

Statement

Déclaration

Secretary of
State for
External Affairs



Secrétaire
d'État aux
Affaires
extérieures

90/05

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

STATEMENT IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

ON CANADA AND INDOCHINA

HOUSE OF COMMONS

January 25, 1990.

Affaires extérieures et
Commerce extérieur Canada

External Affairs and
International Trade Canada

Canada

Mr. Speaker,

I want to provide a progress report to the House on international efforts to end the violence that has gripped Cambodia for fifteen years. The Cambodian people have suffered greatly from invasion, unparalleled abuses of human rights, and civil war. We wish to ensure that Canada does its part in helping to break the cycle of suffering in Cambodia.

There are measures Canada can take to address the suffering of Cambodia, and which will contribute to the building of a lasting peace.

The recent history of Cambodia is a saga of unending war, turmoil and death. During the Vietnam war, approximately 600,000 Cambodians were killed. With the end of the war in April 1975 the Khmer Rouge forces overthrew the Cambodian Government of Lon Nol. The subsequent atrocities perpetrated by the regime of Pol Pot between 1976 and 1979 have been condemned by the international community and by Canadians from every walk of life.

The expulsion of the Khmer Rouge at the hands of the Vietnamese in 1979 led to an extended civil war pitting three Cambodian parties against a government installed by the Vietnamese army. Eleven years later, in spite of diplomatic efforts, the war continues, and Cambodians continue to die. Indochina's limited resources are being tragically squandered on the battlefield.

In September of 1989 Vietnam withdrew their troops from Cambodia. Since that withdrawal, we have seen the two sides of the Cambodian conflict intensify the civil war. We have seen the battlelines shift, but with little overall change from where they began eleven years ago. Time and time again the military solutions have been chosen over political solutions.

The victims remain the same: the people of Cambodia, and indeed all of the people of Indochina who have borne too long the burden of protracted military struggle.

From the beginning of the war, Canada has helped fund the efforts of the United Nations and its agencies to care for the 300,000 Cambodians seeking refuge on the Thai-Cambodian border. Our commitment continues to these people, and this fiscal year it will amount to \$3 million in food and other aid.

We also recognize the need to assist the 8 million Cambodians still living in their country whose lives have been disrupted by the armed struggle. Their needs are immediate and real. A response to their suffering must not be held forever hostage to progress towards a political settlement.

With that in mind, the Government is now in the process of re-establishing the eligibility of Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, the three countries of Indochina, for official Canadian development assistance.

The exact nature of this aid is now under study by CIDA. As part of that process, an officer from our Embassy in Bangkok is currently in Cambodia with representatives of Canadian non-governmental organizations to examine how best to resume an aid relationship there.

In the short-term, these programs will be small scale and focussed on humanitarian needs. Over the longer term their expansion will be predicated on progress towards peace and the political realities in the areas affected. We will not have Canadian aid channelled into the military efforts of any group. Nor will we permit it to be used by groups or governments whose records demonstrate a fundamental disrespect for basic human rights. We will, for example, insist that no Canadian aid be distributed in areas controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

The central problem in the Cambodian conflict remains how to deal with the Khmer Rouge in an eventual settlement process. The reign of terror of the Pol Pot regime was one of the most brutal chapters in human history. Each position we, as a government, have taken on the question of Cambodia has been grounded in a determination never to allow the Khmer Rouge back into power.

We have called upon the Chinese, Soviet and other military suppliers to the Cambodian parties to cease their support. There is no benefit to Cambodia to be found in the further import of weapons. The people of Indochina have seen enough implements of war to last for all of history.

Two major developments broke the old impasse respecting Cambodia. The first was the recognition by the Parties themselves, and countries close to them, that war would yield no winner, but would hold back the development of Cambodia and its neighbours. The second was the decision to treat the search for peace as a regional responsibility and lift it beyond the immediate combatants. Seminal to that process were the Jakarta informal meetings which brought the six nations of ASEAN directly into the process, working with the Cambodian Parties, Viet Nam and LAOS.

The next step was to make that search for peace a genuinely international preoccupation, moving beyond the region, to involve permanent members of the Security Council, and other countries with a particular interest or contribution. The Paris Conference was convened. Canada was invited because of our unique experience in peace-keeping, our extensive relations in the region, and our acknowledged reputation as a trusted and moderate nation.

The Paris Conference succeeded in getting the agreement of all parties to involve the offices of the United Nations, in the form of a fact-finding technical mission sent to Cambodia. It also made substantial progress in the design of an international control mechanism and in refining the complex of tasks that such a mechanism will have to address. Canada co-chaired that Committee with India, and Parliament can take pride in the skill and effectiveness of the officials in the Canadian delegation. That first Committee produced the agreement that could well be the basis of further progress now.

The Paris Conference may resume - and Canada and other countries may be called upon to participate in UN-led peacekeeping and transitional arrangements. It is important that potential participants be adequately prepared. As part of this process, officials from my Department and the Department of National Defence are reviewing Canada's recent experiences in Namibia and elsewhere. Lessons learned there can be applied to improving the planning and organization of future peacekeeping operations such as Cambodia. The collection, exchange and assessment of peacekeeping information with both existing and potential peacekeepers, as well as with the UN itself, can only serve to strengthen the UN's effectiveness and reputation as a peacemaker.

In October, I dispatched a mission to Indochina led by Ambassador Sullivan, Head of our delegation for most of the Paris Conference, to explore and encourage the resumption of negotiations. One of the major messages delivered by Ambassador Sullivan in Hanoi and Phnom Penh was that of the importance of accepting a major role for the UN in any settlement.

In November, the Government of Australia proposed the establishment of a UN interim administration for Cambodia. That proposal has Canada's full support. It overcomes the problem of how to share power between the Cambodia parties, by delegating to the UN the responsibility for administering the country in an interim period prior to elections.

Like the UN-based settlement recently achieved in Namibia, this proposal would effectively guarantee that no Cambodian party would retain or acquire political power sufficient to disrupt the process leading to free and fair elections. That is the most flexible and reasonable proposal currently in play. It has been welcomed by all the key players in the dispute, with the exception of the Khmer Rouge.

Indeed it is becoming increasingly clear that the Khmer Rouge and its two non-communist coalition partners no longer speak with a unified voice.

At the same time, Canada and other countries recognize that the current regime in Phnom Penh is more than simply one of the four factions. Over the last few years it appears to have provided adequate government, and its record in most areas is far better than that of the Khmer Rouge Government which preceded it. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of human rights and in basic respect for human life.

The peace process was moved forward in Paris last week in a meeting of the five permanent members of the Security Council. The meeting resulted, for the first time ever, in a significant level of agreement between the mentors of Cambodia's warring factions. Their views were summarized in a 16-point communiqué highlighting an enhanced UN role in the resolution of the Cambodian problem.

China's decision to agree to the communiqué represents a significant concession and suggests that China may move away from its long-standing insistence that the Khmer Rouge have a major role in the interim government. Such flexibility from the Chinese, who are the principal backers of the Khmer Rouge, is an important ingredient in ensuring the cooperation of the Khmer Rouge in the peace-building process.

As I have said in the past, we all wish that we did not have to deal with the Khmer Rouge. Unfortunately, the Khmer Rouge remain a major military reality, the strongest among the three resistance factions. To exclude them a priori from the peace would leave them no option but to continue fighting a civil war. We must instead find a way to include them in the process of peace while removing their ability to either wage war or to seize power and return Cambodia to the living hell it experienced under Pol Pot.

The next weeks will be crucial as details of the potential UN role are further discussed, and as options for resolving other key questions such as a cease fire and transitional arrangements are explored. Canada will be active in that process.

Should the Cambodian Parties return to the negotiating table with the kind of flexibility and commitment demonstrated by the permanent five in Paris, it is probable that a resumption of the Paris Conference will follow as a next step.

As a co-chair of one of its key committees, we expect to be closely involved in the preparations for a new Paris Conference. We will continue to work closely with our friends in Asia and elsewhere to help create the best possible environment for peace-building.

We will stress that a new window of opportunity to build a lasting peace has been opened, and that all the Parties to the conflict must approach the upcoming discussions willing to seek and make the compromises which will be required if Cambodia's long nightmare is to come to an end, and peace is finally to be brought to this once gentle and tranquil land.

Peace for Cambodia must become a priority for the world community. Canada has the experience, ability and commitment necessary to play an important role in the peace process. I can assure the House that we will do so.