

## HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

### ISSUE

The human rights situation in Cambodia continues to be a matter of concern as the fragile coalition government tries to maintain power and authority.

### 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 re-emergence of civil conflict in the country, sustained efforts will be needed to ensure that human rights violations are held in check and progress is made in the future. In recent months there have been disturbing reports of human rights abuses by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces including extra-judicial killings and inhumane treatment of prisoners in certain parts of the country. With the continuing jockeying for power, including an attempted coup in July, the commitment of certain officials in power to maintain such elements as a free press is becoming more tenuous.

Approximately 10-15 per cent of the country, primarily in the north and west, remains under Khmer Rouge control. There have been repeated human rights violations including the abduction and subsequent murder of Western nationals, the execution of soldiers captured in combat and the massacre of Vietnamese civilians. Khmer Rouge units have been implicated in the rape of female villagers, in the laying of anti-personnel mines and in using village communities as human shields to protect themselves from enemy shelling.

### CANADIAN POSITION

Canada applauds the recent measures taken by the new government to improve the human rights situation in Cambodia. At the 49th session of UNGA, Canada co-sponsored a resolution on the human rights situation in Cambodia, which, inter alia, expressed the