

ATTITUDE OF COMMISSION

51. The reform proposals outlined by His Majesty the King were far-reaching in character. The Commission, however, was not concerned with the merits of the reform project. It was only bound to examine the scheme from one aspect, namely, whether any of the changes proposed were or were not in conformity with the international obligations undertaken by the Cambodian Government at Geneva. The main questions to be decided were: In view of the reference made to the Cambodian Constitution in Article 6 of the Geneva Agreement and in Point 3 of the Final Declaration of the Nine Powers participating in the Conference, are major changes in the existing Constitution permissible till the first elections after Geneva are held? Will not such changes alter the terms on which the two parties at Geneva agreed to a political settlement? If such changes are permissible, should such amendments be made in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Constitution or not? Are any of the proposed changes discriminatory against the former resisters in terms of Article 6?

52. While the issues posed above were in the minds of the Commissioners, the International Commission did not take an official stand on the reforms till the time of the abdication of King Norodom Sihanouk. The reasons for this were two-fold: (a) Firstly, the Commission was awaiting a copy of the official text of the reform proposals, which had been expounded by the King orally at the meeting on February 19 but of which no authorised version had been communicated to the Commission; (b) Secondly, in view of the unexpected and far-reaching character of the reform project, the Commissioners had wanted time to consult their Governments. So the position was that though the Commissioners had doubts on the compatibility of some aspects of the reform project with the international commitments given by the Cambodian Government at Geneva, they had not officially defined their attitude as a Commission. A statement adopted by the Commission on March 9 for its own records may be quoted here to explain the part played by the Commission in the abdication crisis:

"In view of certain statements made in the press regarding the part supposed to have been played by the International Commission in the developments leading to the abdication of King Norodom Sihanouk, it is necessary to place on record the facts.

"The International Commission did not take an official stand on the proposals of King Sihanouk for constitutional reform up to the time of his abdication.

"It had the opportunity of listening to His Majesty at the Palace on February 19 when he explained the nature of his proposals. The International Commission was awaiting the official publication of His Majesty's study on the proposed reform. Only when it was in possession of that document and had had time to examine it did the Commission intend to make any comments on the King's reform in its relation to the obligations which the Royal Government of Cambodia had undertaken at Geneva.