



For immediate release

1 April 1997

STATEMENT OF MR. THOMAS HAMMARBERG, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE  
OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN CAMBODIA

I am deeply shocked and outraged by the barbarous grenade attack of Sunday, 30 March 1997 which killed at least 16 people and injured over 120 others, including members of the Khmer Nation Party, journalists, police officers and bystanders. The killers showed absolute disregard for the lives of innocent people and must be condemned in the strongest terms possible.

This was a clear attempt to assassinate the leadership of an opposition political party who was conducting a legal and peaceful political demonstration. The perpetrators and sponsors of this attack, no matter what their positions or connections, must be identified, arrested, tried and sentenced according to Cambodian law.

Given the lack of proper investigation and the failure to bring to justice the perpetrators of previous politically related violence, including the September 1994 murder of journalist Noun Chan, the September 1995 grenade attack on the home of Son Sann and his supporters in a nearby pagoda, the ransacking of the offices of "New Liberty News" in October 1995, the murder of journalist Thun Bun Ly in May 1996 and other cases, I have serious concerns about the possibility of a serious, professional investigation in this matter. I call on the Royal Government to commit itself fully to a proper and thorough investigation.

I am concerned at the suggestion that the target of this attack, Mr. Sam Rainsy, should be arrested for staging an illegal demonstration. This demonstration was approved in writing by the co-Ministers of Interior on 29 March 1997 in accordance with Cambodian law and the Cambodian Constitution. The right of peaceful protest is among the most fundamental of democratic and human rights. Instead of being subjected to a murderous attack, the persons attending such a demonstration should have received police protection. This is the duty of a government in a democratic society which respects human rights.

I am also concerned that this massacre, the recent factional fighting in Battambang and the many other unresolved cases of politically related violence have created an environment which will make the holding of free and fair elections much more difficult. I therefore encourage the Royal Government and all political parties and leaders to take every possible step to end political violence and intimidation in Cambodia and ensure the safety of all Cambodians to fully and freely participate in the political life of the country.

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Towards that end I call on all political leaders to enter into a formal agreement to renounce the use of violence and to impose strict discipline upon all military, police and irregular forces under their respective control to carry out this agreement. After so many years of war and violence, the Cambodian people deserve to live in an atmosphere free from political violence and fear thereof. Only Cambodia's political leaders can make this happen.

Finally, I would like to offer my sympathy to those injured and my most sincere condolences to the families of those who were murdered. There is no place for acts such as this in Cambodia or anywhere else. Please be assured that I and the United Nations will do everything in our power to ensure that justice is done in this case.