Chapter 5

Development Aid Denied

"Kampuchea remains in the unique position of being the only developing country in the world — and it is almost certainly the country in most need — that is prevented from receiving any of the normal development and other assistance provided by the UN system." ¹

Sir Robert Jackson

Vietnamese troops leaving Phnom Penh in June 1986, part of their staged withdrawal from Kampuchea.
Aid as a Political Instrument

Eight years after the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, Kampuchea remains a very poor country with one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world and chronic food shortages. Yet for political reasons it is being denied even the most basic reconstruction and development assistance. The international aid embargo means that Kampuchea will stay poor, hungry and underdeveloped.

The Kampuchean people are being denied reconstruction and development aid because Vietnam invaded the country and because Vietnamese troops still 'occupy' it.

The Kampuchea relief programme illustrates elements of both humanitarian and political concerns. For example, between 1979-81, US$663.9 millions in aid from western donors were channelled through the UN agencies, the ICRC and smaller non-governmental agencies to mount a major emergency relief operation. Half these funds were pledged at the UN donors meeting in New York for the joint UN/ICRC programme of assistance to Khmer displaced people and refugees at the Thai-Kampuchean border. This aid programme was administered from Thailand to benefit a fluid population of about one million, including remnants of the beaten Khmer Rouge. Some of the border aid also trickled back into Kampuchea, especially seeds distributed via the land-bridge operation. At the same time, the other half of the funds was destined to a ravaged Kampuchea and its 6.5 million people. Similarly, 95 NGOs came to the assistance of displaced people and refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean border, while only half that number offered assistance to the Kampuchean people inside the country.

While the massive aid operation brought relief to many Kampucheans inside the country and at the Thai-Kampuchean border it served other functions as well. It provided a mechanism for the respectable rehabilitation of the Khmer Rouge remnants in Thailand, restoring their
strength and capacity to fight the PRK regime and its Vietnamese backers. It later provided a lifeline to other opposition groups as well. The border relief operation also acted as a magnet drawing many desperate people there in the hope of receiving assistance. Many Kampucheans and foreign observers perceived this as an attempt to destabilise the new government in Phnom Penh. The maintenance, with international assistance, of a refugee population in border camps under the control of the DK forces ensures that the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea seated at the UN as the 'legitimate' representative of the Kampuchean people has a population base and a source of recruitment to fight the Vietnamese/PRK forces.

Since 1982, as Kampuchea has progressed from the state of emergency, western aid donors have been unwilling to expand cooperation from purely emergency aid to reconstruction and development projects. Today the 7 million Kampucheans who remain in the country are still denied development aid while those living under the control of the opposition forces in Thailand benefit from generous relief programmes in the border camps. In 1987, a UN official working at the border admitted that he felt 'morally ambiguous' about the relief work: "If the UN stopped feeding the soldiers' wives and families, the resistance would stop." In a report presented to the UK Parliament in April 1987, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs included amongst its recommendations "That HM Government should now consider the possibility of increasing the level of humanitarian aid either directly to the resistance groups or indirectly through UNBRO".

According to current statistics, supporting a refugee in a border camp for one year costs US$142. A proportionate amount of aid for the people inside Kampuchea would amount to over US$1 billion a year. Yet in 1986, the country received only about US$1.50 per person from the multilateral agencies and another US$1.50 per person from NGOs — a total of about US$22.8 million. While most official western aid programmes contribute funds to work with refugees on the Thai border, their total bilateral aid contribution to Kampuchea itself, despite the clear need of the Khmer people, is zero.

Kampuchea is the only Third World country to be denied UN development aid. From the perspective of non-governmental organisations working in Kampuchea, this withholding of aid for political reasons is actually counter-productive and serves only to increase the suffering of the Khmer people.

Ironically, Vietnam continues to receive UN development assistance, as did Afghanistan and Uganda during periods of foreign occupation. Thus the current sanctions isolate the Khmer people unfairly not only on humanitarian grounds but also in view of precedents set by the UN itself.
This political tying of aid is also highly questionable in the light of the UN Charter and its stated purpose of "the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all." The 'development aid' ban plus the isolation imposed on Kampuchea by a majority of governments deprive the Kampuchean people of basic human rights as defined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Innocent Khmers are made to suffer sickness, hunger and even death in the name of "putting pressure on Vietnam".

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

**International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty."

Part III, Article II of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights defines some of these rights: "1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions...

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognising the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed:
a) to improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilisation of natural resources."

Part III, Article 12 of the same Covenant elaborates other rights: "1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."
2. The steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realisation of this right shall include those necessary for:

a) The provision for the reduction of the stillbirth-rate and of infant mortality and for the healthy development of the child;

b) The improvement of all aspects of environmental and individual hygiene;

d) The creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness.

Part III, Article 13 goes on to define the rights to education and Article 15 recognises the right “to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications”.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights places responsibility for promoting these rights, not only on the member signatories to the Convention but to “every individual and every organ of society... and by progressive measures, national and international...”

Sources of Aid

There are three potential sources of aid:

□ multilateral — from governments through international agencies such as the United Nations (UN) or International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), or through the EEC.

□ bilateral — direct from government to government.

□ voluntary — through non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

(See Appendix III for those working in Kampuchea.)

Multilateral Aid

Because of the political considerations which for the last eight years have given Kampuchea's UN seat to the 'Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea', the UN agencies are currently forced, under a special mandate renewed annually by the UN General Assembly, to ban 'development aid' — as opposed to 'humanitarian aid for Kampuchean people in need.' However, the distinction between 'development aid' and what constitutes 'humanitarian aid for people in need' often defies logic and understanding.

In practical terms it means that UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR, all UN agencies with an emergency relief mandate, can implement certain projects in Kampuchea while the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNESCO and other development-oriented UN agencies cannot operate there despite the overwhelming needs. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) could operate in Kampuchea during the emergency period between 1979-82, but afterwards had to limit its aid.
Punishing the Poor

The ban on development aid means that during the food shortages of the past eight years the UN and donor countries have been able to respond generously but they cannot provide the tools and materials necessary for Kampucheans to avert these disasters. This goes against the adage: “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, give him a fishing net and he will eat for the rest of his life”. The present embargo prohibits the giving of that fishing net. It also means that the UN has had to drop any interest in power stations and waterworks, though half a million citizens in Phnom Penh for example, are threatened by a contaminated water supply. It means that the UN can drill a new well at a village school but it cannot repair a damaged well in the same village. It means that it cannot help to maintain the fleet of lorries and machinery which it provided during the emergency period between 1979 and 1981.

Deterioration of the Phnom Penh waterworks has resulted in low water pressure and a serious threat of contamination. Many families in the capital are now without piped water. 1987.

In 1980 UNICEF, under its emergency humanitarian mandate, was able to provide sawmill equipment to help in the rebuilding of schools. The equipment arrived in bits and pieces over a period of three years. By this time the UN had determined that the emergency was over, and a ban on development aid was put into effect. Meanwhile the Kampucheans in the Education Ministry to which the sawmill equipment had been given lacked the technical expertise to assemble it. Although UNICEF could bring in a sawmill expert to evaluate the project’s progress, it could not bring in a technician to help the Kampucheans put the sawmill together and to train them to use it. The technical expertise was finally provided by an NGO technician in the country on another project.
**WORLD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Pop. (millions)</th>
<th>Life expectancy (years at birth)</th>
<th>Under 5 mortality rate (per 1000)</th>
<th>Infant mortality rate (under 1) (per 1000)</th>
<th>% of pop. with access to drinking water</th>
<th>Daily per capita calorie supply as % of requirements</th>
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- In Kampuchea, one child in seven dies before reaching the age of 1, compared with one in one hundred and eleven in Belgium or the UK.
- In Kampuchea, one child in five dies before reaching the age of five compared with one in eighty five in the developed countries.
- Only 1% of Kampuchea's population have access to safe drinking water.
- Even a very poor country like Sudan has halved the infant mortality rate since 1960 while Kampuchea has virtually stood still.
- In Mali, life expectancy has increased by nine years since 1960; in Kampuchea by four years only.

*Yet Kampuchea is the only developing country to be denied UN development assistance.*
Punishing the Poor

Today UNICEF has an excellent but limited programme in Kampuchea focusing on child health and nutrition, wells and sanitation for schools and hospitals, education and basic social services, literacy, women's programmes and family food production projects. Although UNICEF has been able to extend the scope of its programmes in Kampuchea since 1984, including village water supply, its hands are still tied by the ban on development aid. The absence of other UN aid is sorely felt.

The 'no development' policy of the UN and other donor governments restricts self-sustaining recovery in Kampuchea and adds to costs by encouraging stop-gap relief. Reconstruction or rehabilitation aid which is described as 'development' aid is perceived as somehow not really essential by the UN and most donor governments. For example, the US State Department defines development aid as “aid designed to begin new enterprises or operate old ones at previously (before the Vietnam war) unattainable levels”\(^\text{13}\). Yet in 1987 nothing in Kampuchea is functioning “at previously unattainable levels”; not even at previously attainable levels. Development aid would consolidate the valuable investment already made by the United Nations under the emergency programme. Helping Kampuchea to become more self-sufficient would also reduce the need for emergency aid in the future.

The European Economic Community

The EEC is another source of multilateral assistance.\(^\text{14}\) The EEC's position regarding the Kampuchean problem is closely allied to that of the US, China and ASEAN. It too has withheld development aid for essentially political reasons. Despite this, two EEC members, France and Ireland, have refused to align themselves with Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge and have consistently abstained in the UN credentials vote. Although some emergency assistance was granted to Kampuchea through multilateral aid organisations between 1981 and 1984, no reconstruction/development aid from the EEC either direct or indirect, was given to Kampuchea up to the end of 1984.\(^\text{15}\)

However since January 1985, a new Commissioner appointed within the EEC has taken a more humanitarian view of assistance to Kampuchea. In 1985 the EEC approved an emergency grant through the NGO sector for assistance to flood victims in Kampuchea. More importantly however, in the area of rehabilitation projects, the Commission has shown more flexibility in considering project co-funding under the NGO co-financing scheme. Since 1985 it has co-funded eleven rehabilitation projects. These include a mobile irrigation pump repair workshop in Prey Veng Province, facilities for the production of agricultural implements in Kandal, and the supply of drinking water in Kampong Speu. Others, such as a project for the rehabilitation of the Phnom Penh Water Treatment Plant, and a ferry repair workshop are in the process of
Repair team technician Phouk Sok inspects a Lister irrigation pump in Takeo Province. These pumps, vital to dry season rice production, depend upon imported spares for their maintenance. 1987.
Punishing the Poor

consideration. Compared to the scale of need in Kampuchea such aid can only be symbolic; however it is a step in the right direction.

While the EEC has assumed a more humanitarian approach to rehabilitation aid to Kampuchea, the policies of many individual member nations are less encouraging. No EEC member provides bilateral aid to Kampuchea. France was the only EEC nation to earmark humanitarian assistance for the country through multilateral agencies in 1986 and 1987.\textsuperscript{16}

Other nations justify the withholding of aid on the grounds of Kampuchea's human rights record. A 1986 guideline from the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation states, among other reasons, that "no assistance is given to countries — like Kampuchea — where there is a gross and systematic violation of human rights".\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, in January 1987, the British Minister for Overseas Development, referring to the lack of aid given to Kampuchea, indicated that "we take account of human rights factors". By contrast, neither country withholds aid from the border where human rights abuses by the resistance groups have been extensively documented.\textsuperscript{18} According to the Foreign Affairs Committee Report, "the United Kingdom has pledged direct humanitarian assistance to the Khmer resistance forces of £100,000 in 1986-87 and support for the various UN border and refugee relief programmes of about £1/2 million."\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore no EEC nation has ever voted against seating the Khmer Rouge at the UN, despite their known record of systematic human rights violations.

Bilateral Aid

Bilateral aid to Kampuchea comes mainly from Vietnam, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These programmes have given priority to agriculture, supplies of fuel, tractors, fertilisers, restoration of power stations for factories and urban centres, communications and technical assistance.

Aid to Kampuchea from the socialist countries is estimated at about US$100 million a year, with the Soviet Union the largest contributor.\textsuperscript{20} Their aid (about US$80 million a year) is normally channelled into large scale projects such as repair of the port facilities, rehabilitation of electricity stations and roads, and restoration of the textile and rubber industries, projects which in other countries might be financed by the World Bank. It also provides agricultural equipment and nitrogen fertilisers, as well as cloth, medicines, trucks and steel. East Germany, the second biggest donor, puts about US$5 million a year into hospitals and the telephone system. Bulgaria is helping to improve the yields of tobacco, one of Kampuchea's few export commodities. Vietnam's aid is more difficult to estimate but according to the Vietnam/PRK Friendship
A Russian lecturer working with students at the Technical Training College in Phnom Penh, 1987.

Treaty it is committed to providing a minimum of US$25 million per year. Vietnam's assistance includes technical expertise in a number of fields as well as aid for the repair of roads and bridges, agricultural inputs, and goods such as cement and plastics. A system of pairing off Kampuchean and Vietnamese cities and provinces provides mutual aid in times of emergencies. In one case of province-to-province mutual aid, Vietnam provided 60 tons of rice seed and help in building dispensaries, a radio station, a sawmill, a veterinary post and two reservoirs. Aid from the socialist countries also includes military assistance and expertise.

But the assistance given by socialist countries is completely inadequate to sustain or permit Kampuchea to develop further. This leaves a wide gap in the aid provision, in agriculture, industry, transport and communications, health, education and social services. These gaps are far too wide to be filled by NGOs which do not normally fund capital projects. There is a clear need for humanitarian aid from the rich, non-communist nations, yet there is no such bilateral aid whatsoever; like multilateral development aid, it is currently withheld for political reasons.
Punishing the Poor

Australia

In 1979-80 Australians donated more money per capita to the Kampuchea relief programme than the people of any other country. Australia channels its aid for humanitarian and rehabilitation programmes in Kampuchea through both multilateral and non-governmental organisations. In 1985-86 Australian aid to Kampuchea was estimated at US$3.891 million, making it the largest single western donor country. Today Australia stands out mostly for its efforts in trying to bring about a political solution to the Kampuchean conflict.

United States of America

While the US showed great generosity as the largest single donor to the Kampuchea emergency relief operation in 1979-81, representing about one third of the entire budget, since then it has consistently obstructed the provision of aid to Kampuchea. In 1982 the US actively lobbied other western donors against providing assistance to the country and has deliberately thrown many obstacles in the path of aid programmes, even of American voluntary organisations who have to present every aspect of their work in Kampuchea to the US government for review and licensing.

The International Emergency Economic Powers Act was used to restrict non-governmental humanitarian organisations in providing aid to Kampuchea and Vietnam by requiring them to receive licences, even for relief and emergency aid. The line separating development assistance from emergency aid is fundamental to US government restrictions, but it has changed over time and varies according to local conditions and political considerations, frustrating the work of the agencies even more. For example, sending school kits to Kampuchean children one year was considered emergency aid. The following year it was banned because it was considered ‘development’. The denial was eventually reversed after school children who had handmade these school kits appealed directly to President Reagan and greatly embarrassed the administration. According to an American NGO official, women, children and men in Kampuchea have in effect been declared enemies of the US, and US agencies are being used to implement foreign policy. “It is absolute madness that fishnets and pumps and boats and trucks and farm tools are seen as undermining US interests and therefore banned from shipment to Kampuchea.”

In the past year however, as a result of activities by the American voluntary organisations, the US Congress has liberalised export controls on humanitarian aid from the US and the Administration has followed suit in relaxing restrictions on the purchase of goods abroad. It has also expanded the definition of acceptable projects.

Although the US provides no aid of any sort to Kampuchea, it does give
Development Aid Denied

financial support for both the non-communist factions of the DK coalition and the Khmer Rouge. In December 1986, a letter from a US Senator's aide stated that Washington had given the ousted Khmer Rouge forces US$85 million in aid since 1980. This however has recently been denied by State Department officials. In 1986 and 1987 the US foreign aid bill authorised US$3.5 million in aid to the non-communist anti-PRK forces, and US$5 million in 1985, without restrictions on how it was to be used. It appears that at a meeting between the Deputy Foreign Minister of Thailand and the US Deputy Secretary of State, the United States agreed to increase its humanitarian aid to the non-communist resistance groups to about US$7.5 million in 1987-88. Covert aid to the non-communist forces of DK is estimated to be US$7 million annually since the formation of CGDK in 1982.

'Vietnamisation'

No issue has more prominently dominated criticism of the Heng Samrin government by western donor governments than the unsubstantiated allegations of deliberate attempts to colonise and 'Vietnamise' Kampuchea. While it is impossible for any foreign observer to go out and actually count every Vietnamese living in Kampuchea, aid officials with long experience of working in Kampuchea, as well as foreign visitors and Kampuchea scholars and experts, find that allegations of massive influxes of Vietnamese settlers into Kampuchea are unfounded.

Many Vietnamese who were living in Kampuchea before the war have certainly returned and settled in their old neighbourhoods. Many have resumed the activities which they dominated before the war, namely trading and fishing, hair cutting and running restaurants. According to a Khmer colleague in Phnom Penh, "Khmers do not have a commercial spirit, so the Chinese, Vietnamese and Thais have taken advantage of us for many generations. We have been taught the Buddhist principles of tolerance and respect for all living creatures. We are taught not even to kill a fly. And partly for this reason, Khmers are not fisherfolk. We are people of the soil. We don't like to move around from place to place as most merchants and fisherfolk do. But perhaps we must change that." A smaller number of illegal migrants are more defiant to control. They travel up and down the rivers to trade, or come to Kampuchea in order to avoid military conscription in Vietnam or simply because they are unemployed and life might be easier in Kampuchea. Furthermore both Kampuchean policy and Vietnamese policy discourage intermarriage between Khmer and Vietnamese.

Kampuchea's border with Vietnam is both long and largely unmarked. Attempts by the Kampuchean government to establish Khmer villages and settlements along its borders with neighbouring countries suggest actions to discourage Vietnamese infringement of settlement. Research
undertaken in border provinces where one would expect a Vietnamese presence, as well as reports of a recent visit by a former US Ambassador to Kampuchea, estimate the number of Vietnamese residents to range between 150,000 and 250,000. This compares with the 450,000 who lived in Kampuchea prior to 1970.

**The PRK Government**

The isolation imposed by most of the international community and eight years of anti-PRK propaganda account for many of the prevailing misconceptions about the current regime. The common western view sees the PRK as a mere Vietnamese puppet. However the PRK has an identity of its own, and has become increasingly assertive vis-a-vis Vietnam in recent years.

Vietnamese influence in Kampuchea appears strongest in foreign policy, military affairs and internal security. It is more difficult to define the limits of their influence in other spheres of Kampuchean government. Nevertheless some trends are indicative of growing Khmer nationalism. Perhaps most significant are the changes which have occurred in government since 1979. For example, in 1979 when the PRK was first formed two groups of leaders dominated the government: those who had participated in the independence struggle of 1946-54 and then gone to Vietnam until the US-Vietnam war, and communists who had stayed in Kampuchea and participated in the Pol Pot administration before becoming dissidents. Thus in mid-April 1980 the governing body of Kampuchea, The People's Revolutionary Council, was composed of 12 Khmers who were Vietnam veterans and 5 who were former Khmer Rouge personnel, among them Heng Samrin the President, Hun Sen then Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chea Sim then Minister of the Interior. Only the Education Minister had no pre-war communist background.

In 1981 the government structure was expanded and modified. The People's Revolutionary Council was replaced by the Council of State and the Council of Ministers and National Assembly became part of the governing body. The new government included 11 Vietnam veterans, 8 Khmer Rouge defectors and 5 non-revolutionaries, including the US-educated former Minister of Agriculture.

Similar shifts occurred within the Party structure. In 1981 the Central Committee consisted of 11 Vietnam veterans and 7 former Khmer Rouge, while after the 5th Party Conference, held in October 1985, the Central Committee was expanded to include 31 full members and 14 alternates. Of the 31, only 5 are Vietnam veterans, 9 or 10 are former Khmer Rouge and the rest are mainly young professionals who had no association with either Vietnam.
or the Khmer Rouge but who were teachers, students, technicians or civil servants under Lon Nol or Sihanouk. The latter have chosen to stay and help reconstruct their country and can hardly be said to be ‘pro-Vietnamese’. While compulsory political education at all levels attempts to win civil servants over to the current political system, one can detect fear and cynicism among intellectuals over what socialism can do for Kampuchea. The experience of socialism under the Khmer Rouge is still a vivid memory.

In 1986, two more non-revolutionaries replaced Vietnam veterans when they took over the important Ministries of Interior and Trade. Similarly, leadership in the provinces is dominated by non-revolutionaries.

All PRK government and party positions are held by Khmers, not Vietnamese, and when Khmer people and foreign aid workers have to deal with the administration, they deal with Khmers only. According to foreign aid officials in Phnom Penh, the National Assembly and all public service sectors meet annually to review and evaluate the effectiveness of recently adopted policies. They appear to proceed from experience and by trial and error to see what best fits Kampuchea; what has and has not been effective. There are many examples in current Kampuchean infrastructure which show that Kampuchea is not being turned into a carbon copy of Vietnam. The PRK constitution and the process of drawing it up are examples of the consolidation of various Khmer points of view. The legislative system differs in many respects from those of other socialist countries. The recognition and encouragement of the private production sector reflects Khmer pragmatism and realism. The rejection of a Vietnamese offer to educate Kampuchea’s minorities located in the remote areas bordering Vietnam is another indication of Khmer self-determination.

In 1979, following the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge, Vietnamese personnel played an essential role in getting Kampuchea back on its feet when there were too few Khmers alive with experience of administration. It is worth noting that Vietnam did not flood the country with advisors, as the US did in Laos and Vietnam during the war, but brought in limited numbers to do key work only. Today there are still Vietnamese advisors in the ministries, in the provinces and at district level where Khmer administration is still perceived to be inexperienced or weak. Western aid workers who have worked in Kampuchea since 1979 and Khmer-speaking Kampuchean scholars who have debriefed refugees agree that the number of Vietnamese experts and advisors has steadily diminished over the years.

Although most Khmers are grateful to Vietnam for rescuing them from Pol Pot and for the vital assistance provided to them at a
Punishing the Poor

desperate moment, they share a traditionally strong resentment of Vietnam. Many of them today express anxiety and concern about Vietnam's, and to a lesser extent the Eastern bloc's, long term intentions. The PRK has no illusions about Vietnam's security interests in the region nor the fact that ultimately Kampuchean self-determination must not threaten those interests. Neither does Kampuchea ignore its economic potential to neighbours and more distant allies. According to one Khmer civil servant, "The more we become indebted to our neighbours, the less choices we will have in the disposition of our resources as time goes on". There is popular resentment over agricultural products (especially rice) and fish going to Vietnam, and rubber to the Soviet Union on exchange terms which are perceived as disadvantageous to Kampuchea. The lack of competitive marketing opportunities, another result of isolation, clearly limits Kampuchea's trading alternatives.

According to a western aid official with extensive experience in the country, Kampuchea is being put in an almost impossible position. It faces a daily struggle to find a development strategy which responds to its needs and aspirations, and remains faithful to socialist ideology. The government states its desire to limit dependence on Vietnam and the Eastern bloc and to avoid a preponderance of either one in its affairs. However the PRK government is shunned by many governments on the grounds of being a puppet of Vietnam. This isolation creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Security

The security situation in Kampuchea has at times deteriorated since 1980. Then, the beaten Khmer Rouge were revived by misappropriating international aid destined for refugees, and by weapons supplied by China through Thailand. The KPNLF and ANS (Sihanouk supporters), the other two members of the Coalition government of DK, receive limited arms supplies from ASEAN and their resistance depends largely on international food aid. Together they can claim no significant victories on the battlefield nor have they succeeded in winning the support of the Kampuchean population. In the words of Ben Kiernan, a specialist in Khmer history who has visited the country four times since 1980 and most recently in January 1987, "It will be many years before the horrors of the Pol Pot period recede far enough in the popular memory for any significant numbers of Kampucheans to see the Vietnamese as a greater enemy than Pol Pot's forces or anyone even loosely allied to them." After his six week visit, including two weeks in a Khmer village, Kiernan concluded that the ongoing war has helped to
A Khmer guard on the train from Phnom Penh to Battambang — a route vulnerable to Khmer Rouge attack. 1987.
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consolidate the PRK government and that Khmers who in the past may have mistrusted Heng Samrin’s PRK, are in many cases now resigned to it.42

The Khmer Rouge, with an estimated force of 30-40,000 troops, are by far the most effective Khmer resistance faction.43 Since losing their bases along the Thai-Kampuchean border during the 1984-85 Vietnamese offensive, they have developed the capacity to act almost anywhere in the country. In small and isolated hit-and-run incidents they attack not only economic and military targets but kill peasants and travellers as well.44 While China, ASEAN and the West have been quick to interpret an increase of DK attacks inside Kampuchea as a sign of increasing popular support for the opposition, the evidence is lacking. Most peasants do not take sides politically. They want to live in peace; if well-armed Khmer Rouge soldiers come through their village, the people cooperate and will not turn them in because they do not want their village burned down or to attract any revenge. They will do the same no matter whose soldiers arrive. When offered this argument in a recent interview, a Khmer Rouge official admitted that in fact “there might be some truth in that”.45

For Kampuchea the price of the war is high, in both human and material resources, but as long as Vietnam maintains its troops to support and defend it there is little chance of the government being toppled.

Western intelligence sources estimate the number of Vietnamese forces currently in Kampuchea at approximately 140,000 troops, compared to 200,000 in 1980.46 The Vietnamese ‘occupation’ of Kampuchea is not comparable to the Nazi occupation of Europe. As many foreign visitors to Kampuchea have observed, the Vietnamese military presence in Kampuchea is neither used against the civilian population nor deployed to organise society, but is concentrated out in the countryside fighting the war.

The presence of Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea while the PRK rebuilds its army (estimated to number about 30,000 troops) is still the only assurance Kampucheans have that the dreaded Khmer Rouge will not return, despite being armed by China and seated at the United Nations. After eight years of deadlock and despite pressure brought to bear on Kampuchea and Vietnam by China, ASEAN and most western nations, security remains vital to Kampucheans. They will not trade a total Vietnamese troop withdrawal for western aid and recognition or even elections until they themselves, or other members of the international community, can ensure that the killers of over a million Khmers will not return to power. No such assurance is provided in current proposals for “internationally supervised elections”. Stating that the Khmer Rouge “would not win free elections” is not the same as preventing them from trying to seize power by force. Peace-keeping
forces of the United Nations, which recognises Democratic Kampuchea as the 'legitimate government', would be unlikely to oppose effectively the return to power of its leaders like Pol Pot.

In recent years the PRK has put a number of unpopular defence measures into effect. Military conscription has been extended from three to five years. Since 1984, civilians have also been conscripted by the thousand for 'patriotic works'. These include repairing access roads, clearing forest, digging ditches and laying mines along the Thai border to form a kind of Maginot line of defence between Kampuchea and Thailand. Such work, being close to the war zone and in malaria-infested areas, exacts a heavy toll on those involved. The completion of this border project seems to be a pre-condition for a complete Vietnamese troop withdrawal in 1990.

Human Rights
The rapidly growing body of information on the history of Kampuchea over the last century indicates that abuse of power and even torture of political opponents has been a distressingly regular part of political struggle for decades. An Amnesty International report on Human Rights in Kampuchea and a report of the New York based Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights, on violations in the camps on the Thai-Kampuchean border firmly allege continuing human rights abuse. From their work in Kampuchea, NGO representatives, although they are aware of criticisms of the government and of the Vietnamese presence, have no first hand evidence either to support or refute those allegations. The charges are serious and must not be ignored but they should be examined in the context of Kampuchean recovery from the Khmer Rouge excesses.

NGOs working in Kampuchea have witnessed Khmer society pulling itself back from the almost total dismantling which was the legacy of the American-Vietnam War and of the rule of the Khmer Rouge. They have struggled beside Khmers carrying out reconstruction work. They share a sense of victory when one village rehabilitates a small irrigation system or obtains a safe drinking water supply or when one health project provides minimal immunisation to children. Similarly, they are encouraged by and supportive of the first signs of a judicial system, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, being restored. They do not feel it necessary to condemn the fact that the great majority of the people have yet to receive any of these fundamental rights. They recognise the size of the task, and the scarcity of human and material resources to apply to it. The NGOs see their role as strengthening and encouraging all moves in the right direction, rather than simply condemning the system's failures and inadequacies.
Punishing the Poor

For NGOs to diminish their humanitarian work in any way in response to allegations of human rights violations in Kampuchea would be to make innocent people suffer in the name of preventing the suffering of other innocent people. So while continuing their work, the NGOs must also continue their appeals to the morality and conscience of those in power in Kampuchea and in the border camps to put an end to any abusive practices and release any ‘prisoners of conscience’.52

At the same time, NGOs working in Kampuchea are fully aware that, in the name of a better life for the country, outside powers finance and encourage daily abuses of the human rights of Khmers in the form of guerrilla warfare. Innocent women and children have been killed in brutal ambushes of trains and other public transport.53 Attacks on economic targets such as the jute sack factory or a ferry,54 and the placing of explosives in market places55 add to the hardships of a struggling civilian population. For these powers to use reports of human rights abuses as the basis to justify still further death and destruction among Khmers would be the ultimate denial of their human rights.

It seems obvious that all human rights, social and economic, political and legal, would be much more likely to be observed if the war in Kampuchea were brought to an end. There is no credibility in a policy that suggests that guerrilla warfare is the only way to bring about the better observance of the rights of the Kampuchean people. Ending support for guerrilla warfare and providing more human and material resources are two positive ways in which governments can join NGOs in expressing their concern for the welfare of the Kampuchean people. Such actions, unlike the current punitive policy of isolating Kampuchea, could provide leverage in the struggle on behalf of the human rights of the Khmer people.

Genocide

From the perspective of the surviving victims of Pol Pot it is a bitter irony that concern is expressed for the rights of the Khmer people at the same time as a majority of the international community at the United Nations continues to recognise the Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for acts of genocide between 1975-78. The overwhelming majority of countries in the UN who repeatedly condemn the Vietnamese ‘occupation’ of Kampuchea have never publicly condemned the systematic and extreme violations of human rights in Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge rule. And no western country has ever voted against the Khmer Rouge being seated in the UN.56

Kampuchea signed the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1950 and Democratic Kampuchea remains an internationally recognised State Party to the
Development Aid Denied

Convention. As such it can be held accountable for crimes against humanity.57

Over the past five years, the New York based Cambodia Documentation Commission has gathered voluminous evidence to demonstrate conclusively that crimes against humanity were committed under the Khmer Rouge regime. According to David Hawk, the Director of the Commission, the deliberate nature of mass murder is provided by thousands of pages of Khmer Rouge extermination camp archives, including signed execution orders and signed reports on the torture of prisoners, execution logs, a manual detailing when and how to torture prisoners and thousands of photos taken by the Khmer Rouge officials of prisoners before and after torture. This evidence is further supported by hundreds of oral histories and interviews of survivors inside Kampuchea, in the refugee camps and among Khmers now living abroad.58

At the beginning of 1987, 200 refugee survivors of the Khmer Rouge wrote to the government leaders of 60 countries which have signed the Genocide Convention appealing to them to take legal action against the Democratic Kampuchean leadership responsible for acts of genocide, as required by Article 6 of the Genocide Convention. Only signatory nations, and not individuals, can instigate an international tribunal. To date none have sought to take action under the Genocide Convention.

As disturbing as the documented evidence is the fact that the Khmer Rouge leaders of Democratic Kampuchea continue to play an active role in international political life and to violate the rights of Khmer people held unwillingly in the refugee camps under their control. Even their partners in the Coalition admit that the Khmer Rouge have not changed.59 In May 1987 Sihanouk, after many previous threats, finally stepped down for a year as president of the Coalition government, citing as his reasons Khmer Rouge attacks on his followers and Khmer Rouge violations of human rights.60

NGO representatives working in Kampuchea are also aware of the Khmer people's overwhelming fear of the return of the Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for genocide. If Vietnamese forces were to withdraw from Kampuchea tomorrow there would be nothing to prevent Pol Pot and his 30,000 troops from seizing power. The Kampuchean people have been willing to make many sacrifices to prevent that happening. They have sacrificed peace. They have tolerated the presence of Vietnamese forces in their country and the isolation imposed on them by other countries; all this to prevent the Khmer Rouge leadership from returning to power.

Withdrawing multilateral support for the Khmer Rouge, and bringing its leaders to justice for the crime of genocide would bring immediate relief to Khmers both inside the country and in the Thai-Kampuchean
Punishing the Poor

border camps. It would give some legal redress to the Kampucheans who suffered so much from these leaders and ensure that they would not return to power to resume the ‘killing fields’. At the same time such action would remove one of the main obstacles to a peaceful solution of the Kampucheans problem and possibly hasten the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops.
Chapter 6

The Thai-Kampuchean Border

"The quarter of a million people on the border are one of the tragedies of the conflict. The longer the conflict goes on, the costs are not to the government; they're to those individuals. It is true that for most governments people of another nationality are ultimately expendable."

Thai Political Scientist

Women returning home with their UN food rations after a distribution in Nong Chan, part of the huge Site 2 camp.
The Political Uses of Refugees

The plight of over 260,000 Khmer refugees and displaced people still held in enclosed camps in Thailand poignantly illustrates the human cost of the Kampuchean tragedy. These are the obvious victims of the continuing conflict, suffering a hopeless and often violent existence in United Nations-assisted camps controlled by the various factions of the coalition 'government-in-exile' of Democratic Kampuchea.

Until recently all but approximately 26,000 of these displaced people were denied either the protection of asylum and refugee status in Thailand or the security of a normal life in their home country. With the Thai closing of the UN camp at Kao-I-Dang in January 1987, even these 26,000 have lost that final protection.² The Khmers in Thailand are needed to legitimize the 'government' of Democratic Kampuchea by creating an identifiable population which the CGDK controls. This enables the CGDK to be recognised at the United Nations as the 'government' of Kampuchea. The Kampuchean displaced people are also needed to provide a recruitment base for the coalition forces fighting the Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin government in Kampuchea. They also act as a buffer between the Vietnamese and PRK forces on the one hand, and Thailand and the Coalition's military resistance bases on the other.

An internal UN document refers to the border population as hostages:

"The essential moral problem at the border is the fact that the international community has purposely contrived and continues to support a system that relegates the border Kampucheans into a limbo. The real issue is whether or not the international community will choose to continue to perpetrate a Palestinian type festering sore and thereby hold the Kampucheans hostage to political considerations far beyond the comprehension of the victims themselves."³
Who are the displaced people and refugees? Why are they in camps? What are their problems and needs? How are their lives affected by the current conflict? What is their future? Who gains from their plight? Why are the United Nations, the International Red Cross, and other humanitarian agencies unable to fulfil their mandates of protection? Why have so few diplomatic efforts been made to end the suffering of the Kampuchean people? These are but a few of the questions involved in an understanding of the Kampuchean border situation, a situation complicated by numerous human and political variables, ironies, inconsistencies, and contradictions.

Origins of the Refugee Problem

Kampuchea’s refugee movement dates back to the war period between 1970 and 1975. As Khmer Rouge guerrillas began to control more of the countryside, bombing and strafing of Kampuchea by the United States and the Phnom Penh Air Force not only destroyed villages, markets, and fields but also killed and injured many people and animals. Kampuchean society became completely disrupted and well over half the population was uprooted. The only two major towns which remained outside the war zone, Phnom Penh and Battambang, began to swell with refugees from the war. During the period, the population of both cities more than trebled.

Two categories of refugees sought safety abroad during this period. A relative trickle of 34,000 refugees, mostly affluent and well-educated, fled westward to Thailand but required little international support. Another group of approximately 320,000 Vietnamese residents went southward, driven out by the Lon Nol racial massacres. Since 1979 many of the Kampuchea-born Vietnamese have returned, giving rise to the West’s fears of the ‘Vietnamisation’ of Kampuchea.

During the Pol Pot regime, approximately 150,000 Khmers and Sino-Khmers fled to Vietnam while only about 26,000 Khmers were able to flee into Thailand. By the time the Vietnamese and Khmer liberation forces invaded Kampuchea in late 1978, 20,000 of the 26,000 refugees had already been resettled in third countries, informing the world at large about the horrors of the Pol Pot regime.

The invasion led to another mass movement within Kampuchea as traumatised, diseased, and weakened Khmers criss-crossed the country in attempts to return home and in search of family and friends. Many, broken by almost ten years of war and suffering and fearing a very uncertain future, preferred to escape abroad. Thus, the destruction of the Democratic Kampuchea regime and the resultant freedom of movement created a new wave of refugees who fled to the border and into Thailand. In June 1979 42,986 Khmers crossed over into Thailand to escape
Punishing the Poor

fighting between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese troops. The Thai government, fearing that it would be left saddled with the burden of refugees, forced them back to Kampuchea over the treacherous cliffs of Preah Vihear and through minefields. A death toll of 10,000 is considered conservative by some. In response to an international outcry over the incident and with assurances of assistance from the West, in October 1979 Thailand agreed to open its borders and grant asylum to refugees from Kampuchea.

Those arriving included the defeated Pol Pot forces together with thousands of ill and starving Khmers they had forcibly taken with them on the path of retreat. The deplorable condition of these refugees, described by one journalist as "a walking concentration camp", plus news of the devastation and fear of impending famine inside Kampuchea, made headlines and was broadcast to homes around the world. This resulted in the most generous outpouring of aid seen until that date.

Between October 1979 and January 1980, 180,000 to 200,000 refugees crossed the Thai border. Thailand found itself in the thick of the refugee problem.

At its peak, between 1979-1981, the massive emergency relief operation drew over a million Khmers to the vicinity of the border. Many were uprooted and frustrated by conditions in their country. Others feared renewed fighting or persecution by the Vietnamese. Broadcasts on the Voice of America reporting on Khmers going to 'freedom' in the Thai refugee camps attracted a good number of Kampuchea's remaining professionals. They were quickly resettled in the West, which in turn provided an added incentive to others. The majority of Khmers who came to the border however had no intention of going abroad. They moved freely back and forth to the border, benefiting from the aid operation and also engaging in the lucrative border trade.

In January 1980, Thailand again closed its border, and those refugees already in Thailand were placed in UNHCR holding centres, such as Khao-I-Dang. They were granted de facto refugee status, making them eligible for resettlement in third countries. Thailand had earlier made clear its position to the West, stressing that it offered asylum only for the purpose of resettlement in third countries with no prospect of either repatriation to Kampuchea or more permanent settlement in Thailand.

The remaining refugees settled in makeshift encampments ostensibly on the Kampucheana side of the border. The Thais and western governments considered them as 'displaced people', not refugees, since they were still on Kampucheana soil and presumably under the 'care' of the UN-recognised 'government of Democratic Kampuchea'. The exact boundary was not clear, and a camp could be described as being in Thailand or in Kampuchea depending on political necessity.
The Thai-Kampuchean Border

These camps were at first controlled by a variety of opportunists, military leaders and bandits. Eventually they came under the administration of the three opposition groups: the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) a non-communist group under Son Sann, and FUNCINPEC, Sihanouk's faction. Since 1982 these three groups have formed the "Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea." The forcible misappropriation of considerable quantities of aid by the military commanders of these camps for their military or personal purposes was widely reported.9

The population of the camps consisted of a mixture of guerrilla resistance forces and civilians, who were theoretically not allowed to cross over into Thailand but who could move relatively freely inside Kampuchea. Many made their fortunes through illegal cross-border trade and smuggling or engaged in these activities to supplement the aid they received from the UN, ICRC, and the NGOs. By February 1983, the camps on the Kampuchean side of the border took on the semblance of permanence, with thriving markets, farming, and private enterprise. However, civilians in these camps often became victims of inter-factional fighting, as well as other forms of violence, banditry and rape.

Because of the military nature and activities of these camps, civilians living in them also fell victim to attacks by Vietnamese and Heng Samrin forces. Between 1982 and 1984, the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) supervised 95 camp evacuations, 65 of them under shellfire. China, ASEAN and the West protested against these attacks on civilians and responded by providing more support and military aid to the resistance.10 The refugees became a useful human buffer between Thailand and the Khmer resistance forces on the one side and the Vietnamese and Heng Samrin forces on the other. As one UN official working at the border pointed out, "instead of the resistance forces providing protection to the displaced civilians, it is more a matter of civilians protecting the resistance forces."11

From November 1984 to March 1985, a major Vietnamese and PRK offensive was launched against the coalition base camps, forcing the evacuation of some 240,000 people into Thailand.

With the aid of the UN, the ICRC and the NGOs, eight new evacuation sites in Thailand were set up, enclosed, and patrolled by the specially-created Thai Task Force 80. Since then, the quality of life of Khmer civilians living in the camps has deteriorated with serious consequences for their future. Even though these Khmers have been in Thai territory since 1985, their situation affords them neither asylum nor refugee status, and neither the opportunity for repatriation to their own country nor for resettlement abroad.
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MAP OF THAI-KAMPUCHEAN BORDER REGION

Camps holding displaced Cambodians, under the control of:

- **KR** — Khmer Rouge
- **FUNCINPEC** — National United Front for an Independent, Neutral and Cooperative Cambodia
- **KPNLF** — Khmer People's National Liberation Front
- **UNHCR** — United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
The Thai-Kampuchean Border

THAI/KAMPUCHEAN BORDER CAMPS
CAMP AFFILIATIONS AND POPULATIONS
(from UNBRO food distribution statistics, April 1987)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camp Affiliation</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Huay Chan — KR</td>
<td>8,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natrao — KR</td>
<td>12,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Hill — Sihanouk</td>
<td>43,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2 — KPNLF</td>
<td>152,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 8 — KR</td>
<td>29,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo Rai — KR</td>
<td>3,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sol Sann — KPNLF</td>
<td>7,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta Luan — KR</td>
<td>4,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmer Rouge</td>
<td>58,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPNLF</td>
<td>160,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sihanouk</td>
<td>43,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>261,687</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The above do not include the resistance forces' satellite military camps.
** Khao-I-Dang with a population of about 22,000 is a refugee camp, and thus falls under the responsibility of the UNHCR and the Thai government.

The Border Camps

In April 1987 261,000 civilians were living in eight camps, located just inside Thailand, from one to six kilometres from the Kampuchean border. These are extremely dangerous areas within easy shelling range of Vietnamese guns. At least 10,000 more civilians are in satellite military camps located near each of the civilian camps. This is the 'hidden border' which is out of the reach of the UN. In addition there are 60,000 or so members of the various armed forces at the 'hidden border'.

While the UN and ICRC have had some success in separating the civilian and military populations, the two groups remain inextricably linked. This has serious implications for both civilian life and the work of the UN and NGOs. Several of the civilian camp leaders freely admit to the military nature of their camps. An official of Huay Chan camp stated to a World Food Programme evaluation team: "This is a resistance camp. Everything we do is to support the military." In September 1986, whilst on their way to a meeting point to deliver insecticides and stationery for Natrao camp, UNBRO and Catholic Relief Services officials were met by
Punishing the Poor

200 armed soldiers.¹⁴ Natrao is a Khmer Rouge camp administered by Mok, known as the ‘butcher of Kampuchea’. He is a close ally of Pol Pot and was responsible for some of the bloodiest purges in Kampuchea. Green Hill and Sok Sann are both rear-base military support camps. The

Green Hill camp administrator explained to the WFP evaluation mission that they would not see many men in the camp because 10,000 of the camp’s population were stationed inside Kampuchea, and returned just to rest. A Sok Sann camp administrator told the same team: “This camp works for the liberation of our country...90% of the young men want to be soldiers.”¹⁵

According to a survey carried out in August 1986 by a British academic, 37% of the men in Site 2 gave their occupation as soldiers; 50% in Green Hill and 2% in Site 8, with another 13% working as ammunition carriers.¹⁶ Women also ‘volunteer’ as ammunition carriers. According to one report in March 1987 “Five months ago three female porters, who each headed up a unit of 15 women responsible for carrying weapons and food to Khmer Rouge fighters deep inside Kampuchea were executed after trying to escape...”¹⁷ The reporter was told this story by a woman who survived the escape attempt and now resides in Green Hill camp.
During deliberations of the British House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1986, a Conservative Member of Parliament who had recently visited the border stated “we felt that most Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand were also, in effect, rear base camps for support of the Khmer Rouge and other forces.”

Of the 260,000 Khmers in border camps, 150,000 are under the age of 15 and half that number are under the age of 5. The oldest would have been born during the period of the Vietnam War, have survived the Pol Pot era, and today continue to live in the violence and uncertainty of the camps. They will never have experienced peace or normal life. While they have access to some primary education, Thailand does not officially allow high school education or any type of technical training in the camps. (Two secondary schools operate unofficially in Site 2.) With compulsory military service at the age of 16, the present camp situation provides a breeding ground for tomorrow’s guerrillas.

At almost 5%, the camp's birth rate is one of the highest in the world. It is expected to double the already overcrowded border population within the next decade. 30% of the border population are under the age of 5. One aid worker spoke of the sadness he feels when he “asks a five year old girl where rice comes from and all she knows is that it comes home on her mother’s head every Tuesday morning from the UN rice distribution lines or that water comes from trucks every week.”

A refugee woman in Site 2 spoke emotionally about the effects of camp life on children:
Punishing the Poor

"They don’t know what Kampuchea is and what it means to be Khmer. They have no identity. They have never seen a mango growing on a tree or know how to plant rice. Many don’t know what it is to have a grandfather or grandmother. They don’t know what it is to have land or the freedom to move about. All they know is life in a closed camp and all they have to look forward to is going to fight because that is the only option open to them and the only thing they will know how to do." 21

Unless something is done quickly to resolve the refugee situation, the international community, including western governments, must share responsibility for a younger generation of Kampucheans growing up with a warped sense of reality, in a totally artificial environment, thinking that war is a normal way of life. What society will they fit into and what will they have to offer their country? How will they adapt if and when they ever return to Kampuchea? How will Kampuchea adapt to them?

Life in the Camps

It is not easy to convey the atmosphere permeating the camps to someone who had not been there. One aid worker at the border describes it as:

"An elusive sadness that is deeper than words. It is a sadness that causes the Cambodians to say, “I have no more tears.”

On this border it is the sadness one feels when one realises that there is something terribly wrong out here; something that leaves people in such a state that they’ll never be whole again, be it minus a leg or psychologically broken.

The sadness one experiences in one’s friend as he feels he cannot go home because he has been at the border too long; as he comes to realise Site 2 is more a prison than a refuge, as he knows that even if he did want to go to a third country no one would accept him.

It is the sadness one touches on when recognising that even if there were a peaceful solution to this refugee problem, people will be walking on land mines for another generation.

It is that sadness which causes one to ache as a pregnant mother with two small toddlers in her arms tells you she attempted to abort this third child because she is afraid she can’t carry three children in the wake of yet another early morning attack by the Vietnamese.

It is the sadness that can overwhelm you as you watch one of your most talented medics break down when he receives the news that his only relative (and only ticket out of this hell) died in Canada.
The Thai-Kampuchean Border

It is the sadness one must struggle with when one is with a despondent 20 year old boy who has lost two arms and an eye to a mine which he was in the process of making to blow off another's leg. Maybe when one touches this sadness fully it will motivate one to move with an urgency, the urgency with which one moves when one's friend is dying, the urgency with which one would move if one were dying oneself.  

The Khmer Rouge-controlled Site 8.

An in-depth socio-economic evaluation of the camps undertaken in August 1986 by Dr. Reynell points to a number of long term psychological effects of growing up in the tense environment of the camps. She notes:

"Deprivation does not only relate to physical conditions. The physical and economic deprivation in the camps, the lack of freedom, the level of violence, the over-crowding, the fear of attacks and conflict and the overwhelming uncertainty as to what the future holds — all compounded by the horror of the Pol Pot era — have serious social and psychological consequences."

Her findings show that marital conflict often results in violence, and is common due to the frustrations arising from lack of food and cramped
living conditions. The common problem in all camps of men taking mistresses is also a source of marital violence. Reynell observes:

"Conflict and fighting between neighbours can result from a number of seemingly small incidents which become exacerbated by the crowded, trying conditions of life in the camps. For example, a water-carrying yoke which breaks when a neighbour is borrowing it, a neighbour throwing dirty water near someone else's house, children fighting, neighbours gossiping about each other, people getting drunk and picking quarrels. Even the language of social discourse has changed. People no longer use the polite forms of address when speaking to each other. Other social norms are breaking down, and some now describe Khmer society as "confused and mixed-up"."

Overcrowded housing and poverty also lead to an increase in child battering, says Reynell: "For example, children reject their monotonous diet, and unable to fulfil the child's wishes, mothers beat them in frustration."

Orphans face particular problems when they are adopted by poor families. Often their labour is used to help the family survive, for example by chopping wood and carrying water. This means that they are deprived of even the limited educational facilities in the camps. According to Reynell:

"People expressed the view that the combined effect of the Pol Pot regime together with the insecurity of camp life, marked by constant shelling, evacuations and general lawlessness have also made people more violent than was the norm. This violence is expressed in everyday language. When people are jealous of someone or dislike them they use the word which means "to cut open" or "to kill". The use of these words dates back to the days of Pol Pot and refers to their methods of killing.

Visible signs of psychological stress are widespread. Children have low levels of concentration, and find it difficult to absorb much information. There are women for whom camp life has become unbearable, who walk out of the house leaving their children, and others 'retreat' into themselves shunning social contact. Anxiety is also high with people sharing their worries about when the next shelling will take place — even though there has been no serious shelling for over a year. It is common to hear people say they cannot concentrate because of such fears."

The lack of employment opportunities and options for improving life in the camps results in the loss of self-confidence and feelings of worthlessness, feelings which are increasing among the population. At
most, 6,000 out of the total population have any form of employment. The restrictive nature of the camps plus the lack of employment opportunities also leads to high levels of theft and other crimes. Many people feel they have no control over their lives. Reynell expands on this point:

"People find the lack of freedom very difficult to endure. They speak of feeling trapped in a cage or in jail. The total uncertainty as to the future is particularly stressful.

On the whole, people are unable to talk about or envision a future which is different from the present... Many people emphasise hopelessness; they are just waiting to die. People fear to express such thoughts openly in case they are considered disloyal to the resistance movement, so even verbal release is impossible.

The sense of fear is pervasive. Most of the people of rural background wish to go home but are afraid of the Vietnamese and the Heng Samrin forces in Kampuchea. They fear the camp administrators as well as the mines on the border. They also express fear of the Thai authorities and rangers."

Green Hill Camp

The Khmer camps vary widely in size, location, and character. Green Hill is perhaps the best organised and most tolerable of the camps. A picture of Prince Sihanouk, once king of Cambodia and now leader of a non-
Punishing the Poor

communist faction of the Coalition, hangs next to a picture of the king of Thailand in all the administrative buildings and classrooms. Green Hill receives UNBRO food for 41,000 people in addition to aid from many other donors and supporters of Prince Sihanouk. Security is more relaxed than in other camps, and it is the only camp to have a cooperative shop offering up to 200 commodities and foodstuffs. The Kampuchean Women’s Association plays an important role in the welfare of camp residents, assisting widows and the most needy, implementing adult literacy programmes, training women to sew, and offering some day care services for mothers who attend the literacy classes. Living conditions are, on the whole, better than in the other camps, with more opportunities for supplementing income through gardening, raising livestock, or cultivating fish ponds. For these reasons, this camp is often used as a showpiece. Nevertheless, this should not obscure the fact that many problems do exist in the camp, nor should it imply that conditions in the other camps are similar.

Site 2

Site 2, only one kilometre from the Kampuchean border with a population of 152,000 is the second largest Kampuchean ‘city’ in the world after Phnom Penh. Because of its size, poor administration, inter-
The Thai-Kampuchean Border

factionalism, lack of discipline, large black market activities, and smuggling, this camp also has the most problems. It is overcrowded, surrounded by barbed wire and situated in inhospitable terrain, making it difficult for its inmates to grow supplementary food or to raise animals. It has no ground water, making it necessary for UNBRO to truck in water during the dry season in order to provide each person with one bucket of water a day. This costs UNBRO US $170,000 per month.\textsuperscript{28} Robbery, smuggling, and rape are frequent occurrences in the camp, as well as other forms of violence perpetrated by the KPNLF forces who control it with Thai assistance.\textsuperscript{29} At times, camp residents abandon their huts at night to sleep close to the NGO medical service building for safety.

Site 8

Site 8 is the only Khmer Rouge camp accessible (and only by day) to the international organisations and NGOs. Many of the civilians in this camp are not Khmer Rouge supporters but were forced across the border with them in 1979 and again in 1985 following the Vietnamese offensive. Its control by the Khmer Rouge is a serious source of concern. While the Khmer Rouge have tried to put on a new face to gain credibility as a member of the coalition government, their practices and cruel punishments are like those of the Pol Pot regime. According to the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights Report of February 1987 and reports from aid workers and journalists, this group has not yet abandoned its 'killing fields' policies and tactics.\textsuperscript{30} Perhaps most disturbing is their forcible removal of civilians from Site 8 to Khmer Rouge military camps.

In correspondence with the United Nations Secretary-General, one former UNHCR worker wrote that, “during the week of 12 to 16 January 1987, 1,683 Kampuchean site inmates were moved against their will from one Khmer Rouge controlled site (Site 8) to another — Natrao.”\textsuperscript{31} Natrao is run by Mok, known under the Pol Pot regime for his utter contempt for human life. In the light of this, it is perplexing that UNBRO continues to provide aid to Natrao and the other three Khmer Rouge 'civilian' camps even though they are denied access for monitoring camp activities. This is strictly against UN policy. The letter to the Secretary-General continues: “Neither the Thais nor the United Nations can guarantee that ‘refugees' relocated to non-communist evacuation sites or new border settlements, will not eventually, against their will, end up with the Khmer Rouge.”\textsuperscript{32}

Security is the most pressing problem in all the camps. Refugees face robbery, rape, extortion and murder from the GDK soldiers, gangs of armed bandits, and even from Thai rangers who have been assigned to protect them. From Thailand's perspective, these people are under the
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protection of the CGDK. But since this 'government' has no territory and no substantive administrative structure, it is very difficult to enforce law and order or to ensure that the basic needs of people are provided for.

Another aspect of security relates to the location of the encampments close to the Kampuchean border which makes them vulnerable to attacks and shelling from the Vietnamese and PRK forces. Though the border was relatively quiet in 1986, shelling of Site 2 on January 26, 1987, left eight people wounded, including three children. An aid official went so far as to suggest that such shelling had propaganda value for the CGDK. Although the Vietnamese had given warnings so that the camp could be evacuated, camp officials did nothing. According to a UN official, "the Thai strategy, endorsed by the western governments, is to keep these people in the combat area." 33

In another incident in Site 8 on May 29, 1986, nine people were killed and about thirty wounded in shelling of the camp. NGO staff and informed journalists in Bangkok believe the Khmer Rouge army deliberately shelled the camp to convince Thai officials that it would be too dangerous to move people from another Khmer Rouge military camp into Site 8. 34 While the government of Thailand exercises its sovereignty in deciding where the camps should be located, it is UNBRO and ICRC who assist in the evacuation of civilians, usually only to deposit them in another equally vulnerable area.

The Role of Thailand

Since 1945 Thailand has offered temporary refuge to hundreds of thousands of South East Asians, victims of her war-torn neighbours. As a country of first asylum for Indo-Chinese refugees, Thailand has shown unmatched generosity. Its policies regarding Kampuchean fleeing to the border in the wake of Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea are however influenced by a number of special interests.

Thailand's principal interest is in its security. With the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Kampuchea, Thailand had lost the buffer that stood between itself and Vietnam. Encouraged by China and the US, Thailand pursued a policy of encouraging the growth of guerrilla groups opposed to the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh. 35 Ironically, by offering resistance forces a haven in Thailand and by strategically placing Khmer camps as a buffer between Thailand and Vietnamese/PRK forces, Thailand has attracted large numbers of Vietnamese forces to its border and brought the war closer to home.

While the influx of Kampuchean into Thailand has caused a strain on Thailand's resources and danger for many Thai villages located in the vicinity of the Kampuchean border, there have been some advantages as well. Between 1979 and 1982 US $350,000,000 had been spent in
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A child injured by shrapnel is tended by her mother, Khao-I-Dang camp, November 1986.
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Thailand in refugee relief efforts. Since then, UNBRO alone has spent close to US $36 million a year on the Khmer border population, of which 90% is spent in Thailand. The aid programmes generate a beneficial ripple effect on the Thai economy. Foreign exchange, infrastructure development, local employment and business have all benefited from the UN Kampuchean Humanitarian Assistance Programme. Some 80,000 Thai villages affected by the Kampuchean presence also receive UN assistance. Another UNBRO grant of US $5 million is given to the Thai military for aid projects for affected Thais.

A participant at the 1985 Bellagio Conference on Kampuchea claimed that the Kampuchea invasion was a “blessing in disguise for Thailand. Bangkok had received security guarantees from the United States, the Thai army had been re-equipped, and China had stopped its support for the Communist Party of Thailand.”

In spite of this, Thai policy towards Kampucheans and the organisations assisting them has often been obstructive. Fear of being left with the burden of absorbing the refugees has prompted Thailand to close its borders to new Kampuchean arrivals on occasion; to deny 260,000 displaced Khmers legal status as refugees, the right to be resettled or return home. Thailand has also consistently resisted efforts to improve education programmes and provide vocational training to displaced Khmers.

Thailand has also failed to fulfil its responsibility to provide adequate protection for Khmers in Thai camps and has failed to take disciplinary action against abuses of Khmers by Thai rangers designated to protect them. The Thai government has ignored entreaties by UN agencies, ICRC and NGOs to move the Khmer camps further inland and out of the range of fire. Referring to potential changes in Thai policy towards Kampucheans, one Thai political analyst said, “there may be relocation of the camps, to meet our strategic needs, but our strategy of using the refugees as a military and human buffer between us and the Vietnamese will go on... It could go on for years. There is a lot of humanitarianism in our policy towards refugees. The refugees have been treated better here than in a number of other countries in the world.”

Thailand holds a potentially strategic key to the Kampuchean conflict. A decision to stop the passage of Chinese-supplied arms to the Khmer Rouge through Thai territory would bring relief to many Kampucheans who live in fear of a Khmer Rouge return to power. Such a decision would also set the climate for better relations with Vietnam and possibly hasten the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea. However Thailand would need support and reassurances from its neighbours in ASEAN and from its allies, especially the United States.
The Role of the United Nations

The United Nations itself has been mandated responsibility for the border relief programme. The United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) falls under the overall authority of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Humanitarian Assistance to the Kampuchean People, whose office is based in Bangkok. The appointment of this official by the Secretary-General served as important evidence of the concern and commitment of the United Nations to the Kampuchean people, as does the appointment of another Special Representative based in New York with a mandate to explore political solutions to the Kampuchean conflict.

The main tasks of the Special Representative for Humanitarian Assistance were to mobilise resources for the humanitarian programme, to coordinate the activities of United Nations agencies and other international bodies involved, and to consult with governments and other authorities concerned with the work. But even more valuable is the role that the Office of the Special Representative has undertaken in promoting dialogue and understanding between all parties involved in the Kampuchean situation, in support of the Kampuchean people.

In its present climate of isolation, the interest that the Office of the Special Representative has taken through the many visits made by its staff to Kampuchea and the border, has helped to sustain the hopes and courage of Kampucheans trying to rebuild their lives and their country in the absence of resources usually made available by the international community. As an advocate for Khmers living at the border, the Office of the Special Representative has been influential in bringing about some separation of civilian and military elements in the camps, and has continually pressed the issue of training and education for the border inhabitants, and the issues of protection and voluntary repatriation with officials on both sides of the border.

Thus the UN Secretary-General's decision, in January 1987, to terminate the position of the Special Representative and to merge the post with that of the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was received with great concern and disappointment by the aid community, donors, and Kampucheans. The decision raises some doubt about the priority accorded to the Kampuchean situation by the Secretary-General's office.

It is more difficult to assess the role of the New York based Special Representative for Kampuchean Political Affairs as few initiatives have been made public.

Within the United Nations system, UNBRO is a unique agency specifically created in 1982 to take over the work of UNICEF in the United Nations emergency relief operation at the border. UNICEF had
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been growing more concerned and uneasy about having to feed the Khmer Rouge and other opposition forces. UNBRO's mandate is to help meet the needs of Khmer civilians living in camps along the Thai/Kampuchean border. Its mandate does not include the key issue of protection. UNBRO coordinates, funds, and contracts twelve voluntary agencies to assist in nutrition, health care, and sanitation in the camps.

UNBRO receives the bulk of its funding from bilateral cash donations pledged four to six times a year at donors' conferences held in New York. A third of its funds comes from the USA, with 28% from Japan, and 8% from the EEC.

UNBRO provides all basic foodstuffs, rice, tinned and dried salted fish, salt, housing materials, thatch, and bamboo to all the main camps. It assists with supplementary feeding programmes, medical care, and social welfare programmes. It also provides firewood and some educational materials. In addition, vegetables are delivered and water is trucked into Site 2 during the dry season. While UNBRO delivers food directly to Site 2, Site 8 and Green Hill, it also purchases food for the other camps which is delivered by the Thai military. Four Khmer Rouge camps (Ta Luan, Borai, Natrao and Huay Chan) do not allow the international organisations proper access to the camps even though they receive aid from them. This clear violation of UN policy has gone on for years.

It would be highly improbable for soldiers in the 'civilian' camps not to eat UNBRO food. In two of the CGDK camps, Sok Sann and Green Hill, soldiers are even included in the headcount for food distribution to displaced people. In some of the camps, the administration provides food rations to soldiers leaving for the front. For example in Site 2 this includes two kilos of rice and two cans of fish. Communally-grown vegetables in Site 2 are partially used to feed the military.

Similarly, health facilities provide care to soldiers and civilians, although NGO staff have been asked by UNBRO staff not to refer to soldiers as soldiers in their reports but as “people from outside the camp”. Drugs provided by UNBRO and medical personnel trained by the NGOs for hospitals in the civilian camps find their way to military field hospitals. In 1986, 15 of 32 medics trained by Catholic Relief Services and half of the CAMA trained medics from Site 8 went to the military medical services.

Despite these and many other similar examples, the UN and western donors officially continue to assure the international community that this is a strictly humanitarian operation which in no way helps the resistance in carrying out its military incursions into Kampuchea.

Privately however, many UN officials and most aid personnel associated with the relief operation readily admit that the Border Relief Operation is first and foremost a political one.
Food distribution at Site 8.
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Against this it must be noted that the United Nations Border Relief Operation has received many acclamations from the international community for being the most efficient UN relief programme to date. Its work is carried out under extremely difficult conditions, and is often frustrated by restrictions and broader political considerations beyond its control. According to a senior UN official, the key to the border since late 1979 has been the military strength and ruthlessness of the Khmer Rouge, who have consistently had the political and military support of certain governments. Technically, and within the limits of what is controllable by the UN, there is little with which to reproach the UN Border Relief Operation.

![Children assemble at a nursery school in Site 2. Secondary schooling is officially prohibited by the Thai authorities.](image)

As the camps are supposed to be a temporary situation, one of the dilemmas UNBRO struggles with is deciding what is the appropriate type and amount of aid to be given in order to maintain the border population without creating an atmosphere of permanency or a magnet drawing more refugees from within Kampuchea. One must honestly ask just what role UN aid plays (whether wittingly or unwittingly) in maintaining the status quo at the border. Many aid workers feel that had the relief operation stopped in 1982 when the coalition was formed, most Kampucheans would have returned to their country. But the UN encountered a dilemma to which there seemed to be no good solution, only the less unattractive. A UN official points out that the UN had three alternatives. First, to feed all refugees and displaced Khmers. This included Khmer Rouge murderers and torturers. Second, to feed no one.
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What then would become of non-Khmer Rouge? Third, to feed only non-Khmer Rouge. Neither the Khmer Rouge nor the Thai government would allow this, and innocent Khmers would have had to pay the price. The only answer in humanitarian terms was to feed them all.

There is no doubt that the UNBRO programmes relieve suffering. Although there are still many underfed families at the border, especially at Site 2, on the whole nutrition has improved as has the general health of the population. But then, as one aid worker put it:

“One can accomplish wonderful things at the border. It is the perfectly controlled laboratory. One can vaccinate 100% of the children against childhood diseases. One can control the treatment of the population infected by tuberculosis, one can do all types of sociological surveys, statistically it can be very impressive...”

While visiting Site 2 in March 1987, the British Ambassador expressed his appreciation for the good work being done by UNBRO: “Aren’t they [UNBRO and NGOs] doing a marvellous job?” he commented. It might be argued that in keeping the guerrilla movements going the United Nations is ‘doing the dirty work’ for political interests and that the border operation is a misuse and an abuse of the UN system. Concerning the mandate of the UN at the border, a top UN official involved in the Kampuchean situation states: “The border operation is a political operation. It’s the UN system being used to keep the game going.” It is open to question what might happen if the UN refused to be used to serve the political interests of the countries who stand to gain most by the continuation of the Kampuchean conflict and especially by the Border Relief Programme. “Thailand, USA, ASEAN and China all benefit at the Khmers’ expense,” noted an Australian parliamentarian who recently visited the border.

The Role of UNHCR

The UN agency most shaken and challenged by the complexities, legalities, and politics of the Kampuchean situation is the UNHCR, which is specifically mandated to protect refugees. The contradictions inherent in UNHCR’s role at the border raise serious questions concerning the credibility of that agency, which will have much broader implications in the future for the issue of asylum in situations around the world. UNHCR’s difficulties however stem in part from the fact that “at present it is dependent on funding from political entities, and is not furnished with financial guidelines that fully secure its political independence from the donors.”

Perhaps most difficult to understand in the Kampuchean situation is why certain Kampucheans deserve protection from the High
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Cumulative departures of Kampucheans from Thailand to resettlement countries 1975 to 31 August 1986

Argentina ........................................ 90
Australia ....................................... 12,922
Austria ......................................... 334
Belgium ......................................... 675
Canada .......................................... 2,760
China ............................................ 65
Denmark ......................................... 4
France .......................................... 32,431
Germany, Federal Republic of .......... 863
Italy .............................................. 299
Japan .............................................. 696
Netherlands ..................................... 164
New Zealand .................................... 2,695
Norway ........................................... 14
Spain ............................................. 9
Sweden .......................................... 3
Switzerland ..................................... 1,412
United Kingdom ................................ 211
United States .................................. 136,349
Other countries ................................ 6,295

Total 208,291

ANNUAL RESETTLEMENT RATES FROM THAILAND
Adapted from "Kampuchean Humanitarian Assistance Programmes" United Nations, N.Y. 1986.

Commissioner's office, while hundreds of thousands of others who have left their country for presumably the same reasons, are denied any form of asylum and are considered to be merely displaced people. The 1987 closing of Khao-I-Dang, a refugee holding centre under the protection of UNHCR, by the Thai government sheds some light. For Thailand and the West, either the holding centres or the border camps are a contradiction.

While in 1979 and 1980 the refugees coming to Thailand were considered to be 'voting with their feet' against the Heng Samrin regime,
by 1987 the existence of Khao-I-Dang threatened to weaken the CGDK’s claim to legitimacy and to a base of popular support. Although in theory Thailand stopped offering asylum to refugees in 1980, many displaced people have succeeded in fleeing the border encampments (mostly from the KPNLF camp, the Khmer Rouge camps being under much stricter security) and, through bribery, gaining access to Khao-I-Dang. Since the Coalition Government has not been winning many battles in Kampuchea, losing their population base would not only limit their source of recruitment but seriously challenge their credibility.

For these reasons and others, the Thai and other governments have strongly opposed extending the mandate of UNHCR to protect the 260,000 displaced people living in the border camps. Not only would this be an avowal that their policies had failed, but it would also put new pressures on the West to resettle any new refugees. Having already generously resettled more than 250,000 Khmer refugees, many western governments are now reluctant to accept any new demands for refugee resettlement from Thailand.

Another area in which UNHCR has failed to fulfil its mandate, due to constraints not entirely of its own making, is in the voluntary repatriation of refugees. The greatest constraint perhaps is Thailand’s failure to dissociate the issue of asylum from resettlement. While UNHCR’s goal from the start has clearly been to give priority to the voluntary repatriation of refugees to the interior of Kampuchea, in fact since 1980 it has only successfully repatriated one person. The issue is a highly political one. For Thailand, it would mean some kind of tacit recognition of the Heng Samrin government and represent a failure of Thai policy, while for Phnom Penh it would be be seen as a significant propaganda victory.

A more recent pressing issue also deserving immediate attention is the ‘involuntary relocation’ of refugees from Khao-I-Dang to resistance bases along the border. In March 1987, Thailand began this evacuation as part of its decision to close Khao-I-Dang. Although the refugees being relocated are considered ‘illegals’ by Thailand, they are nevertheless refugees under the mandate of UNHCR, and deserving of protection under the Geneva Convention. While Thailand’s action is clearly in violation of the Geneva Convention, its intention is to put pressure on western governments to act. Thailand views these governments as having defaulted on their earlier commitments to resettle refugees. It is especially concerned about 14,000 refugees rejected for resettlement by the United States because of alleged association with the Khmer Rouge.

This situation not only challenges the ‘divine right’ to decide who deserves to be a ‘refugee’ and who does not, but jeopardises the whole concept of asylum. Meanwhile, it is the Kampucheans who must suffer
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the cost of protracted conflict.

In addition to its border work, UNHCR operates a special emergency and reintegration programme of assistance in Kampuchea to help those Khmers who through their own efforts return from the border to Kampuchea. Since 1980, UNHCR has financed and monitored a limited programme of emergency assistance focusing on some 300,000 of these people, mainly in the provinces of Battambang, Siem Reap, Takeo, Prey Veng and Svay Rieng. The assistance entails the distribution of kits containing clothing, household utensils and tools. However since 1983 their number has declined, partly because of the increasing physical danger involved in crossing the border. The PRK government reported the return of 1,500 families in 1985 and no figure was available in 1986.

Since 1984, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Kampuchean Red Cross, has established four reintegration projects for returnees in four provinces in Kampuchea. These are small scale projects such as the construction of schools, wells, basic health dispensaries and workshops.

While UNHCR's limited assistance has so far benefited only a segment of a very large group of returnees and displaced people, the programme in Kampuchea is deemed necessary to prepare the ground for a large scale and organised repatriation. Even though the PRK has expressed willingness to participate in a repatriation programme through the intermediary of an appropriate international organisation, as yet there is no sign of consent from Thailand or agreement on how such a programme would work from any of the interested parties.

The Role of ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is the lead agency on the issue of protection of Khmers at the border. UNBRO has no explicit protection mandate and until recently, UNHCR's protection mandate extended only to Kao-I-Dang.

ICRC's protection role is limited in part by its own interpretation of the protection role and in part by Thailand and other external factors. Their protection activities centre on the evacuation of the border population in case of attack, and ensuring that the military and civilian populations are kept separate. ICRC has also helped secure the release of Kampucheans detained on their way to Thailand and held for ransom by KPNLF troops.

Another traditional ICRC role is visiting prisoners of war. In 1984, it obtained access to visit prisoners held in KPNLF and ANS detention centres. Since then access has been restricted.

The lack of access to all camps at night, when most abuses are known to occur, or proper access to the Khmer Rouge camps even in the
daytime, greatly restricts the ICRC's mandate to provide protection to displaced people. Perhaps the ICRC's most notable weakness with regard to protection has been its failure to raise before appropriate authorities the issue of known abuses of displaced Kampucheans, for fear of expulsion from Thailand. The same criticism must apply to other agencies operating on the border. However since February 1987, the UN and ICRC have undertaken new initiatives with the Thai government to secure a better protection system for all Khmers at the border.

The Need for Urgent Action

Ways can be found to help make life more tolerable in the camps, but little has been done to find any long-term solution to the plight of these people. Few initiatives have been taken to bring about the conditions that would allow those Kampucheans who want to go home to be able to do so. Little if anything exists to help this population to deal with the trauma of the violence they have experienced over the past fifteen years and continue to live with day-to-day. Neither the UN, ICRC, nor any NGO can protect them or offer them any reason for hope. Moreover, the western governments who could influence the situation appear to lack the political will to do so.

In the view of NGOs it is tragic that a situation which was only meant to be temporary has been tolerated with all its injustices for eight years. Nine years after the downfall of one of the most brutal regimes in history, Khmer people are still forced against their will to live in Khmer Rouge camps which receive UN assistance. 260,000 civilians continue to be denied asylum or the right to the minimum protection due to civilians and provided for in the Geneva Conventions.60

The suffering of the Khmer people on the border calls for an urgent re-evaluation of the policies necessary to break the stalemate. If the UN, ICRC, and NGOs do not speak for the Kampuchean people, their suffering will remain invisible.

Some urgent steps need to be taken in order to improve the security and living conditions for Khmers in the camps, pending a peaceful settlement of the Kampuchean conflict:

- The camps should be moved further from the border, out of the range of artillery fire.

- Thailand should be urged to exercise its responsibility for law enforcement with respect to criminal behaviour occurring on Thai territory.

- The protection mandate of UNHCR should be extended to the
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260,000 displaced Khmer civilians in Thailand. Stationing international personnel in the camps at night would enhance the residents’ security.

☐ A system of regular reporting of security problems and abuses, to be shared with the aid community and embassies of donor countries would help the problems to be properly addressed.

☐ Measures should be taken by UNHCR to ensure that refugees forcibly relocated from Kao-I-Dang to other camps do not lose their refugee status and the rights it accords them. The governments of the United States and other countries of resettlement should honour their commitments to Thailand to resettle the refugee population of Kao-I-Dang. Reconsideration should be granted to those 14,000 who have been rejected for resettlement under a controversial screening process.

☐ Action is urgently required to provide practical education for the 150,000 children under 15 to prepare them for an eventual return to Kampuchea. Vocational training of adults is also recommended so that they too may participate in the reconstruction of their country upon return.

☐ Priority should be given to negotiating and facilitating a safe and orderly voluntary repatriation of those Khmers wishing to return to Kampuchea.

☐ Aid to the military population on the border and to those who actively support them should be stopped.

☐ Humanitarian assistance should be provided only where it can be properly monitored.

These measures should not detract from serious efforts to seek a long term negotiated solution to the Kampuchean conflict.
Chapter 7

The Poverty of Diplomacy

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Political Pawns

In spite of the Kampuchean people's overwhelming desire for peace, broader regional and extra-regional interests continue to obstruct any attempts at a negotiated settlement of the Kampuchean issue. Ordinary Kampucheans are thus tragically condemned to a role as pawns in a game of power politics which for the last few years has been arrested by a convenient impasse.

Political settlement has been obstructed by a number of factors, conflicts and sub-conflicts. Amongst these is the failure of the international community, in seeking a solution, to understand and recognise the nature of the conflict and to address its root causes. There have been too few attempts or too little will on the part of the international community to solve the Kampuchean issue. The fact is that the conflict so far is tolerable to all parties, excluding the Kampuchean people. The chronic, low level nature of the protracted war poses no serious threat to the Vietnamese-installed PRK government nor does it involve any heavy costs to the interested protagonists. Too many western governments, comfortable with the status quo, hesitate to jeopardise the advantages it confers on them.¹ (See Appendix V) One British embassy official’s comments concerning the absence of western diplomatic initiatives on Kampucheans’ behalf reflects a view shared by many other western governments. “Let’s be realistic,” he said, “after all it’s only six million people.”²

Another obstacle to political settlement is the fact that after eight years no clear winners in the conflict have emerged. Vietnam may have won military victory in the field, whilst ASEAN has achieved a diplomatic one at the United Nations. Each side may boast of time being on their side but the situation has reached an impasse and the ultimate losers are the Kampuchean people. Their future is being shaped by events out of their
control, and by the poverty of western and Chinese diplomacy rather than by deliberate acts of self-determination.

**Roots of the Conflict**

The causes of the current Kampuchean conflict are varied and complex. The roots go back to the US-Vietnam war and earlier, to the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime and to the conflict between Kampuchea and Vietnam during the Khmer Rouge era. Evidence indicates that Vietnam attempted to develop a friendly relationship with Kampuchea during that time and that it was Pol Pot's forces which started the war between the two countries. The conflict was then exacerbated and exploited by powers outside the region, the most important being China, which supports the Khmer Rouge.

But other global dimensions of the conflict continue to influence regional events. These cannot be ignored in the search for a solution. One such dimension is the Sino-Vietnam conflict which has its own deep historical roots.3

Another is the major shift in the international balance of power which occurred with the communist victories in Indochina in 1975. China aspired to fill the role of the dominant power in the region after the retreat of the US, and saw the USSR as its main rival. The Soviet Union also saw the retreat of the US as an opportunity to establish itself in the region and to secure strategic naval and air facilities. Political events unfolded, each in reaction to the preceding one, resulting in a polarisation of regional and extra-regional interests and relegating Kampuchea once again to a sideshow. For example, Vietnam responded to the restoration of relations between China and the US by signing a Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union, giving the latter long sought-after access to air and naval bases in the region.4

The two chronologies (see pages 4 and 124-5) and Appendix V help to illustrate the complexity of the Kampuchean problem. They indicate the large number of actors, the diversity of conflicts, the different interests, the costs and benefits to each party to the conflict and the changing factors which could have some bearing on the outcome. What is disturbingly evident from the myriad dimensions of the conflict charted overleaf is that the plight of the ordinary Kampuchean is an insignificant consideration, lost in the broader struggle. There is no compelling reason why this should remain so indefinitely. Immediately following the ousting of the Pol Pot regime the international community responded with a sense of justice and compassion to the plight of the Khmer people.
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#### Chronology of Events in the Search for a Solution to the Kampuchean Conflict

**1980:** Vietnam first proposes demilitarised zone along Thai-Kampuchean border but this is outrightly rejected by Thailand.

**July 1981:** UN-sponsored International Conference on Kampuchea boycotted by Vietnam, USSR, and most of Eastern bloc. ASEAN proposes UN-supervised disarming of all Khmer factions, Vietnamese withdrawal and free elections. China opposes ASEAN proposal. US backs China.

**Mar. 1983:** 7th Non-aligned Nations Summit Conference in New Delhi. Malaysia proposes Five (ASEAN) plus Two (Vietnam & Laos) proposal which would bring ASEAN and Indochina minus all Khmer parties into direct discussions. Plan opposed by China and DK client.

**July 1983:** First visit of Australia’s Foreign minister to Hanoi.

**July 1984:** Australian Foreign Minister Hayden at ASEAN meeting in Bangkok proposes a Six (ASEAN) plus Two (Vietnam & Laos) meeting in Canberra to discuss Kampuchean issue. Proposal rejected by both ASEAN and Vietnam.

**Aug. 1984:** Sihanouk proposes direct talks with PRK.

**Sept. 1984:** PRK envoy indicates willingness to meet Sihanouk in Paris. Chinese opposition causes plan to fall through.

**Nov. 1984 to Mar. 1985:** Major Vietnamese offensive knocks out all resistance bases along Thai-Kampuchean border, driving refugees and resistance forces into Thailand.

**Mar. 1985:** Hayden visits Hanoi followed by Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar. Visit provides optimism and important clarifications from Vietnam.

**Apr. 1985:** ASEAN proposes proximity talks between CGDK and PRK each separately with ASEAN as conduit for exchanges. Sihanouk rejects indirect approach as unrealistic. China and US object on grounds this explicitly assumes PRK recognition. Formula changed to exclude PRK and substitute Vietnam but this rejected by Vietnam.
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July 1985: Vietnam proposes proximity talks and reveals PRK ready to talk to CGDK if Pol Pot faction excluded.

Sep. 1985: Pol Pot resigns as military commander of KR forces but this is seen as cosmetic change only.

Mar. 1986: CGDK puts forward 8 point peace proposal. While accepted by ASEAN the latter finds it fails to address important issue of disarming Khmer Rouge. Proposal also rejected by Vietnam on same grounds as well as others.


Dec. 1986: Swedish Ambassador to Algeria offers to facilitate meeting between Sihanouk and Vietnam. Vietnam does not respond; urges direct talks with PRK.

1986: Hayden publicly suggests Khmer Rouge leadership be brought before international tribunal for crimes against humanity.

Mar. 1987: Soviet Foreign Minister visits Thailand, Indonesia, Indochina and India.

June 1987: UN Secretary-General's 4 point plan made public at ASEAN Ministerial meeting in Singapore. The plan includes partial withdrawal of Vietnamese troops as well as an eventual total pullout, national reconciliation among fighting Kampuchean factions, and selection by Khmer people of a new government. Plan rejected by both Vietnam/PRK and China.

July 1987: Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar visits Vietnam, ASEAN countries and Sihanouk in N.Korea to propose idea of informal talks "diplomatic cocktail party" between all parties, with no preconditions. Proposal meets dead end when both sides set own agenda for discussion at the meeting.

1990: Latest date fixed by Vietnam for complete troop withdrawal from Kampuchea, at which time PRK forces are expected to assume country's defence.
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The Diplomatic Stalemate

Although there are identifiable signposts to a solution to the Kampuchean conflict, the end of the road is still difficult to discern. A number of changing factors, namely increasing flexibility on the part of most protagonists and a new timetable set by Vietnam for the withdrawal of its troops from Kampuchea, suggest that there is movement towards a solution. But whether or not the solution enhances Kampuchean self-determination and independence will depend on whether the international community will seize the initiative and play a more positive role. This will entail offering positive incentives, as opposed to playing an obstructive and punitive role, which would lead to a solution dictated mostly on Hanoi's terms. By 1990, the date set by the UN for Vietnam's complete withdrawal, its political consolidation in Kampuchea may have advanced to the point where a call for Kampuchean self-determination may become meaningless.

The current policies of ASEAN and a majority of western governments have been at best counter-productive. While they may have exerted pressure on Vietnam and Kampuchea to moderate their positions, they have failed in most other objectives. Moreover they have exacted a huge cost in the suffering of the Khmer people.

The main components of ASEAN and western policies to date include:

- Diplomatic support for Pol Pot, as a majority of the West voted to seat his spokesman as Kampuchea's representative at the UN in September 1979, seven months after his overthrow and the clear revelation of the regime's murder or starvation of over a million Kampucheans.
- A majority of the international community repeated that vote in 1980 and 1981. No western country has ever voted against Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea.
- In 1982, to cover up the embarrassment of continuing support for the Khmer Rouge at the UN, western governments put pressure on Sihanouk and Son Sann to join Pol Pot in a coalition government. From 1982, and each year up to 1987, it is that coalition 'government', dominated by the Khmer Rouge and based in Thailand, which a majority of the international community has seated at the UN as the 'legitimate' representative of the Kampuchean people. This despite the fact that it figures on no map and controls no significant Kampuchean territory.
- Imposing diplomatic and economic isolation on Kampuchea, thus denying the Kampuchean people the aid they need to rebuild their lives and their country.
- Supporting and encouraging the 'coalition forces' of Democratic Kampuchea, through humanitarian and military aid, in waging a
guerrilla war against the PRK and Vietnamese forces. It is the Khmer people who pay the price in lives, limbs and material resources, diverting the PRK's efforts from reconstruction to defence.

- Maintaining a refugee population largely held hostage in coalition-controlled camps in Thailand in order to legitimise the CGDK.
- Obstructing regional attempts at dialogue and proposals for a negotiated settlement in which the Khmer Rouge or one of the extra-regional powers appears to lose.

The continuing recognition of 'Democratic Kampuchea' at the UN contributes nothing to a resolution of Kampuchea's problems. In expressing their opposition to the presence of Vietnamese troops, ASEAN and western governments are effectively giving a seal of approval to the coalition-in-exile. That is, to a grouping whose dominant members were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people of the nation they claim to represent. It does not help for western governments to state their abhorrence of Pol Pot and his close Khmer Rouge associates at the same time as condoning the seating of the coalition 'government' in which the Khmer Rouge are the most powerful faction.

The fact that the bulk of Kampuchean people fear the return of the Khmer Rouge more than anything else and therefore are prepared to accept the presence of Vietnamese troops to defend them while they rebuild their military strength has failed to bring any influence to bear on the issue. Consistency in western foreign policy is sorely lacking. The delegation of the Government of Uganda was seated following the overthrow of Idi Amin by Tanzanian forces in 1979. Moreover the regime of Babrak Karmal in Afghanistan is seated despite the continuing occupation by Soviet troops.

The fact that Kampuchea represents a major security interest for Vietnam has yet to be acknowledged and addressed in western proposals for a solution. In contrast, ASEAN has been more realistic with regard to Vietnam's security concerns. Western governments also wish to pursue a negotiated settlement without the participation of the PRK, a government which since 1979 has offered the Khmer people more stability than they have seen in almost two decades. The US, which has just modernised Thailand's army, and the EEC and Japan, which have significant relations with ASEAN, are in a position to influence the Thai government over improved protection for displaced Khmers in Thailand. Moreover, China's desire for outside help in achieving its modernisation also makes it open to persuasion.

To date, western policies towards Kampuchea have been self-defeating. First of all, they have clearly not succeeded in bringing about either a Vietnamese troop withdrawal or self-determination for the...
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Kampuchean people. On the contrary, by closing all doors on Kampuchea they have denied the Khmer people any options other than dependence on Vietnam and the Eastern bloc.

By keeping the Khmer Rouge in the coalition government in 1982 the anti-Vietnam forces lost the political war at home almost immediately. The association with the Khmer Rouge crippled the non-communist members of the coalition from the start by limiting their ability to win support inside the country. It also gave Vietnam and Heng Samrin a major boost in consolidating their regime.

Diplomatic, ‘humanitarian’ and military support for the coalition forces and the low level, protracted war, have exacted a high price from the Khmer people on both sides of the border. Over 2,000 amputees have already been fitted with artificial legs at the border and the number in the PRK may be as high.9 The figures for numbers of deaths are not available. The PRK, which must devote much of its limited resources to defence purposes, has not yet been able to restore food self-sufficiency and many Kampucheans still lack basic health care and other services. Over 250,000 displaced Khmers in the UN supported camps controlled by the various factions of the DK coalition, are daily subjected to many forms of violence.

No one is under the illusion that the coalition forces could topple the Heng Samrin Regime or drive back Vietnam. Thus far they have scored no significant victories on the battlefield and are crippled by inner conflicts, and division even within factions. Their viability as an opposition has been consistently eroded. In recent interviews officials of KPNLF and Sihanouk have said, “we know that we cannot beat the Vietnamese/Heng Samrin forces but if we don’t continue to fight and show that we are inflicting damage on the PRK, the West will drop its support for us and the world will forget about us”.10

Current policies have not succeeded in assuring Thai security. Support for Khmer resistance bases in Thailand has only brought the war closer to them and increased the risk of escalating confrontation between Thailand and Vietnam.

Neither does the present situation enhance regional stability or development. Continuation of the conflict makes Vietnam more dependent on the Soviet Union. In turn the latter has acquired strategic bases in Vietnam and has become increasingly entrenched in the region, raising the stakes for super-power competition in the Asia-Pacific zone.11

The politicised role of the United Nations is especially evident in the case of Kampuchea. The UN seating of the Khmer Rouge-dominated DK ‘government’ hardly makes it a neutral party to the conflict, and undermines its effectiveness in facilitating a negotiated settlement. The UN cannot help with any negotiations because the premise of
Young amputees at Khao-I-Dang, two of the thousands at the border who have lost limbs in land-mine explosions.
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recognising the 'coalition government' is that the PRK is illegitimate and must be disposed of. Its failure to provide even basic protection to the Kampuchean refugees and displaced people in the camps it assists, and its questionable role in maintaining the status quo at the border also challenges its credibility as an organisation devoted to humanitarian concerns and the protection of refugees.

A number of western nations are playing a more positive role in relation to the Kampuchean stalemate. Wishing to give credibility neither to the Khmer Rouge-dominated coalition nor to a Vietnamese invasion, Australia, Austria, Ireland, Sweden and Norway have consistently abstained in the yearly credentials vote in the United Nations. In fact Australia, Austria and Sweden have initiated a number of constructive attempts to bring together the major parties in the conflict. Australia, Sweden and Norway also provide aid through international organisations and NGOs on both sides of the border. Most recently the Australian Foreign Minister, Bill Hayden has publicly suggested that the Khmer Rouge leaders who were responsible for the atrocities perpetrated between 1975 and 1978 should be brought before an international tribunal and tried for crimes against humanity. However Hayden stated in the course of a Bangkok news conference in May 1987, "we are not pursuing this ourselves". If this course of action were pursued it could remove one of the main obstacles to a negotiated settlement whilst allowing the various parties to 'keep face'.

Signs of Hope?

Although there have been a number of proposals for a comprehensive settlement of the Kampuchean problem many of these have failed to address key issues and to include major parties to the conflict. In realpolitik, it is unlikely that any government will accept a unilateral proposal defined by its adversary.

UN proposals for a solution to the Kampuchean problem rely on an International Conference on Kampuchea first held under the auspices of the United Nations in 1981. Due to the seating of 'Democratic Kampuchea' Vietnam refused to participate nor was the PRK represented. Without the participation of these key parties to the conflict a comprehensive settlement could hardly be expected. The Conference also failed to address key issues for Kampucheans, particularly the elimination of the threat of the return of the Khmer Rouge, and the issue most crucial to Vietnam — its security. Since then many more proposals have been designed by this same body and by ASEAN. Most of them have been variations on the same package, whilst failing to address some key issues.

The latest four point plan advanced by the UN Secretary-General in
June 1987 shows little progress from earlier UN-sponsored resolutions. The plan includes a partial withdrawal of Vietnamese troops as well as an eventual total pullout, national reconciliation among the fighting Kampuchean factions and the selection by Kampuchean of a new government. According to a Vietnamese Foreign Ministry official, the plan "simply calls for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea". However it fails to link the withdrawal "to the elimination of the Khmer Rouge leaders, China's giving up its support for the genocidal Pol Pot clique, or to Thailand's denying the Khmer reactionaries their sanctuaries on Thai soil". On the other side, the Khmer Rouge will not endorse the UN plan because it calls for an initial partial withdrawal of Vietnamese troops rather than the unconditional withdrawal proposed in past UN resolutions.

An encouraging fact is that all parties appear to be agreed on the need for a comprehensive political settlement to the Kampuchean problem. The obstacles therefore lie not with the principle but with the terms of such a solution, such as who should participate in a settlement.

There are other encouraging factors in the search for a negotiated settlement. A close study of the various proposals suggests that the conflicting parties, especially ASEAN and Vietnam/PRK, share several points in common. For example, most parties agree that there is a need for dialogue, peace in Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese forces to withdraw from Kampuchea, the Pol Pot faction to be eliminated and for Kampuchean self-determination to be respected.

**ASEAN conditions for a peaceful settlement include:**
- A total withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea.
- The introduction of an international force to keep peace and verify the withdrawal of foreign troops.
- National reconciliation between the four Khmer parties, including the Khmer Rouge.
- An internationally supervised act of self-determination by the Kampuchean people.

On the other hand the PRK/Vietnamese position includes the following conditions:
- The withdrawal of Vietnamese forces paired with the elimination of the Khmer Rouge as a political and military force.
- National reconciliation excluding the Pol Pot faction.
- Self-determination for Kampuchea and free elections.
- Building a S.E. Asian zone of peace and stability.
- Establishing an international forum to supervise and guarantee the implementation of these agreements.
The main point of contention between ASEAN and Vietnam is the Khmer Rouge, with each side demanding a one-sided disengagement as a pre-requisite. Vietnam demands the disarming of the Khmer Rouge while ASEAN insists on a prior Vietnamese troop withdrawal. ASEAN appears to be in the weaker position since they cannot guarantee that the Khmer Rouge would not fill any vacuum left by a Vietnamese withdrawal. ASEAN, through Thailand, could refuse the Khmer Rouge refuge, or stop the flow of their military supplies through Thai territory. Otherwise only China can really control the Khmer Rouge.

The role of the Khmer Rouge is also the main flaw in the most recent eight point peace proposal outlined by the CGDK. Not only is it unacceptable to the PRK and Vietnam but even Sihanouk and KPNLF supporters and officials have expressed serious concern and fear over the proposed participation of the Khmer Rouge in a quadripartite government. Both have publicly admitted that as violators of human rights the Khmer Rouge have not changed. Following one of his many threats of resignation, Sihanouk told a Southeast Asia expert, Nayan Chanda, that if China succeeded in installing the Coalition 'Government' in Kampuchea... "so much the better for the Khmer Rouge. That day I would prefer to go to Mougins (in Southern France).... I did not promise that I would go with Son Sann, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and Pol Pot to Phnom Penh. Son Sann would have to manage it alone with the Khmer Rouge. Within 24 hours he will disappear."21

The PRK and Vietnam have modified their position considerably since 1979, moving from an 'irreversible' stance to a position where they would consider negotiations with all members of the coalition excluding those Khmer Rouge deemed responsible for the atrocities inflicted on the Khmer people between 1975 and 1978, and a quadripartite government. In early 1986 the PRK government announced that "general elections resulting from the political agreement to end the conflict would not necessarily have to be held under the communist constitution of the Phnom Penh regime." In 1983 Vietnam dropped its insistence that the 'China threat' be removed before it will withdraw its troops from Kampuchea.

The Khmer Rouge and their main supporter, China, have been less flexible, though their eight point peace plan points to one concession. Suggesting that Heng Samrin and the CGDK work out a process of national conciliation represents the first time China or the Khmer Rouge have recognised the PRK as an entity to be dealt with. However it is also true that China has blocked all Sihanouk's attempts to meet with a PRK representative.

In May 1987 Sihanouk stepped down for one year as President of Democratic Kampuchea in protest over Khmer Rouge attacks on his
followers. This will undoubtedly provide him with more freedom to pursue independent negotiations and is perhaps the most significant sign of hope to date. It remains to be seen whether the West will follow up his initiative and also dissociate themselves from the Khmer Rouge. Sihanouk will need active western support if he is to negotiate an end to both the Vietnamese occupation and the Khmer Rouge threat.

At a 1987 Bangkok news conference, Australian Foreign Minister Bill Hayden spoke of positive signs: “It’s my impression that there is an important change in the mood and the tone of what is taking place in relation to Kampuchea and that there is the possibility of settlement there.”24 He also cautioned that future developments were “very much conditional” on the issues of what to do with the Khmer Rouge and of contact with and de facto recognition of the Heng Samrin administration. Hayden pointed to a number of changes, including the Soviet Union showing a preparedness to play a positive role on the Kampuchean issue and Sihanouk’s stepping down from the coalition. He also mentioned the admission of an Indochinese source he could not reveal, that “there are good people among the Khmer Rouge, they’re not all bad. That there is a role for the United Nations, that’s something that hasn’t been said before and that, while the joint communique of the Indochinese Foreign Ministers’ meeting should be the basis for a settlement, not all wisdom resides in that particular document.”25 He notes that the many recent exchanges between countries in the region are an important step in the search for a solution. But "I'd have to stress that there’s a long way to go yet before we can be satisfied that movement has finally started".26

Components of a Viable Solution

An empty seat at the UN, or outright recognition of the PRK, would perhaps be steps towards easing the suffering of the Kampuchean people. But more is necessary to bring an end to the fighting between Khmers and resolve the underlying sub-conflicts between China and Vietnam, between Vietnam and Thailand, between the USSR and China and between the US and Vietnam.

Only reconciliation and peace can reduce tensions and eliminate the conflict over Kampuchea. In order to resolve the different layers of conflict between all the actors whose interests have a bearing on the situation, different processes of conciliation at regional and extra-regional levels may have to be pursued simultaneously.

Of primary importance is the need to address effectively the non-negotiable concerns of the primary actors. These include Thailand’s security, Vietnam’s security, and the disarming of the Khmer Rouge. A viable regional settlement will require compromise and trade-offs from all parties to the conflict as well as a decision from the extra-regional
parties to refrain from obstructing regional agreements. The latter could actually make a positive contribution to the search for peace by providing the necessary guarantees.

A possible scenario might involve an initial agreement between Vietnam and Thailand based on the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from the border area in exchange for the cessation of external material support to the Khmer Rouge. There is no doubt that such a reduction of tension would be conducive to the security interests of both Vietnam and Thailand. Such an agreement could be reinforced by further security guarantees from the US, from ASEAN and possibly from other extra-regional actors such as Japan, Australia, the USSR and China.

On another level, the situation will be improved if Vietnam and China, and China and the Soviet Union, can be persuaded that their interests might best be served by reconciling their differences. Reinstating and improving relations between the US, Vietnam, USSR, China and the Asia-Pacific countries could result in a more stable balance of power in the region and reduce the threats resulting from the present configuration of alignments. Recent discussions between China and the Soviet Union over their common border indicate a potential for rapprochement between the two nations, or at least a reduction of tension.

As regards the four Khmer protagonists, all are already agreed on the need for conciliation. This conciliation can best be facilitated by the non-interference of external parties. However the main obstacle, the participation of the Pol Pot group, cannot be resolved without the support of the international community. The long overdue accusation and trial, before the International Court of Justice, of the Khmer Rouge leadership responsible for the murder and starvation of over a million Kampucheans would ensure that they no longer present a threat to the Kampuchean people. In fact it can be argued that those countries which have ratified the Human Rights Genocide Convention are under an obligation to guarantee that there is no repetition of the atrocities perpetrated on the Khmer people under the Khmer Rouge regime.

According to the participants in a series of conferences on ‘Conflict Resolution and Cambodia’, a number of steps in the search for a peaceful solution to the Kampuchean problem still need to be supported and reinforced. These include:

- A mechanism for disarming the Khmer Rouge.
- Vietnamese troop withdrawal.
- An end to the isolation of the PRK and the economic embargo on both Kampuchea and Vietnam.
- Continued dialogue between all parties.
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- Abstention in any UN vote that proposes to seat the DK coalition 'government'.
- The identification of safety zones for refugees.
- The extension of humanitarian and development aid programmes. These should never have been used as a political tool in the first place.
- International observers at elections.
- Technical and cultural exchanges between Vietnam and ASEAN.
- Development of trade relationships.
- Non-aggression pacts between ASEAN and Indochina, and other parties to the conflict.

It is not too late for western governments and the international community to play a constructive role that will help the Kampucheans win self-determination and a voice in their own destiny. One PRK official had this to say about the US (but it is equally applicable to other western nations), “much of what the US is doing today is not in her best interest. Why should the greatest nation in the world allow its rancour against the Vietnamese to blind it to political solutions that would give it greater status and influence among nations?” A peaceful solution to the Kampuchean problem would enhance peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region after nearly five decades of war. Moreover it could finally enable the Kampuchean people to determine their own future, free from the threat of conflict.
Children taking the opportunity for a shower during the sinking of a borehole in Prey Veng town, 1986.
Conclusion

Today life in Kampuchea is somewhat improved for the Kampuchean people, but there are still many difficulties and obstacles to be overcome. It will take more than one generation to restore Kampuchea to even its pre-war status, especially in the absence of any development aid from the UN and western nations.

For the ninth year, the Kampuchean seat at the United Nations remains occupied by the Khmer Rouge-dominated coalition of Democratic Kampuchea. This ‘government’ which is hosted on Thai soil, controls no significant part of Kampuchea and is totally dependent for its survival on United Nations rice. Its most prominent figurehead, Prince Sihanouk, has recently stepped down because the Khmer Rouge — partners in the coalition — are killing his supporters.

Only the presence of Vietnamese troops protects Kampuchea from the attacks of the coalition forces operating from their bases in Thailand. Yet because the Vietnamese troops are in Kampuchea and the United Nations recognises Democratic Kampuchea, the 7.6 million people of the People's Republic of Kampuchea are denied UN development aid, despite the strong evidence of need. It also means that 260,000 displaced Khmers are sentenced to a violent and hopeless existence in border camps in Thailand.

On the diplomatic front the tragedy of the Kampuchean people has failed to generate the necessary sense of urgency to break the deadlock. While a number of unsuccessful solutions have been put forward by various parties, they have failed to deal with the issue that most concerns the Kampuchean people — the elimination of the threat of the return to power of the Khmer Rouge leaders who were responsible for acts of genocide. They have failed to address satisfactorily the legitimate security interests of both Vietnam and Thailand. The poverty of
Summary and Recommendations

diplomacy unfortunately stems from the fact that the conflict over Kampuchea serves a number of divergent political interests, at a low cost to all parties except the Kampuchean people.

Yet it is clear that solutions are desperately needed if Kampuchea is to win control of their own future. Without an end to the conflict and insecurity, rehabilitation and development work in Kampuchea and the aid provided by NGOs will at best have a limited impact. It is no longer enough to attempt to heal the wounds of twenty years of war and destruction by applying 'band-aids' even though they may answer an important and immediate need. The root causes of the Kampuchean conflict must be addressed.

It is within the power of the western and ASEAN nations and China to stop the killing now. If Vietnam withdrew its forces from Kampuchea tomorrow the Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for atrocities between 1975-78 would be likely to seize power. On the other hand, if support for the coalition ended tomorrow, the killing would cease but there could be disagreement over the timetable for Vietnamese withdrawal.

The sole concern of the non-governmental organisations is for the humanitarian needs of the Kampuchean people with whom they work in Kampuchea, in the border camps and in countries of resettlement. Political issues have had to be addressed in this book because they underline the continued suffering of a people who have already suffered too much. Conflict and political deadlock are obstructing reconstruction efforts by the Khmer people and the NGOs and international organisations assisting them. A political solution is an essential precondition for a durable peace in Kampuchea. The restoration of bilateral and multilateral development aid to Kampuchea would be a major step towards ending the punishment of the poor in Kampuchea.

After his visit to Kampuchea in 1983, a former US ambassador to Phnom Penh wrote:

"Once again Cambodia is 'the land in between', a contesting ground for rival powers, its people consumed in civil war, its economic development retarded by circumstances beyond its control. One would have wanted better for a nation that has endured so much.

Should we not moderate our policy, which in effect now treats the vast majority of Cambodians as enemies beyond the pale? We could provide humanitarian aid, even modest development aid, for people who have asked for little except to survive.

If we could approach Cambodia — and Vietnam as well — with greater generosity of spirit, miracles might be wrought. We have tried everything else."1
Punishing the Poor

Recommendations

The following key recommendations addressed to governments and the international community call on them to renew their interest in the plight of the Kampuchean people. New diplomatic initiatives to facilitate a peaceful solution are urgently needed, as are the resources for the Kampuchean people to rebuild their country.

These recommendations are based on the direct experience and observations of non-governmental organisations which since 1979 have been working with the Kampuchean people both inside the PRK and in the Thai border camps. They aim to reflect the aid agencies’ understanding of the Khmer people’s desires.

Governments and the international community should:

1. **Provide reconstruction and development aid independently of political considerations.**
   Following the terrible devastation of the Khmer nation and people after over a decade of war and the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge regime, the Kampuchean people continue to suffer. Reconstruction and development aid should be provided on the basis of humanitarian needs and not political considerations. Governments might initially provide funds to assist the Kampuchean people through multilateral and non-governmental organisations.

2. **Withdraw all forms of support for the Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for acts of genocide.**
   The Khmer people so fear the return of the Khmer Rouge that they have been willing to make many sacrifices, including tolerating the presence of Vietnamese forces in their country and accepting the isolation imposed on them by a majority of the international community, to prevent the Khmer Rouge leaders from returning to power.

   The Khmer people must be assured that the Khmer Rouge leaders will never return to power. This could be done by bringing them to trial under the existing UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This would also give some legal redress to the Khmer people who suffered so much under those leaders.
3. Resolve the Thai-Kampuchean border situation and the plight of displaced people.

Over a quarter of a million Khmer civilians are denied refugee status, and continue to suffer a violent and hopeless existence in camps for displaced people in Thailand. Furthermore, some UN and other humanitarian assistance to the border presently benefits the military elements in the camps thus enabling them to perpetuate the war. A resolution of the border situation should include the following steps:

- Provide aid only where and when it can be monitored regularly.
- Move the camps away from the border and the fighting.
- Extend to the displaced people in the camps who are denied refugee status the protection and security of choice about their future accorded to those under the mandated care of UNHCR. Interested governments and international organisations should actively pursue and facilitate voluntary repatriation for those civilians wishing to return to their country following assurances of amnesty by the PRK.
- End aid to combatants and those wishing to support the Khmer Rouge/Coalition forces.

4. Pursue new diplomatic initiatives; support and facilitate all efforts towards a negotiated political settlement.

A negotiated political settlement between all Khmer parties, excluding those Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for crimes against their people between 1975-78, is an essential condition for a durable peace in Kampuchea and for post-war recovery and development. The withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea, once the threat of the return of the Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for the 'killing fields' has been removed, constitutes a vital component of any political solution. It is also essential to ensure Kampuchean self-determination and independence.

Furthermore, because the continued fighting and insecurity are highly destructive of the human rights of the Khmer people both inside Kampuchea and in the Thai border camps, an immediate ceasefire should be encouraged and facilitated. Not only would this bring immediate relief to the Kampuchean people but it would also expedite a negotiated settlement and the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces.