
Interview: Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen

At the end of the 20th century, still no cure for violence

On Sept. 17, 1999, Cambodia's Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen gave an interview to *EIR* Southeast Asia correspondent Gail G. Billington, in New York City. The Prime Minister was in New York for the opening of the UN General Assembly, which he addressed on Sept. 20. *EIR* had previously interviewed the Prime Minister in Phnom Penh, on Jan. 18, 1999 (see *EIR*, Feb. 12, 1999). In the intervening months, Cambodia, under Prime Minister Hun Sen's leadership, has achieved the greatest level of peace, stability and unity in over 30 years, thanks to which, the country has begun to turn its attention away from war and increasingly to nation-building and the general welfare.

As part of the process of restoring the nation's serenity, the opportunity now exists for Cambodia to come to grips with the horrors of the "killing fields" regime of the Khmer Rouge. From 1975-79, the Khmer Rouge government was responsible for the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians, out of a total population of approximately 7.5 million, by torture, execution, disease, and starvation. These were Cambodians killing fellow Cambodians, in Cambodia.

In March 1999, the Defense Minister of the Khmer Rouge, Ta Mok, a.k.a. "The Butcher," and Kang Khek Ieu, a.k.a. "Duch," the Khmer Rouge's master executioner at the Tuol Sleng prison, a former high school in Phnom Penh, were taken into custody. In early September, shortly before the expiration of their six-month detention, the two Khmer Rouge officials were charged under a 1979 Cambodian law outlawing genocide.

Since January, the Royal Cambodian Government has been in discussion with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and the UN Legal Affairs office on the terms of a tribunal for the Khmer Rouge. The last proposal from the UN's Legal Affairs office was that a *special* tribunal be created under which Cambodia would adopt entirely new laws to allow foreign judges and foreign lawyers, not only to participate in proceedings in Cambodian courts, but to hold the majority of seats on the judges' panel and as prosecutors.

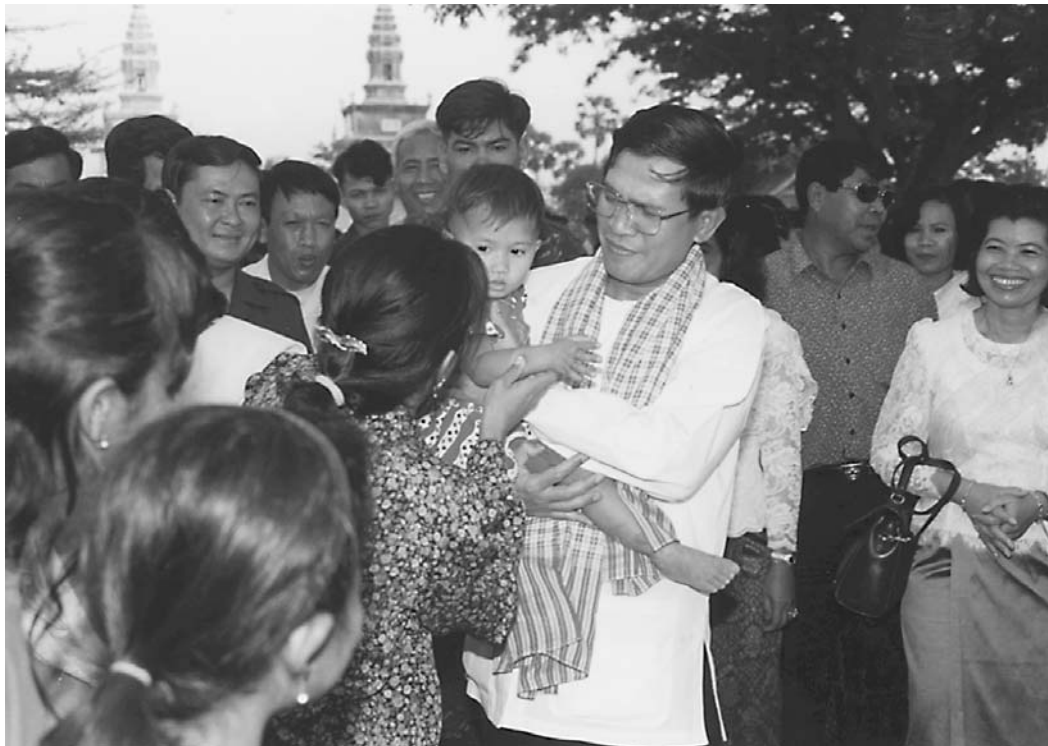
As Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen makes clear in the following interview, the United Nations' track record on bringing the Khmer Rouge to account for its crimes against

fellow Cambodians, frankly, stinks. Leaving aside the effect of the massive U.S. "secret" bombing campaign in 1969 and from 1973-75, in fostering the environment that made possible the Khmer Rouge's ascent to power, from 1975 continuously until 1993, either in its own name, or as a party in the ruling coalition, the Khmer Rouge retained Cambodia's seat at the United Nations. Worse still, evidence exists that the U.S. and other foreign governments financially supported the Khmer Rouge and its coalition partners through U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) following its ouster from power in 1979. Such funding continued through "pro-democracy" NGOs well past the attempted 1997 coup. As he states, Prime Minister Hun Sen's repeated efforts to have the word "genocide" stated explicitly in the text of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords, were defeated by the dominant influence of UN Security Council permanent members.

Even under the first-of-its-kind UN peacekeeping operation, the UN Temporary Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), from 1991-1993, the United Nations was powerless to disarm the Khmer Rouge. Indeed, the Khmer Rouge remained a threat to Cambodia's security, playing on factional discord within the government to attempt a final coup against then Second Prime Minister Hun Sen in July 1997. That threat did not subside until the surrender of the last significant Khmer Rouge leaders in December 1998.

The UN's demand for a foreign-dominated criminal tribunal is a dangerous precedent, for which there is no legal basis in the UN Charter. Would any of the permanent five members of the UN Security Council subject themselves to such a total breach of sovereignty? Cambodia's commitment to see justice served for its people is shown by the fact that the 1948 convention against genocide was ratified by the Royal Cambodian Government in 1951. The United States did not ratify the convention until 1995.

To insist that foreign judges and lawyers dominate such a tribunal, opens the door to demand investigation of the complicity of foreign nationals in perpetuating the Khmer Rouge. Topping the list would be Henry A. Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, architects of U.S. policy from the "se-



Cambodia's Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen campaigning during summer 1998 National Assembly elections. With the government's "triangular strategy," he explains, for the first time in history, Cambodia can "achieve peace and territorial unity."

cret" bombings to the cynical, geopolitical support of the Khmer Rouge in the Paris Peace Accords.—*Gail G. Billington*

EIR: Since we spoke last January, Cambodia has made major strides and received recognition for its increasing stability. What is the current situation in your country?

Hun Sen: From January until now is close to nine months, and the situation has been developing rapidly. Progress has been made because of the policy of the government, and the reforms the government has been carrying out throughout the country. We can take note of the development since January of the total collapse of the Khmer Rouge movement, especially the arrest of Ta Mok. In the history of the world, one can see that only Cambodia was able to arrest the commander in chief of the armed forces of the Khmer Rouge, that is, Ta Mok.

The collapse of the Khmer Rouge allows us to downsize the armed forces, which we have started with the collection of arms. So far we have collected around 7,000 rifles and guns, while more than 10,000 have been destroyed.

At the same time, we have also made strides in social and economic reforms. In spite of such achievements, there is much that remains to be done for Cambodia.

EIR: What are your priorities, domestically and vis-à-vis international relations?

Hun Sen: The government has a strategy called the "triangular strategy." The first angle is to solve the internal problem, to achieve stability, without which nothing could happen. It is the first time in the history of Cambodia that we could put an end to secessionism, put an end to armed opposition against the government, and it is also the first time that we could achieve peace and territorial unity.

The second angle is to quickly integrate Cambodia into the international community. This is another achievement made by the Royal Government after the general election of July 1998. Other achievements we can count include resumption of Cambodia's seat at the United Nations, which was suspended for more than a year; the inclusion of Cambodia into ASEAN [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations]; the normalization of relations between Cambodia and the multilateral financial institutions and donor countries. You may know that during the Consultative Group meeting in Tokyo [in February 1999], the financial institutions and donor countries decided to donate to Cambodia \$470 million for this year and next year. We are also in the process of talking with the financial institutions and donor countries for further grants and loans for the development of our nation.

Compared to the past, Cambodia now has friends in countries that were not friendly to Cambodia before. We could say that Cambodia has arrived at the peak of its international relations. Based on the favorable conditions Cambodia has achieved inside the country and in its international rela-

tions, we are trying our best for social and economic development. Right now you can take notice of the progress achieved by Cambodia after the introduction of the reforms.

EIR: Demobilizing the military is central to the peace and security of the country, and also to the issue of the Khmer Rouge. What is the demobilization plan? Does it include a retraining program, whereby Khmer Rouge soldiers can get training and education?

Hun Sen: In the demobilization, we have to downsize 79,000 of the armed forces, of which 55,000 are from the military and 24,000 from the police forces. In the process of demobilization, if we do not pay enough attention to training, to job creation, and to other related issues, it would be very dangerous. Therefore, we are seeking financial support from the World Bank and donor countries for this process. At least we have to provide each of the demobilized soldiers the amount of \$1,200 so that they would be able to create a living for themselves and integrate themselves into the society. In America, \$1,200 is very little, but in Cambodia, it is a big amount, which allows us to solve a number of problems. With this amount of \$1,200, they can build a small house, they can buy two oxen, and they have land available for cultivation. In this way, they could provide stability for our society. With the 79,000 demobilized armed forces, if all turn to the agriculture, they can cultivate at least 50,000 hectares of land.

So, in this demobilization, we can benefit on three points: First, we can save on spending for the military and security. The saving from spending for military, defense and security can be transferred to social spending, especially for education and public health. Furthermore, we can transform the non-productive force into the productive force. In our view, demobilization of the Armed Forces will increase productivity. That is what we can achieve from the policy of pacification and national reconciliation.

EIR: At the ASEAN ministerial meetings in Singapore in July, something very interesting happened, when the non-Asian “dialogue partners” put pressure on human rights, rule of law, etc. on some of the ASEAN countries. Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan said, the way to approach these issues is by revisiting the regional development projects, such as the Mekong River Development. If we revise these plans and see how to move development forward for the region, economic and social change will create the grounds for political change much better, much faster.

Hun Sen: I think what Surin Pitsuwan said is right, because respect of human rights, the practice of democracy, is not separate from social and economic development. I do not agree with some people who repeatedly say respect of human rights or the practice of democracy can be separated from other issues like peace, security, social and economic devel-

opment.

You can ask how to understand women’s rights, when a pregnant woman, suffering from malnutrition, gives birth to a child, who then dies during or after delivery. How can we talk about her “rights,” when she is not taken care of? How can you talk about children’s rights when they suffer from malnutrition, have no education, and are left scavenging just to survive? So far, in our view, we put everything in one package: respect of human rights, the practice of democracy, along with peace, political stability, and development, especially social and economic development. Therefore, we always try to set up development projects through which we can improve the living conditions of the people, and through which we can enhance their material conditions and spirit. How can people share each other’s ideas, unless they know how to read and write? We have to provide them with schools; we have to provide them with teachers, and then they can become journalists or editors.

So, the Foreign Minister of Thailand, Surin Pitsuwan, has a view similar to mine.

EIR: It was pointed out to me that there are 100 newspapers in Cambodia, and you have such freedom of the press, that they can insult anybody.

Hun Sen: I think, in the whole world, Cambodia has the most newspapers and political parties, if you think of it relative to its population. You see, we have 5 million eligible voters, and we have 54 political parties, so we can say that 100,000 people can be for one party. We have radio, TV, newspapers; we have bulletins. Compared to the population, we can say there are 50,000 readers per newspaper. And the way they write, they can criticize anyone at will. The constitution of Cambodia prohibits any criticism of the King, but they still do that. For me, when I open the newspaper, I always see people cursing me. But I take it as a type of “disease of democracy.” We have to be open to democracy, however, we have also to promote professionalism, so that the quality can be enhanced.

EIR: The *Phnom Penh Post* recently carried, for the second time, a speech that UN Representative Lakhon Mehrotra had given, I believe, to journalists and diplomats in Phnom Penh, in which he strongly commended you for your “struggle against genocide and crimes against humanity for over a decade,” and said that you had uniquely identified “an essential connection between development, democracy and human rights.” Now, why would that be controversial?

Hun Sen: I think it’s normal to have controversy. As I said before, it is part of a necessary disease of democracy. It is no different from America, where a number of people criticize President Clinton, and other people commend President Clinton. So it is the same with me in Cambodia: Some people praise me and some people criticize me. In democratic

countries, you cannot have everyone say yes; there must be yes and no together.

EIR: On a tribunal for Khmer Rouge leaders, what is your proposal for the tribunal? And what exactly does Cambodia want to accomplish through such a tribunal?

Hun Sen: First of all, I have to stress the sovereignty of Cambodia, by which she has to be responsible to find justice for her people. We have also to see that the issues of the Khmer Rouge are different from Hitler in Germany and World War II. It is different from Bosnia and Yugoslavia, and it is also different from Rwanda.

We have to recall a bit about the Khmer Rouge, especially from 1975 to 1979, during the time the Khmer Rouge was in power. They practiced genocide, but they still had their seat at the United Nations. From 1979 to 1982, even though everyone realized that the Khmer Rouge carried out a policy of genocide, they continued to be seated at the United Nations with support from a number of countries. From 1982 to 1991, the Khmer Rouge still occupied the seat at the United Nations, as one party in the tripartite coalition government. From 1991 to 1993, the Khmer Rouge continued to hold the seat at the United Nations under the framework of the Supreme National Council of Cambodia, according to the terms of the Paris Peace agreement.

So the Khmer Rouge problem is complicated. It involves many countries; it involves many people, including the United Nations. When the Khmer Rouge was strong, no one would challenge the Khmer Rouge, even though during the talks negotiating the Paris Peace agreement, I suggested that the word "genocide" be included, but everyone objected to that. I was isolated, and I was under pressure to accept other words instead of the word "genocide," and I was also under pressure to accept the Khmer Rouge in the political solution.

The UNTAC operation spent around \$2 billion in Cambodia, but they could not do anything against the Khmer Rouge. The chief of the armed forces of UNTAC, Australian Lt. Gen. John Sanderson, and the chief of UNTAC, could not go into the Khmer Rouge area, simply because two small Khmer Rouge soldiers blocked their entry by laying bamboo across the road. Yesterday, I met someone who was one of the bodyguards of [Yasushi] Akashi [Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Cambodia] during the UNTAC period in Cambodia. This bodyguard was an eyewitness to the fact that Yasushi Akashi was barred from going into the Khmer Rouge area during that time, just because of one bamboo pole put across the road to block his entry.

But I told that bodyguard yesterday that we can now integrate Pailin into our territory, and we can also introduce development into those areas. We have managed to dismantle the political and military organization of the Khmer Rouge. We have managed that the former head of state, the former Prime Minister, the former Chairman of the National

Assembly, and the former ministers of the Khmer Rouge have surrendered to the government. And we have also arrested some of the Khmer Rouge leaders.

We have the obligation not only to dismantle the political and military organization of the Khmer Rouge, but also to see that justice is done for the Cambodian people through the legal process. Therefore, the proceedings will be carried out by the existing court of law of Cambodia.

What is the existing Cambodian law? We have a three-level legal system in Cambodia. First is the common court, which exists in the cities and the provinces. Second is the appeals court. Third is the Supreme Court. And we already have in the court, judges and prosecutors. However, we also take into consideration the possibility of having new laws, which would open the way for the participation of foreign judges and prosecutors in the hearing.

During my discussions yesterday with His Excellency, the UN Secretary General, I submitted to him the three options related to the participation or non-participation of the UN in the prosecution of the Khmer Rouge leaders. The first option is that legal experts from the United Nations, along with other lawyers, would help Cambodia to draft an additional law to allow the participation of foreign judges and prosecutors in the case. The second option is that there will be participation by the UN legal expert in drafting the additional law for Cambodia, but these experts would not participate in the Cambodian court. And the third option is that there will be no participation, no involvement from the United Nations, leaving the case to Cambodia to handle itself.

According to the nature of the problem, there may or may not be participation from the United Nations. There is no obligation at all for the United Nations to participate in that proceeding. But for Cambodia, we do have the obligation to go forward with this process. In reality, we have arrested, and have in custody, two Khmer Rouge leaders. Recently, some people said that Cambodia need not seek recognition of this process from the United Nations. I would like to say that we did not seek recognition from any other country, nor from the United Nations, to our prosecution.

You see it is ridiculous that at the time we were fighting against the Khmer Rouge, in 1979, we carried out the prosecution against the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer Rouge still enjoyed their seat at the United Nations. And if we now carry out the prosecution of the Khmer Rouge, again, without recognition from others and the United Nations, it means that the United Nations for its whole life has recognized the Khmer Rouge. You see, at the time we were fighting against the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer Rouge was legally recognized. At the time we carried out the prosecution of the Khmer Rouge, we were told that the process was not legal. So it seems that the Khmer Rouge enjoys eternal recognition.

However, we will try our best so that in the prosecution of the Khmer Rouge leaders it will be believed by the Cam-

bodian people and by the international community that justice has been done. And, we would like to stress that, with or without the assistance of the international community, we will still go forward with the prosecution of the Khmer Rouge leaders. Otherwise, without prosecution of the Khmer Rouge, we would be wrong to detain them. The most difficult thing is to arrest the Khmer Rouge leaders, but right now, we can arrest them.

EIR: What are the UN's objections exactly—but, first, I want to go back to January; then you had said Cambodia wanted the tribunal to cover the three periods: the period of the U.S. secret bombings in the late 1960s and 1973-75; second, 1975-79, when the Khmer Rouge was in power; and, third, the period after the Khmer Rouge, post-1979, with the fight in the UN and the international community. Would all of that be back on the table?

Hun Sen: That was just the *aide-mémoire* for others to take into consideration the time frame of the period to be dealt with, in terms of “accountability.” The crime of genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge was mainly from 1975 to 1979. But around this central period, we also had the period from 1970 to 1975, from 1979 to 1998. For us, we would like to focus on the period of 1975-79.

But, if you would like to have full accountability, that would mean going from number 1 to 100. You cannot just take into consideration number 50 to number 55. Because at the time Ta Mok is questioned, one has to ask, when were you born? How did you grow up?

But one should not be worried about accountability from the beginning until the end, because we would like also to focus on the point of genocide. With this question, it is already difficult. In Cambodia, we have a saying that if the bone does not hurt, there is no need to take a stick and hit it.

EIR: Well, there is always the opportunity for some people to write their memoirs—important stories for grandchildren.

Hun Sen: If no one writes the book, I already did it, and I am also prepared to write another one.

EIR: Do you see the constraints that the UN has imposed on the tribunal as being a continuation of the period when the Khmer Rouge held the seat at the United Nations even though, at that point, everyone knew what they had done?

Hun Sen: Yesterday, I handed to His Excellency, the General Secretary of the United Nations an *aide-mémoire*, after which I had the feeling that we could carry out our activities as the people of Cambodia, as the government of Cambodia, as a sovereign country, as a legal government.

I did not sign an agreement, like the Paris Peace agreement, that says unless the United Nations participates, the operation cannot move forward. In the case of the trial and prosecution of the Khmer Rouge leaders, we can still move

forward without the participation of others. However, we always welcome whatever assistance would be given to us. But one should not use this assistance to delay the prosecution of the Khmer Rouge leaders, because they are very old, and, if we delay the prosecution, they might die before the prosecution.

I told His Excellency Kofi Annan yesterday that I do not want to engage in an endless discussion. I would like to have the draft law in place so that the prosecution could move forward.

EIR: I myself have been very preoccupied with Indonesia in the last two weeks. The Cambodian peacekeeping mission under UNTAC was the first of its kind. Were you at all disturbed when you saw the somewhat brutal way in which the Security Council overrode Indonesia's concerns about their sovereignty in this matter over East Timor?

Hun Sen: Earlier, one might have thought of the issue of Indonesia's sovereignty, but with the latest developments, we recognize that it was the Indonesian government itself that accepted the multinational peacekeeping force to East Timor. Sending the multinational peacekeeping force into the area did not violate the sovereignty of Indonesia, since it has been accepted by Indonesia itself, and I am pleased to see that. Some Cambodian officials would also like Cambodia to participate, by sending Army or police forces for the operation in East Timor. But Cambodia is now engaged in social and economic issues; we are now undertaking reform of the Armed Forces, so that we would not be able to send troops there. We are now taking into consideration the possibility of some limited humanitarian assistance in order to alleviate the difficulties of the people there. When Cambodia was facing difficulties, the people of Indonesia also contributed to helping us, so we would like to reciprocate to the best of our ability.

Let me share with you my feelings, in which I do not feel it is normal for the UN operation, at this time, in East Timor. Psychologically speaking, there will be fighting between the militias in East Timor and with any force that will be going there. One can take note from the intervention of some countries in the UN Security Council that before going into East Timor, they talked about arresting the leaders there for prosecution. So, it means to me they are applying a policy to create troubled waters in order to catch the fish. It is different from my method, which I said in 1996, before we decide how to cook the fish—whether to bake it or to fry it—we must first catch the fish. That is how we were able to accomplish the surrender of the Khmer Rouge. It is psychologically wrong with the militia in East Timor, because they realize that even if they surrender, they would be brought to trial.

To curb violence, to create order, we should not use this language before taking action. You see, I do not know what

will happen in East Timor. If they send limited forces there with light weapons, then there will be fighting. And to support that, they will have to send tanks and artillery. In this way, they would *create* war there in East Timor. So, in this way, they are not going there to create peace, but to create war.

I do not want to lecture anyone, but I would like to suggest not to use any language that would disturb peace. That's what we would like to have. The tongue can create war, but it also can create peace.

EIR: At the end of the 20th century, what should we have learned about crimes against humanity? What should we know better not to do?

Hun Sen: This century provides us with many, many lessons. It also provides us with many achievements, but it also leaves behind many things for us to worry about. World War I and World War II took place in this century. Nuclear weapons, biological weapons, and chemical weapons were created in this century. In the ten years before the end of the century, war and fighting has erupted in many countries. At the end of the century, killing continues in Africa, in Asia, and even in Europe, in the Balkans region, which one did not expect to happen.

We recognize many achievements in this century, but

we also count many failures in this century, too. The fact that we cover our failures causes us to worry that, as we approach the new century, violence still exists in many places. There are still weapons' stockpiles in many places of the world, and even poor countries try to buy sophisticated weapons. Compared to the 19th century, we have many types of instruments for killing. So what will happen with the 21st century, if at this time, we possess too many instruments for killing? You see, even in America, last week, there was the killing in a church in Texas—that is our concern. Should we gather all the weapons and destroy them, or should we produce new weapons and modernize our armed forces?

We have to recognize that the century that is about to end has been a period in which science carried with it our full moral responsibilities. You see the scientist could create drugs. They did not create the pill to cure people, but they created the drug to spoil poor people. In this way, they are leading people into a world of drugs. Going into the new century, we have no cure to put an end to the violence. So we have to study the experience of the past in order to find a solution for the long-term period ahead.

EIR: Thank you.

Hun Sen: Thank you.

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