The UN plan was finalized during the seventh meeting of the Five on 15 and 16 October, and at a meeting held in Jakarta (at which the Cambodian factions were not present) in November. A comprehensive scheme for the implementation of a peace settlement, it proposes: the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authorities in Cambodia (UNTAC); defines the agency's mandate; outlines conditions for a cease-fire, for free elections and for repatriating refugees; and lays down fundamental principles for a new Cambodian constitution.

On 21 and 22 December in Paris, the two co-chairs of the Paris Conference on Cambodia (France and Indonesia) hosted a meeting of the members of the SNC and of the United Nations to formally adopt the plan. The three opposition factions accepted "most of the fundamental points," but the Phnom Penh government voiced strong reservations on three items: demobilization of military forces, disarmament and, in its words, the "mention of the genocide" perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 and 1978.

AT THE RISK OF OVERSIMPLIFYING A COMPLEX DOCUMENT, there are a few central elements of the plan worth highlighting: it is, first of all, a precarious and delicate structure, held together with very elaborate diplomatic language, which creates the illusion of reconciling all parties to the dispute. While the agreement is the product of considerable efforts on the part of the international community, it will succeed only to the extent that the same sizable resources are applied to carrying out its many detailed provisions.

The whole structure depends on Cambodians ironing out their differences, and on the future of the Supreme National Council. And in turn, an effective SNC under an impartial Chair is necessary for productive and credible collaboration with UNTAC. The interminable disagreements about the SNC and inability to pick a chair, deprive the country of representation in the United Nations, where its seat remains vacant.

During negotiations, all sides seem to have taken it for granted that harmony was achievable. However, since the meeting in Paris at the end of December, the representatives from Phnom Penh have once again voiced reservations. These lingering concerns may seem only technical, but they raise fundamental issues. The Hun Sen government insists that somewhere in the final agreement, there should be mention of the Khmer Rouge genocide. More than a matter of principle, such a clause leads to the following question: how can one allow the perpetrators of genocide to participate in a government or take part in elections held under the supervision of the United Nations? On this point, Hun Sen was very specific:

> Despite the participation of the Khmer Rouge in the SNC, our official position remains unchanged: in whatever case, in whatever solutions, there must be a guarantee for the non-return of the genocidal Pol Pot regime.

Other fundamental questions concern the thorny issues of the demobilization and disarmament of existing military and guerilla forces. The UN plan is quite explicit on these points, outlining a step-by-step process that can be adjusted as circumstances warrant. Nevertheless, the end of hostilities depends on the good will of the parties involved. The plan dictates that upon signing a final agreement, each party would provide UNTAC with a comprehensive and detailed list of its military equipment, bases, weapons caches, etc. All troops would have to report – together with weapons, ammunition and other equipment – to designated assembly areas from which they would be escorted to camps, demobilized and returned to civilian life. Hun Sen's reluctance on this particular point is understandable:

> It is easy to disband Cambodian government troops ... but can anyone provide a sure answer that this is the same with Pol Pot troops and their weapons, and those of Pol Pot's allies in the Dangrek mountains or in the jungles? No one can give this answer. In this case, do not try to disband government troops because this would pave the way to the Pol Pot regime's return.

It would be naive to deny that the Phnom Penh regime has legitimate fears. The UN plan can certainly be improved upon, but the ability of the different factions in finding common ground has been overrated. Unfortunately, the Cambodians' implacable hate is deeply rooted, and there are no indications that this will change.

The Khmer Rouge constitute an enormous stumbling block. Cautious and clever, they play the UN card in order to achieve new respectability. They no longer want to be called Khmer Rouge, but rather "Democratic Kampucheans." And with elections looming on the horizon, they have attempted to recast their image into that of a nationalist party. They have drawn up a constitution, and set up a judicial system and a police force to administer the territory under their control. They court the peasantry by playing up the strong anti-Vietnamese feelings that run through the country, and "democracy" is being tried out in some of their refugee camps in Thailand.

The Khmer Rouge undoubtedly represent a real threat. Kept in check for the moment by the Phnom Penh government, there are widespread fears that the Hun Sen regime could be weakened or even shattered by the presence of the UN transitional authority.

All this is happening as if the solution to Cambodia's internal problems no longer depended on external realities. The unanimity of the Five and the acquiescence of the states in the region would seem to support this. Yet, the Chinese government has yet to indicate its real designs – this despite a certain rapprochement with Vietnam, and reassuring noises about cutting off military aid to the Khmer Rouge.

Hanoi remains Phnom Penh's most faithful ally. Vietnamese troops have repeatedly crossed the border to join in the government's sporadic skirmishes with the Khmer Rouge. Thailand – in accordance with ASEAN's policies – is playing a patient game that gives it control, not only over the supply of Chinese weapons, but also over the Khmer Rouge guerillas in the refugee camps – and those of the other two guerillas factions as well.

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO PASSIVELY WAIT ON the sidelines for Cambodia's factions to work out a compromise, betrays an indifference to the fate of this small country – one of the ten poorest in the world. While China and Vietnam are still very much involved, neither can be really trusted, since neither has gone through a *perestroika* comparable to that of the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. The bitterness of their rivalry is matched only by the decrepitude of their regimes. It is hard to imagine leaders as politically ossified as these questioning their own determination to fight it out to the last Cambodian.

The international community could still bring pressure to bear on both Hanoi and Beijing to obtain – *prior* to the signature of any internal agreement in Cambodia – a commitment not to intervene. In the meantime, the task of rebuilding Cambodia has to begin. Massive international assistance remains, for the time being, the only way of dealing with the great social and economic disparities which fuel the cause of the Khmer Rouge.

It is possible to help the Cambodian people reestablish an infrastructure that will ensure their survival, without endorsing, at the diplomatic level, the current Phnom Penh government. Such assistance could work both to validate the UN plan and reassure the leaders in Phnom Penh. Assuming the international community is not overwhelmed by indifference, what with the Cambodian conflict relegated to the back pages because of the Gulf War, one can imagine a kind of Marshall Plan supported by the nations of the Pacific Rim. Current attempts to bring structure and stability to this rapidly expanding region of the world would be enhanced by a concerted and united effort in Cambodia. □