



## U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights condemns poison scare killings

Phnom Penh, Friday, September 4, 1998 - The Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights strongly condemns the attacks which have taken place on Thursday and today against ethnic Vietnamese people accused of responsibility for a spate of suspected poisonings in the Phnom Penh area.

So far these have resulted in the violent deaths of three people and serious injury to two others. The Office investigation into the three killings has so far shown no evidence implicating those who have been attacked. The Office is also investigating reports of eight further cases of people who have been attacked as a consequence of this scare.

It is particularly regrettable that this food poisoning issue has begun to acquire racial and political overtones. That Vietnamese members of the community have been murdered or beaten by mobs on suspicion that they are behind this is a tragedy.

The COHCHR calls on all political leaders, parties, demonstrators and their followers to exercise heightened responsibility at this time in avoiding statements which may incite violence against persons of Vietnamese origin, whatever the reason.

In the current volatile context further statements by irresponsible political leaders inciting racist actions may lead to further violence and death. The Cambodia Office calls on the authorities to:

1. Condemn the acts of violence against Vietnamese people.
2. Clarify through public media the situation regarding the alleged poisoning.
3. Appeal to the public to remain calm and refrain from any violence in connection with this issue.
4. Instruct police to take firm action to arrest the perpetrators of these murders and beatings

The issue should be thoroughly investigated by the relevant authorities so that the facts are clearly established. Anyone found responsible should be dealt with by the judicial authorities according to law.

The COHCHR offers its sympathy and condolences to all individuals and their families who have been suffering as a consequence of the current scare, be they the victims of suspected poisoning, or the victims of so-called mob-justice.