the Coup

Khatharya Um

The year 2007 began with a controversy that threatened the credibility of the already fragile Khmer Rouge tribunal and ended with the high-profile arrests of surviving senior Khmer Rouge leaders — Noun Chea, Ieng Sary, his wife Ieng Thirith, and Khieu Samphan. In many aspects, these developments, marked by fits of promise and deflating setbacks, characterize much of Cambodia's post-UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) development. A decade after the sanguinary coup led by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) that dealt a decisive blow to its coalition partners, Cambodia's progress report is an uneven mix of stability and faltering democratization, of impressive economic growth and widening disparity, and of hopeful steps but limited prospect for systemic change in the foreseeable future.

### **Politics: Commune Elections and Multi-Party Democracy**

In the political arena, the commune elections in April, framed by sporadic sparks of pre-election violence and post-election protests against procedural irregularities, consumed the attention of Cambodia watchers. By most accounts, the months leading up to the elections were considered relatively calm as compared with the political climate of 2002. Politically motivated violence appeared to have declined, both in terms of the number of occurrences and of their flagrancy. Despite these noted improvements, widespread irregularities before and during the elections were reported. Concerns continued to register regarding the CCP's virtual monopoly over the political machinery, including the media, the police and the military, with its vast political networks extending deep and wide into communes and villages, and

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bigger electoral coffers. Allegations of vote buying and inconsistent, and largely partisan, application of electoral rules, especially regarding voter registration and identification, and overt intimidation campaigns ranging from the illegal presence of officials (or their kin) at polling stations to a grenade thrown at the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) headquarters, dogged the election process. An appeal was jointly made by the principal monitoring agencies (COMFREL, NICFEC, YCC, PEFOOJ, among others) to the National Election Commission, which has been accused of partisanship, “to take these complaints seriously, and make serious efforts to resolve in a transparent manner issues at commune polling centres where the percentage of voters was below 50 per cent”.<sup>1</sup>

Voter discrimination, confusion, intimidation, and malaise helped account for the relatively low voter turnout, which at 65.4 per cent, reflected a 30 to 40 per cent decrease from preceding elections. Not surprisingly, the CPP achieved a landslide victory, securing control over 98 per cent of the communes and party representation in all of Cambodia’s communes. The SRP placed a far second, netting 25.5 per cent of the popular votes, control of 1.7 per cent of the communes, reflecting a twofold increase from the 2002 winnings, and representation in over 85 per cent of the communes. Once a serious contender, FUNCINPEC’s (Front Uni National Pour Un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre et Coopératif) performance at the polls was unimpressive, as it managed to win only two commune chief positions. For its part, the newly formed Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP) succeeded in fielding over 1,000 candidates but secured only 472 council positions, and no control over any commune.<sup>2</sup> These successes and setbacks set the stage for the 2008 national elections.<sup>3</sup>

Along with the political resurgence of the SRP, the 2007 commune elections also showed a hopeful increase in the number of female candidates, particularly fielded by CPP and FUNCINPEC. However, while in absolute terms the number of women elected to the commune council is laudable, the proportionality remains low. Representation is even more skewed at the higher level of government. Nevertheless, the increased presence of women in the political arena has helped broadened the discourse in the male dominated forum. This is critically important given that 52 per cent of the country’s 13.8 million population are women, and that many of Cambodia’s pressing social and economic issues have gender implications. Though labour force participation rate of Cambodian women is at 82 per cent, the highest in the region,<sup>4</sup> poverty, though endemic, is particularly acute among them. Other associated problems such as lack of access to education, healthcare, employment, and other fundamental aspects of human security, continue to be persisting impediments to social progress.

Observers of the elections have proffered a range of explanations for the relatively smooth electoral process, from increasing “maturity” of the system as Ou Virak of the Alliance for Freedom of Expression has proffered,<sup>5</sup> to the recently struck understanding between the SRP and the CPP as Rainsy had contended. The greater cynics saw it as evidence of regime confidence, drawn simultaneously from its ability to effectively repress its opponents and to reward its supporters. In critical ways, the non-communist forces never fully regained their political balance after the 1997 coup. What followed was essentially a decade of continuous struggle by oppositional parties not to bring about regime change but rather to be the chosen ally. By 2007, the SRP had successfully dethroned the royalist FUNCINPEC as the nominal coalition partner, less because of its own strength and more because of the weaknesses of the other. Internal feuding and fracturing, scandals, and defections had debilitated the royalist groups. The formation of splinter royalist factions, namely the Sangkum Jatinium (SJ) and the NRP, further diluted the royalist agenda that was already lacking a political identity. Prince Norodom Ranariddh’s attempt to regain his political relevance through the formation of NRP following his ouster from FUNCINPEC was undermined by the numerous lawsuits filed against him, first by his wife for adultery and then by his own party for the illegal sales of party property. For this latter charge, he was fined \$150,000 for “breach of trust”, and sentenced to eighteen months in jail in the event he returns to Cambodia, a decision that has confined him to exile. Under the guardianship of Prince Norodom Chakrapong, himself tainted by the unresolved scandal associated with his former position as chairman of the Royal Phnom Penh Airlines, NRP was unable to gain the necessary political traction, especially at the grassroots level, in the 2007 elections. The SRP, likewise, faced challenges in the months leading up to the elections. The erosion of Rainsy’s personal credibility, brought on by his long exile and a negotiated return, deemed by some to have been politically costly for the party, provided a political opening for Khem Sokha’s newly formed Human Rights Party. Despite the setbacks and the competition, SRP emerged as the leading non-communist force in the 2007 elections.

## **Economy: Prospects and Consequences**

In addition to its consolidated power, the lessening of regime reliance on violence and fear also reflects the self-confidence that comes from its ability to deliver on the promise of economic growth — even if only for the small class of civilian and military elites that constitutes its power base. A slight dip in 2006 notwithstanding,

Cambodia's average economic growth rate since 1999 is at 9.5 per cent, among the highest in Asia. Exports rose to over \$2 billion, while tourism brought in over 1.5 million visitors in the first ten months of 2007 alone, an average 18.5 per cent increase from the previous year. With the monuments serving as important tourist attractions, Siem Reap experienced an even more impressive growth of over 36 per cent. This sectoral expansion, in turn, has fuelled the real estate boom in the capital and the major tourist centres. In Sihanoukville, the construction of a new airport, and prospect for legalized gambling have reinforced the coastal town's inherent attractiveness to investors. According to the mayor of Sihanoukville, US\$1 billion have already been committed for the development of tourism, with US\$600 million coming from Russian interests. The real estate market is also active along major roads and in urban centres. Public confidence in the banking sector has also kept pace with the expansion of the private sector, as evidenced by the 40 to 50 per cent growth in deposits and loans, mostly for construction.

Additionally, Cambodia's economic confidence, has been recently, and some say prematurely, sparked by the prospects of new offshore oil and gas reserves lying in six potential fields in the Gulf of Thailand. Combined, they are estimated to yield 2 billion barrels of oil, and 280 billion cubic metres of natural gas, respectively. A 2005 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) study determined that at full production capacity, Cambodia's oil reserves could yield 100,000 to 150,000 barrels per day.<sup>6</sup> With concessions for offshore exploration already granted to Chevron, China's CNOOC, and China's Petrotech, it is projected that oil and gas revenues may be generated as early as 2010, and will reach US\$6–US\$7.5 billion per year, spanning the next two decades. It has been reported that Russia is also interested in securing exploration rights in exchange for US\$1.5 billion debt forgiveness. In addition to these new discoveries, prospecting efforts for gold and bauxite deposits in the northeastern province of Mondolkiri are underway with two Australian companies, namely BHP Billiton, in partnership with Mitsubshi, and Oxiana having been granted the concessions to mine for bauxite and gold, respectively. It is hoped that these energy and mineral resources will help move the country out of abject poverty, though concerns remain that the siphoning of this wealth that would obstruct genuine development.

These investments in the energy sector, in turn, have generated interest from leading companies in France, Japan and the United States. In July 2007, General Electric opened a branch office in Phnom Penh while Total Exploration and Production, and France Telecom among other French companies have sent fact-finding delegations to Cambodia. Japan's Biwako Bio-Laboratory has unveiled its plans for an US\$800 million investment in biodiesel production. There has also

been significant investment from China for infrastructural development projects, such as for the construction of hydropower plants in Kirirom, Kampot, Kompong Speu and Koh Kong. As John Nelmes, IMF country representative, points out “you’ve got a story of macroeconomic stability. That’s proving comfortable for business to invest”.<sup>7</sup>

Underscoring this rise in investor’s confidence, the country announced the opening in January of the first investment bank, South Korea-based Tong Yang Investment, with plans to create a US\$100 million real estate investment fund for Korean investors interested in Cambodia and Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> Given that Korea is the leading tourist-sending country to Cambodia, totalling over 250,000 visitors this year, attractive opportunities abound for those interested in hotel and other tourist-centred investments. To further underscore growth and stability, the government announced that Cambodia’s foreign currency reserve has exceeded US\$1 billion. On 16 February, the council of ministers approved a draft law permitting the sale of bonds, which some regard as the first step towards the creation of a stock market in Cambodia.

While Cambodia’s economic growth has been impressive, there are persisting concerns. Growth remains largely sectorally concentrated, principally in the garment and tourist industries, both of which are vulnerable to global shifts. Cambodia’s garment industry, which currently employs approximately 330,000 workers and accounts for 80 per cent of the country’s exports, totalling US\$2.5 billion per year, has thrived under the 1999 bilateral agreement with the United States that granted preferential access to American markets in exchange for adherence to approved labour standards. It has also benefited from the restrictions placed on Chinese exports by the United States and European countries that have compelled manufacturers to seek alternative production sites. These favourable conditions could change as early as next year when the restrictions on Chinese goods are set to expire. This will reopen the door for China to wield its comparative advantages to corner the market. While Cambodia may continue to leverage its labour-friendly policy for market shares, it cannot effectively compete with China’s production capacity, better infrastructure, supply chains, cheaper electricity, higher productivity, and a more highly skilled labour force. In fact, in early 2006 when Chinese textile quotas were abolished, Cambodia’s garment exports fell by 10 per cent as orders were redirected back to China. Similarly, competition will also come from Vietnam, which recently joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). Faced with these upcoming challenges, government officials are hoping that Cambodia will benefit from the passage of the Trade Act, introduced in the U.S. Congress last February, that proposes to extend preferential access to the U.S. market to

fourteen poor Asian countries, including Cambodia.<sup>9</sup> Cambodia is also setting its sights on lesser competitors, such as Bangladesh, rather than China.

### **Persisting Challenges of Economic Development: Environment, Sustainability, and Human Security**

Shifts in the international realm notwithstanding, the greater challenge facing Cambodia is the persisting concern, registered by donors and advocates alike, regarding the more adverse ramifications of growth, namely the lack of transparency, accountability, sustainability, and ultimately of social redistribution of wealth. Over a decade since the political and economic liberalization of the mid-1990s, the Cambodian government has yet to reach many of the benchmark goals set by international donors. According to the World Bank, progress on key aspects of governance, namely the strengthening of critical institutions, and enhancement of transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, remains glacially slow. The rate of poverty reduction nationwide is averaging only 1 per cent per year. Endemic corruption caused a continuous haemorrhaging of the country's resources and stands as one of the principal obstacles to development. It not only bars effective implementation of policies and impedes critical reforms, but also contributes directly to the growing class disparity. In a resource-poor country, the inability, some say unwillingness, of the government to effectively collect taxes from the private sector, results in a potential yearly loss of US\$400 million in revenue.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the lack of transparency and accountability, such as in the granting of lucrative concessions, allows personal gains to supplant national interests with impunity. The approval in February of the 99-year leasehold for the US\$79 million Boeung Kak lake development scheme, priced at below market value, sparked protests from social and environmental advocates, concerned about the forced and uncompensated displacement of the area's residents, most of whom are without legal land titles, and about the opaqueness of the process and insufficient regard for environmental impact. As one of the seven principal lakes in the country, Boeung Kak is a natural reservoir, and the landfill project may threaten the city's drainage system and exacerbate flooding. Other such concessions have also been similarly approved. Since 2006, concessions for more than seven islands off the coast of Sihanoukville and vast oceanfront acreages have been granted to private investors,<sup>11</sup> while over one-third of Cambodia's most productive resources, totalling some 5.5 million hectares of forest, land, and fishing grounds, have been placed under private concession management.<sup>12</sup> According to the Food and Agriculture Agency, Cambodia's primary tropical

forest has also diminished by 29 per cent between 2000 and 2005.<sup>13</sup> Concerns over the absence of effective resource management has led environmental groups to appeal to the donor community to demand accountability from the Cambodian government, and even to attach conditions to any future extension of aid. The organization, Global Witness, for instance, has called upon donors to exert pressure on the government for “tangible actions” and to “insist on the transparent resource management that would enable ordinary Cambodians to hold their government accountable”.<sup>14</sup> Global Witness’<sup>15</sup> documentation of illegal logging and shady forest concessions implicated highly placed families in these enterprises, and drew serious political blowback.

Unregulated development also has an adverse impact on the environment and on the resource base upon which economically vulnerable communities have depended. The Mekong river is Cambodia’s riparian lifeline, and as a downstream nation, it is vulnerable to any agro development projects in the region that alter flow or ecology, such as those undertaken by China and Vietnam. In the river basin, which constitutes 86 per cent of the country’s territory, ecological disturbance and environmental degradation have evoked concerns among fishermen about the reduction of the size and diversity of freshwater fish harvest.

## The Land Question

As a result of corruption, land grabbing and the absence of reforms, social redistribution of wealth remains constricted. Growth, however impressive, has seen little development particularly in rural communities where 80 per cent of Cambodians live. Though per capita income has increased to US\$500, 40 per cent of Cambodians live below poverty level and in some communities of the Tonle Sap Basin, the figure is as high as 80 per cent.<sup>16</sup> The country ranks 129th out of 177 countries and is listed in the Global Hunger Index as one of twelve “hunger hotspots”. Though central to Cambodia’s development, there has been little policy attention given by the government to the agricultural sector. Instead, it has been left largely to donors. Cambodia’s agricultural sector, as such, is among the least developed in Asia, with land and labour productivity among the lowest in the region. Agricultural products account for only 4 per cent of the country’s exports. Despite the economic buoyancy of recent years, there has been little occupational diversification among the rural population. Rural underemployment is estimated to be at 50 per cent.<sup>17</sup> Landlessness has also emerged as a pressing problem and is most acute among female-headed households and in fishing communities.<sup>18</sup> With an average increase of 2 per



cent per annum since 1999, and estimated to be at 20 per cent in 2001,<sup>19</sup> the problem of the landless could only have been exacerbated in recent years by the prevailing real estate frenzy.

For a segment of the landowning population, the size of their parcel may be insufficient to support a family. A study conducted by the Economic Institute of Cambodia (EIC) showed that 63 per cent of urban migrants surveyed own plots that are too small, while 37 per cent are in debt. For many of these land-poor families, migration, both internal and cross-border, is the only recourse. Most migrants to the cities, however, can only hope to secure employment in vulnerable sectors, making less than \$2 per day. Women are highly represented in the informal sectors of the economy, which account for 85 per cent of workforce activities, and contribute to 62 per cent of the country's GDP.<sup>20</sup> Those unable to access these limited opportunities join the thousands of Cambodian migrants who made the cross-border journey into Thailand.<sup>21</sup> Along with vulnerable women, many of the migrants are children. Of the child beggars on the streets of Bangkok, many are, in fact, trafficked Cambodian youths. Most are under fifteen years of age, with an estimated 42 per cent under the age of three, and 20 per cent unaccompanied by family members. With poverty and functional illiteracy being most concentrated among women, they are also vulnerable to all forms of exploitation; according to UNIFEM, 47 per cent of trafficked women were sold against their will. Gender-based violence accounts for 48 per cent of the conflicts being mediated by village and commune councils.<sup>22</sup> These enduring social problems are delineated in a recently submitted UNHRC report. As underscored by the EIC findings, expansion of educational access for women is key to the reduction of poverty and gendered exploitation and abuse.<sup>23</sup>

In critical ways, corruption, and the absence of transparency and accountability reflect the persisting elusiveness of the rule of law in Cambodia, and contributes directly to the denial of human security and transgressions upon fundamental human rights. While the National Assembly did approve a new Criminal Procedure Code on 7 June, many register concerns about existing loopholes being used for political ends, and possible contravention of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Cambodia is a signatory. Without effective enforcement, legislative acts such as the 2001 Land Law that extends ownership rights to squatters who can prove five years of residency on unclaimed land, do little to redress the problems of insecure tenancy and inequities in the landholding system. With the cost of an official certificate of ownership averaging US\$300 to US\$400, very few impoverished families can afford to secure land titles. Paired with a weak and largely corrupt judicial system, the poor and politically unconnected

are gravely disadvantaged. With increased property development and expanding exports fuelling land prices, land grabbing, illegal sales of public properties, and forced evictions have become widespread and violent. In Sihanoukville, human rights organization, Licadho, has documented three evictions of entire villages in 2007 alone, including 107 families from Burnt Bridge Village who are still living in a ditch after their village was bulldozed last April. In Phnom Penh, the Borei Keila “land share scheme”, earlier touted as a model for inner city development, is marred by failed promises of resident relocation. Similarly, stepped up commercialization and interest in eco-tourism has also spurred large-scale encroachments upon indigenous land, sparking conflict and legal contestation. In January 2007, the Jarai community in Rattanakiri filed a lawsuit against a highly connected developer.

## Human Rights

As cases of corruption and abuses multiply and become more publicized, rights advocates have also come under systematic attack. The assassination of the president of the Free Trade Union at Suntex Garment Factory on 24 February underscores the endemic culture of violence and impunity that remains entrenched in Cambodian political life. In other instances, rights workers assisting farmers in their land disputes have faced intimidation and death. Following the release of their politically charged report, Global Witness was banned from Cambodia. The political fallout from the controversy also saw to the mass resignation of the staff and reporters of *Cambodge Soir* and subsequent closure of the newspaper.

Along with the challenges to freedom of the press and the right to organize, the defrocking and disappearance of a Khmer Krom monk in July, and brutal suppression in December of an organized protest calling for his release from detention, called into question the state of religious freedom in Cambodia, and more importantly, the political neutrality of the religious community. The argument put forth by the Supreme Patriarch, Tep Vong, that Venerable Tim Sakhorn’s politics “undermined Cambodia-Vietnam relations”, thus justifying his excommunication from the *Sangha*, points to the uneasy symbiosis between church and state. That his disappearance came in the face of increasing flight of ethnic Khmer monks from Vietnam to Cambodia and organized protests against religious and ethnic persecution in Vietnam, highlights the foreign relations implications of the incident. His eventual reappearance in a Vietnamese prison camp raised critical questions about Cambodia’s sovereignty and the extent of control that Vietnam continues to exercise over the Phnom Penh government.

## The Khmer Rouge Tribunal and Transitional Justice

The tentative, and in many instances outright lack of progress in critical areas, is at the heart of the reservation that many have about the viability of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT) that has been established to bring surviving Khmer Rouge leaders to trial. Since the endorsement of the idea in 1999, the creation of the tribunal has been stalled by the inability of the Cambodian government and the international community to reach an agreement on the location and composition of the court, on the scope of its mandate, and on internal rules, including the Cambodian Bar Association fees to be imposed on foreign attorneys, which arguably will determine the pool of lawyers available to assist in the process. Last year's breakthrough set in motion the creation of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), and the seating of the judges, three Cambodian and two foreign, with a four out of five majority vote needed to carry a verdict. Though controversy over the lack of financial and administrative transparency threatened yet again to derail the process early this year, the high-profile arrests of Nuoun Chea, Ieng Sary, Ieng Thirith, and Khieu Samphan revitalized the KRT. Noun Chea, otherwise known as "Brother Number 2", referring to his position as second-in-command to Pol Pot, who officially served as Deputy Secretary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, has been charged with "crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, torture, imprisonment, enslavement and persecution".<sup>24</sup> He has consistently denied knowledge of any systematic killing, including the existence and function of S-21 extermination centre at Tuol Sleng, contending that he served only in the legislative branch and "never adopted any law allowing citizens to be killed".<sup>25</sup> The arrest of Ieng Sary, former Khmer Rouge Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, also for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the "planning, directing and coordinating" of the purges of returning intellectuals and diplomats, resurrected the long-posed question regarding the applicability of the pardon for genocide (for which he was sentenced to death in absentia in 1979) that he received for rallying to the government in 1996. His wife, Ieng Thirith, former Minister of Social Affairs and sister-in-law of Pol Pot, in turn, was also charged with crimes against humanity for her involvement "in the planning, direction, coordination and ordering of widespread purges" as well as the "unlawful killing or murder of staff members from within the Ministry of Social Affairs".<sup>26</sup> All served on the Standing Committee of the Khmer communist party and are presumed to have direct knowledge of and involvement in the mass atrocities carried out from 1975 to 1979, though they have insisted that Pol Pot made unilateral decisions. For his role during the Khmer Rouge regime, Khieu Samphan is charged with "murder, extermination, imprisonment, persecution on political grounds and other inhumane

acts”, and for having “facilitated and legitimated” the regime’s crimes by conducting political training and helping to cover up the atrocities in international arenas in his capacity as Democratic Kampuchea’s former Head of State. In his book, Khieu Samphan insisted that “there was no policy of starving people. Nor was there any direction set out for carrying out mass killings” and that “there was always close consideration of the people’s well-being”.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, it is widely speculated that Khieu Samphan’s French lawyer, Jacques Verges, known for his defense of international terrorist, Ilich Ramirez Sánchez, also known as “Carlos the Jackal”, Klaus Barbie, and Slobodan Milosevic, will try to implicate major powers, namely the United States and China, in his client’s defence. Along with Kaing Guek Ieu, more notoriously known as Duch, head of the Tuol Sleng extermination centre, all recently arrested Khmer Rouge leaders are awaiting trials, which are expected to begin in late 2008. However, reports of Khieu Samphan’s recent stroke, Noun Chea’s ill health, and Ieng Thirith’s possible early onset of dementia all cast a pall on the prospect of a successful completion of the process.

On 21 November, the court held the opening public session to hear the appeal entered by Duch’s attorneys for his release, citing the illegality of his years of imprisonment without a trial. This hearing, as David Scheffer, U.S. Ambassador at Large for War Crimes Issues and key negotiator, pointed out, was to be the “first public test of professionalism and hence credibility for the (tribunal)”.<sup>28</sup> In rejecting the appeal, co-prosecutor Robert Petit noted that “(Duch) at least bears some direct responsibility in the detention, torture and death of some 14,000 men, women and children.”<sup>29</sup>

The tribunal is expected to finish its work by 2009. Foreign prosecutors have argued that the resource constraint and a premature wrap-up could undermine the credibility of the process. Others have pointed out that corruption and political interference are the greater problems. Brad Adams, Human Rights Watch regional director, noted that “we have always said that the test is not arrests — the Cambodian government knows how to arrest people it doesn’t like — but whether fair trials can be carried out so that Cambodians can see that justice is possible in their country ... Thus far, the Cambodian government has given no sign that it intends to allow the Cambodian judges and prosecutors assigned to the tribunal to act independently”.<sup>30</sup> Also unresolved is the scope of the trials, which the Cambodian government has insisted should be confined to the “mastermind” of the atrocities “for the sake of national reconciliation”. Unlike other historical precedence, the ECCC is the first to be comprised of a majority of national judges, with an administration controlled by Cambodians, and one that took the longest — almost thirty years — to convene.

## Prospect in Retrospect

A decade after the 1997 coup that essentially did away with any semblance of genuine power sharing, the optimism held by many that elimination of political immobilism engendered by the coalition structure would remove the impediments to progress have not borne out. In preparation for the meeting in 2007, the Cambodian Development Cooperation Forum, formerly known as Consultative Group, last year highlighted three areas for improvement, namely the passing of anti-corruption law, enactment of comprehensive judicial reforms, and commitment to natural resource management. No milestone progress has yet been made on any of these three critical fronts. Economic growth, while undeniable, has not resulted in significant trickling down into rural communities and the urban underclass. If anything, the expansion of tourism, of export and plantation economy, and of agro development projects has produced increased concentration of wealth and a widening of class disparity. The vast majority of Cambodians continue to live without a decent wage, electricity, clean water, and other fundamental aspects of human security. Worse, growth has not only failed to reduce but, in fact, has contributed to the increase in the violation of social and political rights.

Despite limited progress on reform goals, the donor community has been unwilling to demand accountability. Given the prevailing exigencies of the war against global terrorism and a world order with shifting centres of gravity, there is perhaps an even greater reluctance now to resort to conditionality. Concerns that Cambodia, with its proximity to regional sites of Islamic activism and weak border control, may become a hub for terrorist cells and for global criminal networks, including the Russian mafia, have strengthened the argument in some corners for constructive engagement. In the same vein, wariness of China's expanding influence and the desire for foothold of influence and access has effectively muffled international protestations against environmental degradation and other flagrant abuses. These political shifts and prospect for juggling competing power interests are not lost on the Cambodian leadership. The dismissive reception that UN Human Rights Commissioner, Ghass, received during his recent visit to Cambodia is an indication of the disregard for international opinion and, correspondingly, the impotence of the international community.

Where power interests trump other concerns, transnational civil society remains one of the key forces of accountability. Entities such as the U.K.-based Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), an alliance of big buying companies, unions and non-government organizations, are making significant impact in helping negotiate power disparities. In Cambodia, ETI was instrumental in recent labour dispute

mediation and in reducing labour-unfriendly practices. Its mission has been aided by the growing strength of informed global consumers and by the cooperation of multinational companies, such as Zara and H&M, needing and wanting to cater to this socially responsible market. In this era of global interdependence, accountability can be leveraged through different sources and from different arenas. It begins, however, with the recognition that these entrenched problems need global intervention and that failure to do so has global ramifications.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Phnom Penh Post*, “Preliminary Findings and Assessment: ‘Cooling-off Period’, Polling and Vote Counting in Second Mandate Commune Council Elections”, 3 April 2007.
- <sup>2</sup> *Phnom Penh Post*, “2007 Commune election results versus 2002 CPP vs. SRP”, 6–19 April 2007.
- <sup>3</sup> For details on election results, see National Elections Committee, “Official Results of 2007 Commune Elections”, 4 May 2007.
- <sup>4</sup> USAID, “Gender Assessment in Cambodia”, Draft report, March 2006, p. 22.
- <sup>5</sup> *Phnom Penh Post*, “Election Campaign Matures”, 23 February–8 March 2007.
- <sup>6</sup> *Phnom Penh Post*, “Donors Put Spotlight on Petro Cash”, 20 April–3 May 2007.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, “A Mouse in Asia gets Ready to Roar”, 28 July 2007.
- <sup>9</sup> For more discussions on the garment industry and global market, see *South China Morning Post*, “Mainland Sews Up Market Share”, 13 February 2006.
- <sup>10</sup> Economic Institute of Cambodia, “Assessment of Corruption in Cambodia’s Private Sector”, July 2006.
- <sup>11</sup> *Phnom Penh Post*, “Islands in the Stream of Cash”, 10–23 August 2007, p. 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Bruce McKenney and Tola Prom, “Natural Resources and Rural Livelihoods in Cambodia: A Baseline Assessment”, CDRI Working Paper 23, p. 7, 2002.
- <sup>13</sup> See FAO, “Global Forest Resource Assessment”, 2005.
- <sup>14</sup> Global Witness, Press Release, 17 June 2007.
- <sup>15</sup> Global Witness, “The Family Tree”, Report 2007.
- <sup>16</sup> See Asian Development Bank, “Cambodia: Establishment of the Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization II” (Final Report), Phnom Penh, November 2005.
- <sup>17</sup> Economic Institute of Cambodia, Survey, November 2003, p. 2.
- <sup>18</sup> So Sovannarith et al., “Social Assessment of Land in Cambodia”, Working Paper 20 CDRI, Phnom Penh, p. 30. See also Kim Sedara, Chan Sophal, and Sarthi Acharya, “Land, Rural Livelihoods and Food Security in Cambodia: A Perspective from Field Reconnaissance”, CDRI Working Paper 24, p. 3; and USAID, “Gender Assessment”, 2006.
- <sup>19</sup> For more detailed discussion on the land question, see So Sovannarith et al., “Social Assessment of Land in Cambodia”.

- <sup>20</sup> USAID, “Gender Assessment”, 2006, p. 47.
- <sup>21</sup> Some estimates place the number of Cambodian migrants to Thailand at 200,000 per year.
- <sup>22</sup> See UNIFEM, 2004 and USAID, “Gender Assessment”, 2006, p. 41.
- <sup>23</sup> Gorman Siobhan, Pon Dorina, and Sok Kheng, “Gender and Development in Cambodia: An Overview”, CDRI Working Paper 10, p. 12.
- <sup>24</sup> Ed Johnson, “Khmer Rouge Leaders Charged by Tribunal: Profiles Bloomberg”, 29 November 2007.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Thomas Fuller, “Ex-official of Khmer Rouge and Wife Arrested”, *International Herald Tribune*, 12 November 2007.
- <sup>27</sup> See Khieu Samphan, “Reflection on Cambodian History Up to the Era of Democratic Kampuchea”, excerpt received by author.
- <sup>28</sup> Agence France Presse, “Khmer Rouge Jailer to Appeal Detention by Cambodia Court”, 20 November 2007.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, “Cambodian Justice Moves Forward”, 21 November 2007.