



PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

17 March 1997

Press Conferences by
Mr. Thomas Hammarberg,
Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General
for Human Rights in Cambodia

On Tuesday, 18 March 1997, two press conferences will be held by Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Human Rights in Cambodia, at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Cambodia, #363 Sisowath Quay. The first press conference begins at 10:30 for the Cambodian media and the second one begins at 11:30 for the international media.

Mr. Hammarberg is in the process of completing another visit to Cambodia which began on 5 March. As with previous visits, information is being gathered on the human rights situation in Cambodia. In gathering information, Mr. Hammarberg has been meeting with several government officials, court members, teachers and representatives of organizations working with the people of Cambodia. They include Ministries, Judges, Provincial Officials, National Police, Prison and Military Officials, Foreign Donor Organizations, and Representatives of Cambodian and International NGOs.

The following are a number of human rights issues which Mr. Hammarberg has been addressing during this visit and will be highlighted during the Press Conferences:

Elections

Priority is required for completing the drafting and passing of election related laws. After the laws are passed, the necessary time is needed for the correct preparations of the elections, including the organizing of an effective monitoring system.

Supreme Council of Magistracy (SCM)

The Supreme Council of Magistracy has never convened. This is unfortunate, as this body is essential for the appointment of judges and the overseeing of the functioning of the judiciary. SCM is also to appoint three of the members of the Constitutional Council which has yet to be established. Again, this delay is disappointing; this body has important functions one of which is to resolve disputes in connection with national elections.

Article 51 of the Civil Servants Law

The recent remarks made by H.E. Sar Kheng, Minister of Interior, and H.E. Chem Snguon, Minister of Justice, on amending this Article are very much welcomed, as were the earlier

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comments by the Co-Prime Ministers with the same positive message. It is strongly recommended that the Council of Ministers send the proposed amendment of Article 51 to the National Assembly as soon as possible.

Torture

It is recognized that torture remains a serious problem in Cambodia. Mr. Hammarberg welcomes the Human Rights and Law Training of the National Police, Prison Officials, Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and Royal Gendarmerie. However, personnel of those state institutions are the primary perpetrators of torture. In September of 1996, Mr. Hammarberg sent a memo to the Royal Government outlining several cases of torture committed by personnel of the Royal Gendarmerie and recommending the government take the necessary actions. As of March 1997, necessary actions have not been taken.

Journalists

Violations of the right to freedom of expression continue, as exemplified with the latest case of Mr. Leng Sam Ang. In November of 1996, Mr. Hammarberg sent a memo to the Royal Government outlining a number of violations against journalists and recommending the government take necessary actions.

Labor Law

The Labor Law passed by the National Assembly on 10 January 1997 is very much welcomed. Upon its promulgation, the implementation of the Law is very important and necessary. Regarding the force used against strikers and NGO workers, and dismissals of workers related to the labor movement, both are very regrettable and appropriate action is recommended to redress these abuses.

Right to Education

The right to education is an essential right to securing economic, political and social development in Cambodia. Far too many areas of Cambodia are without schools or may have schools but do not provide adequate education. The drop-out rate is high, in particular among girls. As more schools are being built which is welcomed, more attention must be given to improving the quality of education.

If you would like to make any inquiries regarding the Press Conferences, please contact Mr. Christophe Peschoux, Special Assistant to Mr. Hammarberg and to the Director of the Cambodia Office and Mr. Heng Ham Kheng, Human Rights Assistant. Telephone numbers where they can be reached are 015833302 and 362797.