

# Cambodia New Vision

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**SAMDECH HUN SEN:**

**"A GOOD FRIEND (NGOS) SINGLED OUT DURING HARDSHIP..."**

**ADDRESS TO THE ASEAN  
INFORMAL SUMMIT,  
MANILA, NOV. 28, 1999**



**At the Celebration to Mark the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Presence of Non-Governmental Organizations in Cambodia at the Chaktomuk Hall, Thursday, 18 November 1999, Samdech Prime Minister delivered the following address:**

"... It is a great honor for me to be invited to attend the celebration commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the presence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Cambodia. This is a Historic Day of great importance, which should be marked in the golden page of the history of the Kingdom of Cambodia. The real significance of this celebration is to highlight the close partnership and strong solidarity which exist between the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and the NGO community, as well as to mark the victory over internal strife, wars and destruction. More importantly, it is a

celebration to mark the prevalence of peace and stability, which have been achieved under difficult circumstances and to mark the progress in the struggle against human sufferings and poverty of the Cambodian people. Moreover, I consider this day as an occasion to strengthen partnership between the RGC and the NGO community. This is also to display the strong determination, of both the government and the NGOs, to explore all avenues and exhaust all the opportunities, created by the peaceful and stable conditions inside the country, to work closely together and move, with even more confidence, towards a brighter future.

Cambodians have a saying "A good friend singled out during hardship". I think that all NGOs present here have become close partners of the RGC and the Cambodian people through their hard work and chal-

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1. It is indeed a great honor and pleasure for me to represent Cambodia at this Summit. As the latest country to join this vital grouping, this is the first occasion for me to speak on behalf of Cambodia at this august gathering. I extend to all of you and your peoples our sincere greetings on behalf of their Majesties, King Norodom Sihanouk and Queen Monineath, the government and the people of Cambodia. I would also like to take this opportunity to once again thank all of you for your continued benevolent interest in Cambodia and for both direct and indirect support, either material or moral, that you have extended to us through the many years.

2. As you all know, Cambodia is fully at peace since last year for the first time in many decades. The coalition government is functioning in harmony and unity, taking important and successful measures to address its priorities and to lift the country out of the socio-economic morass, into which years of conflict had plunged it.

3. Cambodia very highly values its membership of ASEAN. We have been preparing for joining this body for over four years since early 1995 and have come to learn a great deal in the process. We are still on the learning curve..., are sure we will greatly benefit from the deliberations in various meetings of this body. We are also fully committed to participate fully and equally in these deliberations and to contribute our ideas and experiences and share with you

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lenges that they had gone through, as underlined by this saying. I will never forget the crucial role played by NGOs in providing assistance to the people of Cambodia since 1979. I therefore wish to take this solemn opportunity to express the profound gratitude and great appreciation by the RGC and the Cambodian people for this invaluable assistance.

In 1979-80, when Cambodia was liberated from the scourges of the Khmer Rouge's genocide the city was deserted and nothing but ashes of destruction was left behind. Then, when famine was ravaging the four corners of the country, 15 groups of NGOs representing 27 agencies, including OXFAM, CIDSE, AARK (CWS) and World Vision came in to undertake humanitarian actions in Cambodia. At that time, their activities focused on meeting basic needs in health care and rehabilitating agricultural production in the country. Under such difficult and dangerous circumstances caused by insecurity in many parts of the country, these NGOs had reached out almost the four corners of Cambodia, working closely with the authorities to provide seeds and foodstuffs to farmers, rehabilitate the infrastructure, such as railroads, ferries, dams and canals. They had also delivered agricultural machinery, medical supplies and equipment, clothes and other supplies. Thanks to these tremendous efforts, notably the provision of machinery, supplies and numerous facilities, many schools, hospitals, factories and enterprises were reopen. These NGOs also provided assistance in training government officials, staff members and workers. More importantly, what we should not forget was that many orphans were saved, taken care of and brought up by these NGOs. When the people of Cambodia were liberated from the hells of genocide, we should have deserved the assistance and encouragement to rehabilitate the country and restore our liveli-

hood. But unfortunately, the poor people of Cambodia were punished through the imposition of international sanctions and embargo in development assistance. At that time, NGOs had been instrumental to uplifting Cambodia from scratches. Until the early 1990s NGOs have played a key role in the rehabilitation of Cambodia in all sectors. The main focus of humanitarian assistance in 1979-1980 was shifted from relief to assisting with the rehabilitation of Cambodia, which had faced the international blockade. NGOs have joined hands to work in partnership very actively and closely with the central and provincial governments to rehabilitate the safe drinking water, provide the farmers with agricultural inputs, assist the people in setting up nutrition and health centers and deliver school materials. This list can be extended to NGOs' assistance in establishing rice and vegetable research stations, supplying animal vaccines, reconstructing irrigation systems and pumping stations in a number of provinces and rehabilitating the pediatric hospital, etc. Another important role played by the NGOs under these difficult circumstances was to provide support for Cambodia in terms of fulfilling their advocacy role. Faced with international embargo, NGOs were the most important diplomats and diplomatic channels for Cambodia. NGOs had established a strong movement in support for Cambodia in the international arena.

The American school children movement organized by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in the early 1980s and the preparation and subsequent publication of a study entitled "*Punishing the Poor*" in 1986 were the testimony to this important campaign. The establishment of the NGO Forum on Cambodia at that time had played a critical role in pressuring Western countries to review their policies of isolation and embargo vis-a-vis Cambodia.

Between the late 1980s and the conduct of the general elections in 1993, NGOs continued to play a vital role as a focal point for Cambodia with the external donor community and as a channel of aid inflows into Cambodia. They had played a role of important intermediaries to facilitate informal visits by bilateral and multilateral aid missions to prepare the grounds for the resumption of development assistance in the post-conflict period after the conclusion of a political settlement. Moreover, NGOs continued to play a critical role to press for the abolition of economic embargo on Cambodia and to prepare their Cambodian counterparts for the normalization of relations with the donor community. During the post conflict period, NGOs had been very active in the repatriation and resettlement of refugees in Cambodia.

I don't have time to describe in great details the generous assistance provided by NGOs at that time. However, I wish to reassure all of you that every Cambodian and our next generation will remember forever in our heart with profound gratitude the generosity and the humanitarian actions provided to them by NGOs. When many governments and world bodies turned their back to Cambodia it was the NGOs that had been our genuine partners and had provided us with their assistance, sharing with our people both joys and sorrow. More importantly, humanitarian spirit has been put above political considerations, which many other international organizations and governments cannot do. While Cambodia had gone through a dramatic period, NGOs were the bearing witness to the sufferings and the punishment of our people. NGOs had assisted in the uncovering of mass graves left behind by the genocidal regime and had shared the sufferings and hardships of the Cambo-

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dian people as a result of the unjust embargo. You all are both witnesses and participants in the tremendous efforts displayed by a strong and unexhausted will, to work hand in hand with the Cambodian people for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a country ravaged by wars, genocide, isolation and embargo. All over these periods, the most important quality and the strength of NGOs is that NGOs always stay above politics and are not bogged down in bureaucratic red tapes. Human welfare is their utmost priorities. To this end, they have been very flexible in carrying out their own functions and work programs. This flexibility is reflected in the roles and responsibilities of NGOs currently operating in Cambodia.

After the 1993 general elections, NGOs have embraced the development agenda, in particular by focusing on human resource training, community development, environmental protection, mine clearance, support for democracy, respect for human rights and the development of civil society, including the support for local NGOs and associations. In this sense, the majority of international and local NGOs have been very active in delivering their services, in conjunction with the government and local authorities, to the outback remote areas, to which official development agencies do not have access. Moreover, NGOs have made tremendous contribution in many important areas, notably:

- to present a common platform as grassroots organizations working closely with the local people, by providing recommendations and sharing their experience to complement government's and donors' policies and suggestions at the International Conference on the Reconstruction of Cambodia (ICORC) and the Consultative Group Meeting (CG);
- to participate in consultation with the government regarding formu-

- lation of laws and regulations;
- to monitor developments and call for better transparency and accountability in many important issues, particularly the suppression of illegal logging and the respect for human rights, which were recently hot issues in Cambodia;
- to raise awareness of the problems of trafficking of women and children, the spread of HIV/AIDS and the campaign to ban land mines; and etc.

The current activities of NGOs in Cambodia clearly mark their strong commitment to peace, stability and national reconciliation, promoting democracy and the respect for human rights and pushing forward the reforms in Cambodia. On behalf of the RGC, I wish to express our great appreciation for these endeavors and appeal to all NGOs to take a more proactive approach to maintain the same spirit and keep the tradition, by focusing on the following:

First, Continue to build and strengthen the capacity of their Cambodian partners, particular the capacity of the local community. Attention should be made to the transfer of knowledge, know-how and technology to the rural community;

Second, Provide support to the initiatives of the local community;

Third, Give priority to community development with a view to alleviating poverty, especially focusing on the vulnerable groups, such as the people handicapped by wars, mines or for other reasons, landless families, the urban and rural poor, street children, AIDS victims, minority ethnic groups and women suffering from sexual exploitation, etc.

Fourth, Support and promote democracy and the respect for human rights and strengthen the civil society in Cambodia;

Fifth, Continue their contribution to the development process through

their participation in project implementation and monitoring in collaboration with donors and the authorities.

The RGC will make its utmost to facilitate NGOs' activities as appropriate. Concerns have been raised by some quarters that the RGC has intended to adopt a number of NGO laws and regulations with a view to tightening the grips on NGO's activities in Cambodia. On behalf of the RGC, I wish to assure you that draft NGO law and regulations should be adopted only to achieve a unique goal of facilitating NGOs' activities, improving the efficiency of the service delivery, strengthening transparency and accountability under the rule of law and enhancing the partnership with the government. The RGC welcome any comment, recommendation and contribution from the NGO community, donors and other quarters to accomplish this process. The RGC encourages all NGOs based in Cambodia, whether international or local, whose numbers currently increased to almost 700, to cooperate with each other, coordinate their activities and work in the spirit of transparency and accountability. It is also crucial to enhance their partnership with the government ministries and agencies, the local, provincial and municipal authorities to gear towards the needs of Cambodia's development and in conformity with the government's political platform and strategies.

Once again, on behalf of the RGC, the people of Cambodia and on my own behalf, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all NGOs for their sacrifice and endeavors for the cause of Cambodia. Over the last twenty years, NGOs have built up a strong foundation and strengthened their partnership with the RGC and the Cambodian people on the basis of mutual respect and assistance. This spirit and tradition deserve further improvement and strengthening..."■

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our concerns.

4. There is just a month to go before the so-called new “millennium” dawns... Thanks to wise leadership and management, the region has just emerged out of a debilitating financial crisis, much faster than most dire predictions, with many lessons. We are therefore meeting at an appropriate time to discuss our common future.

5. Much study and thought have already gone into this important issue. We have for instance two strategic documents, the Hanoi Plan of Action and the ASEAN Vision 2020 and many other ideas and initiatives. It is vitally important to put every effort for the realization of these already agreed upon plan of action and vision. Allow me therefore to share with you some of our thoughts and ideas, more to highlight some of the important issues already tabled.

6. We all realize that ASEAN has relevance and place more from the substance, depth and extent of cooperation – political, social, and economic – among its members than merely in its forms and methods of its functioning. Both for the longer-term and for the more immediate and medium-term, the issues before us involve solidarity, security, sustainable development and self-reliance in an increasingly interdependent world with much faster and broader public scrutiny over developments resulting from exponential spread of media and technology...

7. On the external front, **solidarity and harmony** among us takes the top-most priority. We have to discuss and formulate common positions on world affairs and developments so that the voices, views and ideas of the large population we represent can be heard in global forums... to present a unified stand on issues that may affect us directly, but also to make a pro-active contribution for the evolution and use of policies and practices bearing on the world at large. Our unity should enable us to protect and defend every individual country in our group from uncalled

for interference from outside or negative portrayal overseas or in the international arena.

8. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) must continue to be the active driving force for political stability and security. The dialogue partner mechanism we have evolved provides a very useful platform for collective sharing of ideas and concerns...

9. On the internal or intra-ASEAN side, there are many issues of importance. Foremost is the need to eradicate rapidly poverty among our people and to put all our countries on a fast track of socio-economic development. We need institutional, material, financial and human help to put in place “safety-net” mechanisms that protect the poor and vulnerable groups and assist them to break the vicious circle of endemic poverty.

10. A common long-term goal is undoubtedly the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Area based on the principles of the “common market” where national boundaries yield seamlessly to regional economic forces, and where ideas, materials, manpower, and finance move freely to find positions of comparative advantage for realizing their full potential. For this long term purpose, it is important... to realize all current initiatives of ASEAN such as AFTA, AIA and others... to intensify cooperation in the development of infrastructure (ASEAN rail links and ASEAN highway), to introduce progressively the liberalization of the services sectors and entrench finance cooperation.

11. We will have to further strengthen the ASEAN Surveillance Process, develop and implement policies and build up capacity to prevent catastrophic flights of capital as... in the recent crisis period. As we are deepening our economic integration, there is also a need to move towards the visionary common currency, whose idea already floated. We could best realize this ideal by gradually shifting to dealing in intra-regional trade in regional currencies and exploring the possibility of establishing

a mechanism to maintain the exchange rate stability in the region.

12. In both the aforesaid matters, we need to be aware that ASEAN countries are at various stages of development... These have to be helped to overcome difficulties in order that the common ASEAN ideals could be easily achieved..., to set up strategies and programs to eliminate or substantially reduce the gap between original and new members of ASEAN in the next 10 to 15 years.

13. The world has realized for some time now that mere economic progress can neither be the goal nor achievable. A holistic view of the human conditions and progress with due regard to environmental sustainability and bio-diversity preservation is the basis for designing and implementing development policies. Social and human security issues are important in and of themselves and are at the same time very sensitive. We have to work assiduously in all our countries towards these human objectives both for our own purposes and to provide examples to others around the world... that priority needs to be attached to poverty alleviation and eradication. Human Resource Development is another priority.

14. Intra-regional liberalization and open opportunities for free movement of people, materials and good, necessary and good goals in themselves, also provide increased scope for cross-border illegal activities including money laundering, drug and human trafficking and removal of ancient pieces of art, relics and artifacts as well as dumping of toxic and hazardous wastes from more affluent nations. ASEAN nations to be very vigilant and pro-active in our efforts to contain and to prevent such crimes. We need to strengthen our individual capacities to deal with these and move rapidly towards harmonizing our laws to enable both prevention and speedy punishment of such offences... to promote regional interests, to strengthen social cohesion and ensure inherent peace and stability, so that our visions can crystallize.../■