

December 1993

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

ISSUE

The human rights situation in Cambodia has taken a positive turn since the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991 and the establishment of a new government in September 1993.

BACKGROUND

For nearly four years in the late 1970s, Cambodia suffered under a regime that was arguably the most systematic, vicious and egregious violator of human rights since the Second World War. Between 1975 and 1979, over one million Cambodians (of a then total estimated population of seven million) are believed to have perished under the genocidal rule of the Khmer Rouge. Memories of this traumatic era continue to permeate every aspect of Cambodian society. This period was preceded by five years, and followed by more than ten years of continuing civil war. State structures during the 1980's existed in only the most rudimentary form with effectively minimal protection of human rights.

Given the country's tragic recent history, the United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) established a human rights component to assist in the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights in the country.

The nascent Cambodian government is giving a high priority to human rights, but given the fragile nature of administrative structures in place and the continuing low level civil conflict in certain areas of the country, sustained efforts will be needed to ensure that human rights are observed in the future.

Approximately 10% of Cambodia, primarily in the north and west of the country, remains under Khmer Rouge control. There are serious concerns about violations of human rights in these areas.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada applauds the recent measures taken by the new government to improve the human rights situation in Cambodia. At UNGA 48, Canada co-sponsored the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly concerning the human rights situation in Cambodia. Inter alia, the resolution welcomes the establishment of an operational presence of the Centre for Human Rights and supports the appointment by the UN Secretary-General of a Special Representative.

Canada continues to be concerned about the human rights situation in areas under Khmer Rouge control.

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