



**Statement of the  
Special Representative of the Secretary-General  
for human rights in Cambodia,  
Professor Peter Leuprecht**

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**58<sup>th</sup> session**

Mr. Chairman,

It is now over three years that I am acting as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for human rights in Cambodia. My ambition was and remains to help the people of Cambodia who have suffered so terribly in the last thirty years. They and their children deserve a better future. Ensuring respect for human rights is a privileged means of reducing human suffering of which there is still far too much in Cambodia.

As I speak to you once again, I cannot help thinking of the women, men and children whom I meet in Cambodian cities, villages, slums, prisons, schools and shelters. Often sitting on the ground, in a hut, under a tree or on the wooden floor of a simple pagoda, I listen to them, to their problems and concerns, their hopes and their fears, and I am trying to relay these to the international community. Life is harsh for most of these people who worry about their future and that of their children.

I have repeatedly said and written that Cambodia is plagued by four basic evils: poverty, violence, corruption and lawlessness. Prime Minister Hun Sen himself has told me that he agreed with this analysis which, unfortunately, is still valid today.

True, there has been progress. The general election of 27 July 2003 marks an important step on Cambodia's road to democracy. There was a marked improvement in the technical aspects of election. The month-long campaign period allowed for more freedom of expression and access to the media than in previous elections. Polling was conducted in a generally peaceful and orderly manner. On the other hand, there was still intimidation and violence, including killings, which continued after the election. Arbitrary restrictions were placed on freedom of assembly and expression in the months prior to the campaign. The National Election Committee, though undoubtedly more professional than its predecessor, was reluctant to make use of its powers of sanction.

I strongly deplore that in connection with the election politicians from several political parties, including the Sam Rainsy Party and FUNCINPEC, indulged in aggressive anti-Vietnamese hate speech. Ethnic Vietnamese have been harassed before, during and after the election.

Now it is to be hoped that the political leaders will rapidly overcome the deadlock that has prevailed since the election and that a stable democratic government will be formed which should be able to address and to respond to the burning needs of Cambodians.

What do Cambodians need?

They need a truly democratic regime based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. They need a real separation of powers and transparent, neutral and accountable state institutions which they can trust.

They need access, *equal* access, to justice, health care and education. They need an honest and trustworthy public service and not self-service by those in positions of power. They need a bridging of the glaring gap between "pays légal" and "pays réel".

They need poverty to be reduced and their environment, including the forests, to be preserved. They need to be protected against exploitation – exploitation by corporations acting under the mantle of land and forestry concessions, sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

They need civil society to flourish as an essential element of democracy.

They need responsible political leaders who have the interests and needs of the people and not their own selfish interests at heart. They do not need sterile demagoguery and manoeuvring by corrupt and self-centered politicians.

To come to terms with the horrible past that still haunts it, Cambodian society needs catharsis and healing. The Khmer Rouge trial is overdue. It is to be hoped that the agreement signed with the United Nations last June will be speedily ratified and implemented and that the trial will be accompanied by a determined effort of public information and education.

The journey from the killing fields to peace, harmony, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights is long and arduous. Cambodia has come a long way on this road, but it still has a long way to go and should be able to rely on the continued solidarity and support of the international community.

The United Nations has a special and heavy responsibility with regard to Cambodia. After its deafening and scandalous silence at the time when the Cambodian tragedy was unfolding, it has produced an endless litany of assurances and commitments towards this country. I owe it to my commitment to the Cambodian people and to my conscience to state very clearly that I regret that in the draft resolution there is no mention of the General Assembly's intention to continue consideration of the situation of human rights in Cambodia. This, I understand, is the result of a "deal" which in my view is not based on the realities of the human rights situation in Cambodia, but on considerations of political expediency. It can be seen as part of the regrettable trend away from the UN addressing specific country situations which has developed over more than thirty years and has considerably increased the UN's capacity in the field of human rights. It is a misunderstanding or a deliberate misrepresentation to describe the UN's involvement with regard to the human rights situation in a specific country as a kind of harassment. In reality it is the expression of the solidarity of the international community in the defence and promotion of human rights.

As far as Cambodia is concerned, it should be added that efforts to reduce UN involvement and assistance in the area of human rights are far from having the support of the whole spectrum of authorities and political forces in the country. Certainly they do not have the support of civil society which, luckily enough, exists in Cambodia although it tends to be ignored, brushed aside or discredited by some of those holding political power.

The United Nations would once again make a serious mistake if it were to reduce its involvement and commitment regarding the human rights situation in Cambodia. The people of Cambodia should be able to continue to rely on the solidarity of the international community in their struggle for democracy, rule of law, human rights and a life in dignity.