



**Special Representative of the Secretary-General  
for Human Rights in Cambodia**

គំណាទពិសេសរបស់លោកអគ្គលេខាធិការទទួលបន្ទុកសិទ្ធិមនុស្សប្រចាំកម្ពុជា



**A Message to the Children and Youth of Cambodia  
from Special Representative Yash Ghai, 10 December 2005**

I am delighted to send this message to the children and youth of Cambodia on the first Human Rights Day since my appointment by the Secretary-General of the United Nations as his Special Representative for human rights in this country.

When the Khmer Rouge regime was overthrown, everyone realized that the suffering of the people was the result of massive violations of human rights. They resolved that never again would they tolerate denial of their rights. They gave the protection of human rights a prominent place in the new Constitution. The international community pledged to assist Cambodia in the development and observance of human rights.

Now attitudes towards human rights have become very divisive, and some people think that advocates of human rights are trouble-makers and obstacles to development. In this argument the real meaning of human rights is getting lost. So what are human rights, really? The idea of human rights arose in a particular historical and social context, but in the course of struggles against oppression by people around the world, rights have become a key element in creating a society that truly gives everyone a chance to live a meaningful life.

The fundamental principle of human rights is that everyone is equal in rights and dignity, regardless of whether the person is rich or poor, young or old, weak or powerful. This upsets the current order of things in many societies, but it creates the possibility of relationships based on respect and fairness.

Solidarity, another important principle of human rights, recognizes that we are all human beings, we share the same needs and aspirations. Therefore we cannot be complete if others suffer from exploitation and oppression: the suffering and humiliation of others can so easily become our own. Rights mean that we should treat everyone around us with tolerance, respect and understanding. Through the rights of expression and association we, as the community, can exchange ideas peacefully and cooperate. Human rights are also about our responsibility to our neighbours and to our society.

Rights are our protection against unjust or oppressive government, creating rules about relations between people and the state. They enable people to choose their leaders and determine the policies of the state. They are about dialogue and participation. They ensure the accountability of the government and integrity of its leaders.

The idea of dignity, which is so central to rights, means that society must try to ensure that everyone has security and that their basic needs for such things as food, shelter, clothing and clean water are met. Without such conditions, people cannot really participate on an equal basis.

Children and young people represent the hope for a Cambodian future in which the principles I have outlined here can become reality. On this Human Rights Day, I hope that children and parents can discuss the real meaning of human rights for resolving the country's many problems. This process can begin with every family, every person, at school, in the streets and markets, as well as in the public life of this country.