



Statement of the Cambodia Office of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights

2 April 1997 - It is with profound sadness and shock that the Cambodia Office of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights expresses its condolences to the victims and families of the 30 March 1997 grenade attack. We call on residents in Cambodia to assist the victims and their families with financial and material assistance as they make funeral arrangements for the dead or face the large medical costs for the wounded.

The 30 March attack violated the most fundamental of human rights – the right to life – in a particularly callous and chilling manner. The persons attending this government authorised rally had the right under the Cambodian Constitution, Cambodian law and international law to freedom of association and freedom of expression in an atmosphere of safety. Unfortunately, on 30 March, each of these rights was violated in a most violent and brutal manner. It is the responsibility of law enforcement authorities to protect these rights. The Cambodia Office joins the UN Secretary-General's call on the Royal Government to take all appropriate measures to see that such incidents are not repeated.

The indiscriminate nature of this attack killed and maimed various members of the Cambodian community such as sugar cane sellers, motorcycle taxi drivers, factory workers and children playing in the park. Surely, the attackers could not have been unaware that their acts of terrorism would kill and wound innocent passersby as well as legal, peaceful demonstrators.

Previous investigations into political violence against journalists and others have not led to the identification and prosecution of perpetrators. This inevitably contributes to a climate of impunity. The Cambodia Office supports the creation of a truly independent, non-partisan Commission to investigate this attack as thoroughly and expeditiously as possible. Consideration might be given to the inclusion of internationally respected criminal investigators on such a commission, which should make its findings and method of investigation open to public scrutiny as soon as the investigation is complete. The success of this investigation will be seen as an important indicator of the Royal Government's oft-stated commitment to the rule of law.

Political violence of this nature necessarily casts a long shadow over the atmosphere for the upcoming local and national elections. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has called on all sides to exercise restraint and do their utmost to ensure a political process conducive to the holding of free and fair elections. The Cambodia Office joins in urging Cambodian leaders to re-establish an atmosphere of safety in which persons of all political views can safely take part in Cambodia's political development.