

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

Letter from Khieu Samphan, August 16, 2001

**LETTER FROM KHIEU SAMPHAN:  
APPEALING TO ALL MY COMPATRIOTS**

Note: This letter was sent to all Cambodian newspapers  
Pailin: August 16, 2001

During the past two years, many of my fellow countrymen have expressed their sympathy towards me. You already understand that by my nature, I have never committed any improper act, let alone crimes. You also know that during "Democratic Kampuchea" I did not have any authority to order anybody to harm or execute anyone, not even one person. There is only one thing that you still wonder about: how could a sincere man like me have agreed to take a nominal position, called "the President of Democratic Kampuchea's State Presidium"?

However, I have tried to avoid anything that might fit the notion of "If the wound doesn't hurt, there is no need to take a stick and scratch it," and thus will not give a lengthy answer to your question. Now the war, which has torn our country apart for decades, has died out. I do not see any importance in bringing up this tragic past. We would be better off to let everyone be at peace so that all of us can carry on our daily tasks, as we have been doing with the support of the international community in order to reinforce the fundamental principles of democracy and overcome obstacles on a step-by-step basis. Consequently, our country may heal its wounds and be ready to face and resolve other, more complicated issues, which mostly are life-and-death problems of our increasingly poor, tiny country...which are the results of this long civil war. It is for the above-mentioned reasons that I have managed to avoid rejecting or making corrections to some articles that were written inappropriately about me. But, because a special tribunal is being organized to prosecute top Khmer Rouge leaders for their genocidal crimes, I can no longer be silent on these ambiguous or confusing views toward me. That is why I am writing to clarify my political stance and activities, as follows:

1. What were the aims of Observateur newspaper?

This newspaper attempted to reflect the opinions of scholars, teachers, and a majority of royal government officials, who strongly supported the neutrality policy of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. At the same time, people thought that democratic measures should be taken to promote social balance in order to amplify the basis of a policy of neutrality.

2. Either as a Secretary of State for Commerce or as a people's representative, I fulfilled my obligations with all my heart and soul. With the same consideration, I participated in supporting the neutrality policy of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the head of state.

3. The reason for my escape from Phnom Penh in 1967 is that I was forced. It was not because I decided to abandon my activities under the framework of the

National Assembly and choose revolutionary struggle as a solution. The whole story began with farmers in Samlot, Battambang Province, who revolted. Today, most Cambodian historians admit that the farmers initiated the revolt by themselves because area authorities had rudely confiscated their land. Unfortunately, this uprising was brutally oppressed. Most people called scholars, including me, "leftists." We were accused of being insurgents and had to be brought to trial in a military court. In fact, it was not the only time that we were intimidated. However, after the "right wing" assembly was formed after the 1966 election and after this assembly appointed Lon Nol to control government affairs, all these accusations and intimidation could no longer be ignored.

I would like to say that since I left Phnom Penh, my active role in politics came to an end. In the countryside (Kampong Speu), I did nothing other than hide in fear in farmers' huts or rice barns. I did not show up for two years because I was afraid that the commune chief or his assistants, or some secret agents of the police or the military might spot me, and that would bring trouble to the whole village. I did not assign communist forces, masses or troops. All of these forces were considered to be strategic by the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). I did not have the right to partake in this task. Nor was I aware of the assembly creating the CPK in 1960 in Phnom Penh. Please be informed that during that time, the CPK leaders were in Rattanakiri Province. Thus, I did not know who the leaders of the CPK were, let alone meeting and discussing serious business with them.

4. After that, a coup was waged in 1970. Immediately, the Vietnam War climaxed in our country. The neutrality policy of Prince Norodom Sihanouk had warded off this war for 15 years. Although this saved many lives, no matter how hard he tried, our country could only delay this disaster. The storm caused by the Cold War and the Vietnam War had effects far beyond the control of the Prince and our nation. Then the superpowers, who were our enemies, fought each other all at once on our tiny land; nothing could stop it. Could our pathetic country bear this destruction? This was an immediate question. In the face of this dangerous situation, almost all Cambodians living both in the rural areas and the cities, scholars, dignitaries, and overseas university students bolstered their cooperation to save the country. There were two prominent forces at that time:

1. The Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), which consisted of stationary forces.

2. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was influential both inside the country and in the international arena.

These two forces influenced each other, so they had to work together.

The question arose: How could we integrate these two powers? Could Prince Norodom Sihanouk cooperate with the leaders of the CPK? Certainly, he could not. This was why I was needed to serve as a bridge. My social class and my experience with senior political leaders in the country determined my role here. To act as a link, I had to be a recognizable leader of the country's struggle forces. In reality, I did not have an obligation as such a leader. This made me feel very uneasy. But, with circumstance being what they were, I was required to overcome my temptation. So, I made a "sacrifice" and took on this obligation in order to participate in saving our country as much as I could and according to my circumstances. Therefore, you, my compatriots, can see the circumstances in which I was entangled (a symbolic

position) in our country's struggle. In short, the circumstances were a consequence of the 1970 coup and the superpowers' fight in our land during the Vietnam War. With these realities, I would like to prove that I had not intended to conspire in the murderous acts that would occur during 1975-1978, as I had not been aware of the plan at all.

In addition, once I took the position as one of the country's top struggle leaders, even though the war had ended in 1975, people will never forget it. However, being labeled as a leader of the struggle in the country qualified me to be able to continue to take the title of "the President of the State Presidium of Democratic Kampuchea," although I had yet to have any authority. If I denied this title, what would happen to me? I would be counted as a traitor, and this was also correct because DK was a legitimate state of Kampuchea born from the struggle of Kampuchean citizens against foreign interference, and it was also a member of the United Nations. All of the points mentioned above are critical factors relevant to my past activities that I want to tell all of you about. In the following explanation, I would like to inform you, my compatriots, about my rank and roles in the CPK.

As you already know, my social class and good relationship with the senior leaders of our country helped me to assume the tasks of "front" and "foreign affairs," jobs that dealt with the upper social class and international affairs. For the same reason, they never gave me serious tasks, even tasks in the CPK, which included such things as recruiting people and military tasks, or tasks with any real authority. Only cadres who came from the peasant class and those who the CPK thought were well informed about class attitudes and who had passed a series of tests, were allowed to undertake these tasks. My rank in the CPK and in DK was not equivalent to the ranks of a zone or regional cadre, and nothing compared with those responsible for cooperatives.

It is true to say that I became a "candidate" of the Party Center in 1970 and a "full-rights member" in mid-1976. However, based on the principles of "democratic centralism," all important tasks were decided within the framework of the Standing Committee or by a separate meeting between organizations and cadres responsible for the regions and zones. The Party Center's meeting was actually a way of instilling a new philosophy and stances into cadres, in order to carry out decisions made by organizational committees about political lines or various policies, to discuss past mistakes, do some criticism and self-criticism, or check the results of previous missions. Therefore, I did not have the right to participate in decisions on important matters. For example, until now, I did not know when the evacuation of people from the cities was discussed and approved.

I also had not been apprised of the mass murders. In about mid-1978, I accidentally learnt of a case of arrests and barbarous acts taking place in Preah Vihear Province. My wife, who was in tears, told me about it. Her siblings and relatives, along with many other people, were shackled on both their hands and legs for over a year, causing nasty wound on their bodies. However, when the captives were released and the Zone Party secretaries were arrested, I knew that this was an act of individuals. The rules prohibited me from travelling without permission. At the same time, the secret and strict discipline of "you know only what you do; you do not know, hear, or see other people's tasks" prevented other people from telling me about this tragedy. This also stopped me from knowing about anything

that was happening in the country. I only knew what the leaders of the CPK allowed me to. Only when the movement failed did my relatives, victims, and witnesses tell me about this massacre, which would cause one's head to tingle upon hearing. In the end, I definitely deny the third point mentioned in the report written by a group of U.S. researchers working for the so-called "Organization for International Justice." It stated that in 1977 after the chief of Office 870, formerly named Doeun, had been arrested, I was "promoted" to replace him. This was not true. I have never been the chief of Office 870. I had not known any decision made by the Standing Committee of the CPK to capture or execute anyone; how could I possibly examine the practice of these decisions? For truth and justice, I request that the writers of this report examine it again completely; I want to know where they got this information relating to me. In fact, I was only an ordinary member of this office. My obligations in this office are stated below:

1. Keeping in contact with Prince Norodom Sihanouk and the Queen, who were staying in the Royal Palace during that time.
2. Setting prices of produce harvested by various cooperatives. But, I could not meet this obligation, since there was no bartering among cooperatives or between cooperatives and the state.
3. Carrying out the decision of the Standing Committee on distributing equipment collected from Phnom Penh to the zones and regions.
4. Contacting foreign ministries of commerce in order to import equipment as ordered by the Standing Committee.

I would like to make it clear that the office chief, Doeun, was responsible for "political tasks." His tasks were highly secretive; no one knew about them. I did not remember who was chosen to replace Doeun. Nobody said a thing about this replacement or dared to talk about it. What I remember is the period from the end of 1976 to the beginning of 1977, when top leaders of the CPK, as I observed, looked worried, even though they tried to control their emotions. Then, I thought that the military situation along the eastern border was probably unfavorable, as I saw that hospitals in Phnom Penh were full of wounded youths and lines of trucks transported wounded soldiers from the battlefields almost every day. It was in this circumstance that I was given more autonomous rights to make decisions within the framework of my tasks described above, especially on importing medical supplies, including antibiotics to meet the demands of the Ministry of Social Affairs and various hospitals.

I have told you enough. As you can see, in the beginning I was only a scholar who did not have any goal, except trying carefully to fulfill my obligations to the nation. During these few decades of transformation and complication, I am well aware of my shortcomings. I think that I cannot escape an obligation that was destined for me. Never have I had the ambition to be a famous leader, or thought of killing someone.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my deepest respect to the souls of our innocent countrymen, who were victims of the killings and heinous acts during the Democratic Kampuchea regime. To those who lost their loved ones to the regime, I am sorry. It was my fault to be too foolish, and failed to keep up with the real situation. I tried my best for the sake of our nation's survival, so that we might enjoy development and prosperity like other nations. I am so

surprised that this turned out to be mass murder.  
Respect and profound love,

Search

១០ឆ្នាំស្វែងរកការពិតដើម្បីការងារចាំជំងឺយុត្តិធម៌: ១៩៩៧-២០០៧

Documentation Center of Cambodia  
Ten Years of Independently Searching for the Truth: 1997-2007  
DC-Cam • 66 Preah Sihanouk Blvd. • P.O. Box 1110 • Phnom Penh • Cambodia  
Tel: (855-23) 211-875 • Fax: (855-23) 210-258 • Email: dccam@online.com.kh • www.dccam.org