



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

Représentant spécial  
du Secrétaire-général des Nations Unies  
pour les droits de l'homme au Cambodge

**Statement by Ambassador Thomas Hammarberg, Special Representative  
of the United Nations Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia**

16 September 1998 – The Special Representative is gravely concerned by the increasing numbers of arrests, disappearances, and discoveries of bodies being found in and around Phnom Penh since the government's September 7 crackdown on opposition protesters. During the past week at least two people have been killed during demonstrations, while the bodies of 16 others have been found floating in rivers, in irrigation ditches, and in shallow graves around the capital.

Many of the bodies bear signs of torture or other violence including bullet wounds and strangulation marks. Several of the bodies had their hands tied behind their back and were gagged and blindfolded. Four bodies have been examined by Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (COHCHR) staff while detailed descriptions of the other twelve have been obtained from interviews with multiple witnesses. The twelve include three women and two people in the clothing of Buddhist monks. Only one victim – Sath Sopheatra, 19, a student at the Bak Touk high school – has been positively identified. He was found together with another body near Samraong pagoda, in the Phnom Penh Thmei quarter of Phnom Penh. Both bodies were riddled with bullets and showed signs of beating. The COHCHR has established from witnesses that the two were taken to the place on 9 September apparently by plain-clothes police, and executed there by members of the district Gendarmerie. Sath Sopheatra is reported to have taken part in demonstrations up to September 8. According to police, both he and the other victim were robbers. In addition to the 16 bodies seen, so far COHCHR is investigating a further dozen reports of bodies being found by villagers in the vicinity of Phnom Penh. Information on all cases confirmed will be submitted to the Government in order that each can be thoroughly investigated.

During this same period the Special Representative has received credible reports of scores of demonstrators being arrested, including students and Buddhist monks. Numerous other people have been reported missing by relatives. These arrests have been carried out in the capital reportedly by the Gendarmerie and the police, including the intervention police and Flying Tiger units. Despite the high number of arrests reported, the authorities have so far acknowledged only 22 arrested persons who are being detained in the Tuol Kork district police station, Phnom Penh.

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Enquiries made by the Cambodia Office of the HCHR with the Gendarmerie and at almost every district police station in the capital have been unsuccessful, with the authorities denying having arrested or detaining anyone. The Special Representative is seriously concerned that no other arrests have been acknowledged. He will soon submit a list of missing persons and reported arrests to the Government. While he is aware that in some instances demonstrators armed with slingshots have fired marbles or thrown rocks at security forces, he understands that by and large, most demonstrators were essentially peaceful. The reason for these arrests of demonstrators is therefore unclear.

Given the urgency of the situation, the Special Representative calls on the Government to acknowledge publicly all instances of arrests and detention in connection with the demonstrations since September 7. Names of detainees and their current whereabouts should be made available, so that families can be informed, and charges against each individual clarified. In the absence of credible charges, these persons should be immediately released. All places of detention should be open to visits by the COHCHR and International Committee of the Red Cross. The Government should ensure that no one is detained in places that are not legal, and that those who may be held by security units are not harmed.

The Special Representative calls once again for all parties involved in the current sensitive political situation, including political leaders, security forces, demonstrators and the public to refrain from using violence, and to commit themselves to dialogue as a means of resolving their differences. Violence can only nurture the desire for revenge and provoke still more violence.