

want peace.

Ambassador Vang: So, I think with this ASEAN 10 of 500 million people, this is a big market. I wish the United States would increase cooperation, trade, and investment with Laos, by investing in electricity, supplying Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, and others in this region. I think that in the future, supposedly in the next 30-40 years, the availability of oil and gas will be reduced, and the use of electricity will increase. In that case, Laos will be booming. Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan has said that Laos will become the “Kuwait of Southeast Asia.”

I think so. Suppose one day we have electric batteries for cars; in that case, we will be booming. I saw on TV, big commentaries about the “greenhouse effect,” concerning the use of oil and gas.

EIR: Sounds like good a riposte to those environmentalists who oppose the hydropower plants.

Ambassador Vang: The hydropower in Laos does not harm the environment, because we develop it only in the mountain areas. In Thailand, they can develop only 17 dams. In Vietnam, they cannot develop, because of the population density along the river. If they develop, it floods the villages. Each case is different.

We developed our project very democratically. We asked the people first. We consulted them first. Everybody gave support in order to overcome the poverty. They have stayed there many, many years with no development. The first dam project was in Vientiane province, Nam Ngum 1. As a result of the development of that dam, the whole region has become developed, has electricity, roads have been built so people can market their products.

And the dam helps to protect the environment, too. I myself lived in the area. Before the construction of the dam, every year there were floods that destroyed all the crops. But in the 30 years since the dam was built, there have been only two floods, because the dam could not hold back the water from the mountains. I am 52 years old; before the dam, every year I saw floods. In our case, as the waters in the rainy season come down the Mekong River from China, the river swells, and if the water from the tributaries of the Mekong in Laos join at that same moment, it floods the entire country. So, if we can keep the water in the mountains, and prevent it from merging with the water from the tributaries, we reduce the flooding. Each region has its own problem.

EIR: Any final remarks?

Ambassador Vang: I wish to see friendship, cooperation, trade, investment between Laos and the United States increase for the good, for the benefit of our two people. Your success in development is good, and we have many things to learn from you.

EIR: I think we have things to learn from Laos and the other countries of Southeast Asia, including a quality of courage

and stamina in the face of tremendous adversity. Also, we must not get stuck in the past.

Ambassador Vang: There are some things we *don't* want to learn from you, too, like “gun democracy.” In Laos we confiscate all guns; only the police, soldiers, and militia can have guns. In Laos, we even collect hunting weapons, because they kill the tigers and other wildlife.

Let me also reflect on history. Before 1975, for 280 years, from 1695 to 1975, our country had been at war; infighting between rival factions led to the loss of our independence, and we were colonized. After 1975 was the first time for peace. There are 47 different ethnic groups in the country, the low-landers, up-landers, and high-landers. But there is no history of conflict between the ethnic groups. Some allied with the Americans, others not. But there has only been war for Laos between the people of Laos and foreigners.

Interview: Ouch Borith

Spare No Effort for Peace and Stability

Gail Billington interviewed His Excellency Ambassador Ouch Borith, Permanent Representative of the Royal Government of Cambodia to the United Nations, on May 2, 2000, in New York City.

EIR: Mr. Ambassador, where were you on April 17, 1975?

Ambassador Borith: In 1975, I was in Phnom Penh with my brother, my sister, and my father. I think it was April 16 when my father asked me to bring my sister to the center of the city to stay with my uncle, because the fighting was very intense, and our house was on the outskirts of Phnom Penh.



Ouch Borith

In the early morning of April 17, I went to pick up my sister and we were going back home, but unfortunately, the Khmer Rouge soldiers had blocked all the road access to my home, and they forced us to go into the direction that they had determined. We were then separated from my father and brother. Together with other hundreds of thousands of people, my sister and I were deported from the capital city of Phnom

Penh, and were forced to work extremely hard in the countryside, without having enough food to eat, until Jan. 7, 1979.

EIR: Your sister was how old at the time?

Ambassador Borith: At that time, she was only 17. I was 24. During the three years, eight months, and 28 days that we lived under the barbaric regime of Khmer Rouge, until Jan. 7, 1979, all Cambodian people endured atrocities and brutalities, which had never been experienced by any other nation before. I lost 12 members of my family, including my cousins and my brother, who were killed by the Khmer Rouge. I have never forgotten what the Khmer Rouge did against my people, my family, and myself. I have never forgotten these atrocities. The Cambodians have been suffering too much.

EIR: A tribunal for the Khmer Rouge has entered an entirely new phase in the last few days. Can you outline that?

Ambassador Borith: First of all, with regard to the trial of the Khmer Rouge, I can say that there has never been a time that the Cambodian government and people spared any efforts to eradicate Pol Pot's genocidal regime, to prevent its return to power for the second time, and to demand a trial of its specified leaders. In August 1979, the People's Court had been established; Pol Pot and Eang Sary were tried by this Court *in absentia*. The trial was attended and covered by international press and jurists. Then, in June 1997, the two co-Prime Ministers, Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen, wrote to the UN Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, asking for assistance in bringing the Khmer Rouge to trial.

As far as the negotiations since then, I am optimistic, because there has been much progress in this matter. So far as I know, we have the good fortune of a favorable decision on the formulation proposed by Sen. John Kerry [D-Mass.]. The proposals put forward by the UN Secretary General Annan, concerning the co-prosecutors and the co-investigating judges, have received the utmost consideration of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

I just want to add that Senator Kerry has played a very important role in this matter. His noble contributions have been highly appreciated by our government and our people.

The proposal is to create a panel of five judges who will rule on indictments to be issued. Senator Kerry's proposal was to have three Cambodian judges and two foreigners. To demonstrate our flexibility and our sense of goodwill, our Prime Minister Hun Sen has agreed to a panel of two Cambodian judges and three foreigners. However, a decision to block a case from proceeding would require the vote of four judges, including one of the Cambodian judges.

EIR: And this remains to be approved by the National Assembly?

Ambassador Borith: I can say that our National Assembly is still in discussion on this matter, and the rest of the draft law. Hopefully, I think that this very important matter would yield the endorsement of our National Assembly.

EIR: The tribunal in 1979 was dismissed by many experts as a "show trial," but that, in fact, was one of the first occasions in which what had been done to Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge was made public. That tribunal found that perhaps as many as 3 million people had died in the course of three years and eight months that the Khmer Rouge had been in power. Now, there are many reports indicating that the 3 million figure may be closer to what actually happened, than the generally accepted 1.7 million killed.

While that Tribunal has been criticized, what would have happened to Cambodia if the invasion led by Cambodians who had escaped into Vietnam, and backed by Vietnam, had not happened?

Ambassador Borith: I share your point of view that, in January 1979, though the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge were disclosed to international opinion and every country in the world, the tribunal was criticized by some countries, charging that Cambodia had been "invaded" by Vietnam, and who then ignored the decision taken by that tribunal regarding the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. I can say that the souls of 3 million Cambodian people who perished under the Khmer Rouge regime were valued less by those countries than the presence of the Vietnamese troops, which, in fact, assisted Cambodian nationalists to overthrow the Khmer Rouge regime and to save the Cambodian people from this barbaric regime. At that time, those countries cared neither for the suffering of our people nor justice for them. Furthermore, they isolated our Cambodian people from the world by putting economic and political sanctions against the Cambodian government in the country. It is even worse that they had supported the Khmer Rouge sitting at the United Nations, who continued fighting and killing our people from 1979 until 1991.

I was very surprised when the people of Cambodia were looking for a way to establish peace and stability for the country, and a lot of international opinion and some countries, which used to support the Khmer Rouge, who used to give assistance to Khmer Rouge leaders, tried to speak up about justice for the Cambodian people, tried to bring pressure to dictate to our government to establish a so-called "international tribunal" to try the Khmer Rouge leaders.

In such a situation, what kind of justice is there, for our people to speak out?

Our main goal is to bring justice to our people and at the same time, to maintain peace and stability for our people. Therein lies the point of a trial for the Khmer Rouge since 1979, and the question of a trial for the Khmer Rouge today. And this process has to be conducted smoothly and carefully in respecting the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Cambodia and maintaining peace and stability for our people.

EIR: Was there any other country indicating that they were prepared to take any action to stop the killings that were going on at that time?

Ambassador Borith: I, myself, as I have said before, since



The Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, after the Khmer Rouge had taken power. Within hours, the entire population was driven out.

April 17, 1975 until Jan. 7, 1979, was under the Khmer Rouge regime, and I never thought I could survive from this barbaric regime. I was getting as thin as the prisoners in Hitler's concentration camp during the Second World War. Every day, I prayed to God, or someone else, some country, to come to save Cambodia, to save us, but nobody, no country came to help us. I was very happy when I heard distant explosions and occasional bursts of gunfire, and I thought that maybe there were resistance groups fighting against the Khmer Rouge, and I prayed that they would defeat the Khmer Rouge as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, from April 1975 to Jan. 7, 1979, no country in the world came to save us from this regime. Even then, the nationalist forces formed a resistance against the Khmer Rouge, but they did not have enough soldiers, ammunition, or matériel to fight against the Khmer Rouge. So, they called upon the neighboring country, Vietnam, to assist them to save the Cambodian people from the Khmer Rouge.

EIR: That invasion led to fighting that lasted less than three weeks. Former U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Quinn had written a report early on, warning of the direction of Khmer Rouge policy, but it really wasn't until that tribunal that the scope of what went on became public. Where should Cambodia be 25 years from now, when your children are your age?

Ambassador Borith: For me, I think that 25 years from now is enough time for our people and government to build a brighter future for our country, but there are a lot of things that have to be done. I was under the Khmer Rouge, and I was in the first government after January 1979. I never stopped thinking about the needs of our people and their suffering, and how we could rebuild our country from nothing. I used

to say to all my colleagues here at the United Nations, every time I spoke about providing assistance to Cambodia, that to develop our country, we need first of all to develop the economic infrastructure of our country, with agriculture as the top priority, and to build human resources.

At the same time, we have to take the utmost consideration in improving other fields, such as the rule of law, the judiciary system, democracy and respect for human rights, and so on. These things would be done only if peace and stability exist in our country. The existence of peace and stability depends on national unity, solidarity, and national reconciliation, which have to be strengthened.

In this context, opposition parties play a very important role and useful service by giving constructive criticism to the nation, and not simply setting themselves up as "opposition" in name only. The Royal Government and the opposition jointly have to promote the national interest, social stability, and the general welfare of the people, so that Cambodia and her people may enjoy the fruits of long-lasting political strength, national stability, and may find their prosperity and brighter future, not only for 25 years, but forever.

EIR: Since the elections in July 1998, there has been a perceptible positive shift in view toward the country, including the recent quarterly review by donors, and even the negotiations on the tribunal.

Ambassador Borith: The favorable conditions created by the 1998 July general elections and the dismantling of the political and military organizations of the Khmer Rouge, peace and stability, which is a *sine qua non* condition for development, not only for Cambodia, but for all countries in the world, prevails all across the country for the first time after

many decades. Our government has achieved encouraging results in the implementation of the triangle strategy put forward by our Prime Minister Hun Sen. The third side of the strategy is the development of our country through the implementation and deepening of reforms such as military and police demobilization, fiscal administrative and judicial reforms, and to take strict actions in order to wipe out illegal logging.

I have reports on deforestation, where Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered all of the provincial governors, the military, and the police to strictly enforce the law. He even fired the Governor of Mondulhiri Province, and others, who were involved in illegal logging along the border with Vietnam. I am very optimistic about the prospects for the meeting in Paris this month of Cambodia's Consultative Group of Donors, because the donors know very well that our government has tried very hard to rebuild the country and to improve conditions in the country and the performance of the government. As to the trial of the Khmer Rouge leaders, a lot of the progress has been made with the noble contribution of Senator Kerry, some other friendly countries, and the goodwill of our government.

EIR: What percentage of the population lives in rural areas?

Ambassador Borith: I could say 90% live in rural areas as farmers.

EIR: And the literacy rate?

Ambassador Borith: I was in the government from 1979 until 1991, when it was the State of Cambodia, and our government tried at that time to push the people to attend classes. I myself was working in the provinces, and I recall that even in the rice fields, we set up classes with a blackboard and chalk. At night, we would have classes by torchlight.

After 1993, according to the statistics, adult literacy rates are significantly higher for men (79%) than for women (55%). The gender difference in adult literacy is smaller in the urban areas than in rural areas. About 33% are illiterate, and less than 1% have had any training beyond high school.

EIR: And access to clean water and electricity?

Ambassador Borith: I think that the majority of the rural areas still do not have electricity, but as for clean water, it is part of the health care policy of our government which, in spite of financial difficulties, has realized notable results. And I never forget what the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and Cambodians overseas have contributed in this matter, when I was in charge of one such organization during 1979-83.

EIR: NGOs have complained about "impunity," lack of "the rule of law," etc. A couple of problems, which carry over from the Lon Nol regime and the Khmer Rouge, include so-called "ghost soldiers" and the elimination of property titles after 1975. The first goes back at least to the Lon Nol government, when the ranks of the military became bloated with

phantom soldiers for which the United States did not hesitate to pay, but now costs a disordinate percentage of the budget. The Khmer Rouge abolition of property titles has compounded the difficulty of making land available for agriculture. Why do NGOs and the UN have such a hard time looking at issues like these in historical context?

Ambassador Borith: I think the NGOs and the UN have the right to criticize us on these matters, but I hope at the same time, that those who criticize us, will provide also assistance to our government. Why? Because those problems, as apart of the poverty of our people, as part of the social problem in Cambodia, are part of the legacy left behind by the Khmer Rouge, who destroyed the social fabric of the country. But, how can we take care of everything at the same time? We do not have enough judges, enough officers trained to handle the various problems. Only step by step can these problems begin to be solved. And this is not only for Cambodia, but also for any country emerging from war.

If we count 1993, Cambodia, the first coalition government, is only seven years old. We are like children, who start to learn to walk and to run. I think we have a lot to do for our younger people in Cambodia. I used to express my point of view in the Sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, that we need more time and more assistance to improve democracy, the respect for human rights, the rule of law, and the judicial system in my country. Therefore, as mentioned in the most important agenda of our government, the rapid alleviation of poverty and acceleration of economic progress are the top priority. And for me, we have to add in this priority, the development of human resources. In this context, we need assistance to improve our education system and scholarships for Cambodian students, to build a new generation. It is obvious that we cannot do that in our country—not only democracy and human rights, but in all fields. I do believe that once our people have enough to eat and become educated, once our people have knowledge of science and technology, Cambodia will certainly enter a more prosperous era.

EIR: Let's look at the government's plans for development. As part of this anniversary coverage, we will review the status of Greater Mekong Subregional (GMS) development, particularly as it relates to the three former Indochina countries.

Ambassador Borith: I can say that the GMS is a kind of regional initiative aimed at gathering all countries in the Mekong basin sub-region to undertake cooperation in trade, infrastructure, tourism, economy, etc. The Asian Development Bank [ADB] plays a privileged role in promoting this cooperation. Under the framework of the GMS initiative, the ADB has provided very kind assistance to Cambodia in many projects, in particular, construction of the highway from Phnom Penh to Ho Chi Minh City. I would like to point out also that the main purpose and function of the Mekong River Commission under the Mekong agreement in 1995, is to deal with cooperation, coordination, and management of the Mekong River, and in related resources among the four riparian coun-

tries, namely, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. For Cambodia, the Mekong River is vital in term of economic growth and development.

As I mentioned, 90% of our population live in rural areas, mostly engaged in farming, and our top priority is focussed on development of agriculture, environment, and to expand education and health care. We need to expand irrigation, rebuild and restore access to electricity, hydropower, and improve crops with fertilizer for our population.

We need to ensure that our people have enough food.

EIR: Is Cambodia food self-sufficient?

Ambassador Borith: Right now, we have a surplus of rice, but the price has fallen. I am optimistic because we have very good land, and our people work very hard, but we need to export.

EIR: In terms of industrial development, the garment sector dominates Cambodia's exports.

Ambassador Borith: Yes, it is true that in terms of industrial development, the garment sector dominates Cambodia's exports. In 1999, manufacturing is expected to increase only 3.7%, following the U.S. imposition of import quotas for garments from Cambodia. And I am grateful that the government of the United States decided to increase the import quota for Cambodia by 5%. This noble decision tremendously contributes to the development of our poor country.

EIR: I believe that you have seen our report on the Eurasian Land-Bridge. The Asian Development Bank's \$40 billion proposal for the Greater Mekong Subregional development is a subset of the Land-Bridge, which especially would benefit Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. I have seen estimates that the United States spent \$150 billion on the wars in the former Indochina. How does Cambodia see this project?

Ambassador Borith: As I said before, the ADB has contributed to develop this project tremendously. We are now at the beginning of the new millennium, a new opportunity to strengthen friendship among nations and people, with respect for sovereignty, integrity, and for mutual benefit, and that is why it would be very good if the American administration can help with ideas and assistance to those who were the victims of the Indochina wars, to rebuild their countries.

For Cambodia, you do not need to spend a lot; maybe \$1-2 billion or even half a billion, is a lot to expand agriculture and build up industry. It is a very good idea, and I do hope that the United States will resume its aid to Cambodia, instead of continuing its freeze on all but humanitarian assistance. Please do not continue to hold our people as hostages to the Cold War or partisan political interest. It is over. The Cambodian people have suffered a lot. Enough is enough.

EIR: The ADB makes the point that they expect half of the \$40 billion will come from private investment. When the Asian crisis hit in 1997, the projects ground to a halt. Do you

think that it is realistic to think that such private funds will become available within the time frame that these countries need for their development? In other words, so that your grandchildren are not still waiting for these projects to be completed?

Ambassador Borith: It is true that in 1997 all countries in Asia were affected by the financial crisis, but at different levels. I think the question is, How do we prevent a recurrence of this kind of crisis? Take the issue of globalization in the world: Some countries can profit from globalization, but others not. That is why we have to cooperate, to exchange views, how we can prevent such crises. I think that the problem for this and the next generation is how to prevent this crisis for all countries in the world. And this goes to the issue of the good will of the big countries to act equitably, to share the wealth. If those big countries do not have the good will to share technology, information, and wealth, then the problem remains.

Another point is that poor countries must work very hard to deal with this matter. We cannot just wait for the big countries to do something.

EIR: The former Indochina countries face the additional cost of cleaning up after the wars, including landmines, unexploded ordnance. Is there any estimate that your government has of *that* cost, because it is not included in this Greater Mekong Subregion plan?

Ambassador Borith: Estimates of the number of mines scattered throughout Cambodia vary from 6 to 10 million. It was estimated in 1996 that landmines still maim or kill around 200 to 300 people a month. The Cambodian Mine Action Center, established in 1993 with the kind assistance from Australia, Belgium, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Japan, U.S.A., and other international organizations, is working diligently to reduce this immense problem. I would like to inform you that during the period from August 1998 to March 1999, teams marked 154,869 meters of minefield perimeters and cleared 229,789 square meters of pathways. The team also found and destroyed 1,018 anti-personnel mines, 23 anti-tank mines, and 246 pieces of unexploded ordnance. Up to now, since 1993, an area of 69,906,043 square meters have been cleared. I cannot estimate exactly the cost of this huge and difficult problem, but we need to clear all landmines in my country. I can say that it costs a lot and takes many years.

EIR: I asked because we have said that the rate at which "Great Projects" such as the GMS are being built, especially under the current financial architecture, is inadequate. That's why we have called for a "New Bretton Woods" conference to reorganize the international monetary system, and that projects like this should be the driver of that reform. You just attended the Non-Aligned Meeting in Cartagena, to what extent was reform of the current system discussed?

Ambassador Borith: Every year, and almost every conference, we discuss the question of financial problems and devel-

opment. When we speak of development, the financial problem always comes up. For the members of the Non-Aligned Movement, and also at the South-South summit in Havana in April, this question of finance and development was raised, along with North-South and South-South cooperation. For small countries, there is the sense of injustice, for example, in the distribution of technology, information, where we need assistance, but the rich countries try to limit access to us. There is also the problem of debt of many small countries, and while we are grateful to the G-7 for discussing debt forgiveness, this is not just a matter of Cambodia or small countries, but it is a global problem, which requires small and large countries to cooperate if there is to be a bright future.

EIR: When we began this interview, I said that *EIR* wanted to look at where the countries of Indochina should be 25 years from now. How much time do you think these countries have, how much patience do the people of these countries have, to reach that objective?

Ambassador Borith: I think that we cannot fix a limit, or set the time that it takes each country to attain this goal. It depends on the particular situation of each country. Take Cambodia: Because, of its experience from the Sihanouk regime, Lon Nol, the Khmer Rouge, the State of Cambodia, after that, the Royal Coalition government, we have gone through five generations. We learn from the difficulty of the past. The coalition government is only seven years old. Our government has realized a lot in rebuilding the country from scratch. But, the main point is peace and stability in Cambodia. This is the *point vital*, the absolutely crucial point for Cambodia: peace and stability. Not only Cambodia, but also every country. Otherwise, we cannot do anything to develop. That's why our government has tried very hard to gain peace and security, to eliminate politically and militarily the Khmer Rouge movement. I can recall that UNTAC could not do anything against the Khmer Rouge regime. Fighting against the government has continued since 1993, since the election that created the coalition government. It was our Prime Minister, Hun Sen, who used the "win-win solution" to eliminate the Khmer Rouge, politically and militarily.

It is the first time, after more than two decades of civil war, that we have peace and stability in our country. Once the peace has been reinforced, so that the people are safe and can start to rebuild—this is the most important point. This is also very important for investment. If Cambodia does not have peace and security, no one will come to invest.

How long will we have to wait? If the situation is established, that peace prevails in all countries forever, no more fighting—I accept that there might be demonstrations, okay, that's democracy but not too far. I do not think we have to wait too long; maybe after 10 or 20 years, Cambodia can reach development similar to other countries. We have very great potential.

EIR: I was struck by some recent reports on a subject that I

have thought about a lot. It seems that the history of the Khmer Rouge era is not taught in the schools in Cambodia. I have repeatedly asked myself: Who will teach the children about this, and what will they be told?

Ambassador Borith: In the period from 1979 to 1991, all of the schools had a program to learn about the Khmer Rouge, their atrocities, but after that, because of the policy of our government to "forgive and forget," we have to build our solidarity, our unity, but history is history. The Khmer Rouge is Khmer Rouge. That is why our government has kept Tuol Sleng, the former high school turned prison under the Khmer Rouge, and other mass grave sites all over the country, remain. It is a symbol of the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. But these places, like the mass graves, the prison, which we keep like a museum, are to show and teach our people of what happened. Every year we try to remind our people of the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge and the misery that the government has to overcome. Even if there is no program for teaching our children, those ceremonies and those symbols serve to remind us. But I share your idea that this needs to be taught in the schools.

EIR: We find in the United States that most American kids do not know U.S. history. To know your history is essential not to repeat past mistakes.

Ambassador Borith: Yes, I have had the opportunity to learn from Americans about your history. I saw the picture of black people who were hanged, surrounded by the people dressed in white robes, the Ku Klux Klan. I was very surprised. That's why I used to say to our friends, please, I do not want to say that you have to stop criticizing us, but, please, before you criticize us, you have to find some way to help us, too.

For example, how many years did it take to build this country? More than 200 years. And you had the problem of violation of human rights, with the separation of black people. The Khmer Rouge killed their own people. The story is very different, but we have the same situation, on a different level. That's why in Cambodia, the problem of respect for human rights, democracy—Who loves Cambodia more than us? We, the Cambodians, we love our people very, very much. Please, *ne soyez pas plus royaliste que le roi*. That means, "Don't be more royalist than the King himself."

EIR: That's good. Also the example of the lynchings. And here you are in New York City, with examples of "free fire" on citizens; 41 shots at Amadou Diallo, which bullet killed him?

Ambassador Borith: Some countries speak out about "international standards" for the Khmer Rouge tribunal. What kind of "international standards" would you like Cambodia to agree to?

EIR: That's why I asked about the tribunal in 1979. What was the international standard at that point? And in the following years, Cambodia and Vietnam had gone through horrific

wars, and yet, up until 1991, they were under total sanction and embargo.

Ambassador Borith: We were isolated! Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam were isolated after the war, from 1979-91, and into 1993. We had to re-win the right to be here [at the UN], but it is unfair for people to speak out about injustice in Cambodia when you see human rights violations still exist in some developed countries.

EIR: When people think of Cambodia, rather than just reading newspapers, how should they think about it?

Ambassador Borith: From my point of view, all people who think of Cambodia, should try to find a way to help this poor country. We accept criticism when we are wrong, but, please, at the same time, consider our request for assistance. We are not perfect, but we work very hard. Our government tries its best to improve the situation. Another example, prison conditions. We are told that the prison conditions are worse and worse. But how can we correct this? You know, our government employees receive only \$20 per month. How can we take care of our prisoners? Where does the money come from to take care of the prisoners? This problem is related to the complex problem of the society.

Interview: Loung Ung

Cleaning Up After the Wars

Loung Ung is the National Spokesperson for the Campaign for a Landmine Free World, a program of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation. EIR reviewed her book First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers, in our Feb. 18, 2000 issue. She gave the following interview to Gail Billington on May 3, in Washington, D.C.

EIR: Would you give us an idea of the scope of the Campaign's work?

Loung: We are still trying to eradicate landmines, and to help those hurt by them. In the whole world, the estimate is that 26,000 people every year are maimed, killed, or injured by landmines. The estimate is that there are between 60-80 million, perhaps upwards of 100 million



Loung Ung

landmines in some 70 countries, or one-third of all nations. The numbers vary, depending on which reports you read, but whatever the numbers may be, you can trust that there are a lot of them in the ground, and that people are finding them whether we do anything or not.

As far as Cambodia, the landmine problem is, I believe, the biggest factor in development of the country after the war. It's estimated that the land in Cambodia is anywhere between 40-50% contaminated with mines. And for a country where 85% of the people are agricultural farmers, you can just imagine what that does to the economy. They can't farm. When they are cold, they can't go into the woods to collect wood. Cows need to be grazed. That's another issue. Not only is it hurting people, but in a country like Cambodia, where the per-capita GDP is anywhere between \$250-300 a year, your livelihood may depend on that cow, that one pig, those three chickens, those two dogs; and if your one cow steps on that landmine, it makes the difference between your ability to farm or being reduced to begging to survive.

The scope of the problem is very large, and, unfortunately, a lot of people don't know about landmines. A lot of people don't know about this aftermath of the wars. I survived the war, as you know from reading my book. I still have a sister and brother in Cambodia, and they have to survive the peace. After the war, people talked about the lack of medicine, the lack of education, child prostitution, the brothels that have cropped up, AIDS and HIV, but they rarely talk about landmines in the ground, and I don't understand why. It's all around you, but, I think society as a whole wishes it weren't there, and so, therefore, they try as much as they can to make those injured or maimed invisible, ship them off to places where they are hidden.

EIR: I understood that one of the most infested areas was in Battambang, which was the rice basket of the country prior to the war. Do you know the situation there now?

Loung: There are still a lot of landmines there. The Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) has gone to Battambang and has cleared some of the area, a few acres at a time. I think in the last two years, actually, in the last year, the clearance de-mining units have been able to move a lot faster. Battambang used to grow the best rice in the world, and was well known around the world for the quality of rice produced. Then, because of that, the Khmer Rouge controlled Battambang, and were hiding in the jungle and forests. Our killers, you know, looked like us, spoke our language, worshipped our religion, had the same skin color, so you don't know who's who.

Right now, I think we have been able to move a lot faster in clearing Battambang, but it is a slow, tedious process, because when you de-mine the land, you have to go inch by inch.

EIR: What is the technology that's mostly used?

Loung: First of all, for military purposes, they don't de-mine the land, they "bleach" it; they shoot rockets, ammunition or