

CLOSING REMARKS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**DEALING WITH A PAST HOLOCAUST**

**AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION:**

**LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCES**

**28- 29 August, 2006, Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

**by**

**His Excellency Mr Sok An**

**Deputy Prime Minister**

**and**

**Minister in Charge of the Office of the Council of Ministers**

**Chairman of the Royal Government Task Force for the**

**Khmer Rouge Trials**

Your Excellencies, Diplomatic Representatives and all participants in this international conference

This is the first opportunity I have had to speak to an international audience on this topic since the historic swearing in of national and international judicial officers for the Extraordinary Chambers held on 3 July 2006 -- an event which marked the commencement of the substantive judicial work of the court.

Many people doubted that this day would ever come to pass.

Certainly there were many times during the almost thirty years since the crimes were committed, and also even during the years after we asked for international help in mid-1997, that the goal of establishing

this court seemed tantalisingly close yet still elusive. Nevertheless, we were always convinced that the goal could be reached.

Although sometimes it seemed we were moving two steps forward and one step back, thanks to the support of many both within the country and overseas, we have finally established the court we were seeking to build. The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) are a mixed or hybrid tribunal -- firmly located in the national courts but involving both national and international law; national and international judges, prosecutors, staff; and national and international financing.

During the past two days you have had the benefit of hearing from speakers from other countries – Germany, East Timor, Sierra Leone and Rwanda – all of which have had their own traumatic experiences. Like our friends in those countries, we in Cambodia can never forget such events, but we can try our best to understand them, to explain them to our children and, above all, to try to bring those most responsible to account for their crimes. Unless we make such efforts we fail to honour those who suffered.

It has been most valuable for Cambodians attending this conference, and hearing about it through the press, to be able to put their own past into context and to know that others around the world have

suffered as we did and have had to work out their own ways to deal with the burden of this past.

I know that HE Sean Visoth, Director of Administration of the ECCC has spoken in more detail about our guiding principles here in Cambodia, namely our determination to render justice for the victims of the tragedy; prevention and non-recurrence of the genocide; maintaining peace, political stability and national unity; and respect for national sovereignty.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words of how we in Cambodia have approached the task of integrating these guiding principles, as Cambodia can perhaps offer some lessons from our experience in the long and complex process of national reconciliation.

The Paris Peace Agreements of 1991 accorded political legitimacy to the Khmer Rouge and, when UNTAC left Cambodia in 1993, the new coalition government had to cope with the Khmer Rouge continuing policy of civil war and destabilisation. We then launched a multi-faceted strategy involving political, legal, economic and military campaigns, including the 1994 legislation to Outlaw the Khmer Rouge, and efforts to encourage its members to defect and split.

The “win-win” policy initiated by our Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen five facets: “divide, isolate, finish, integrate and develop” in which the Khmer Rouge political and military structure was ended, but those Khmer Rouge who

defected were assured of their physical safety and survival, the right to work and to carry out their professions, and the security of their property.

Today the former Khmer Rouge have recommenced their lives within the general community, and all the former factions have taken up the challenge of working together to develop the country. This precious achievement must not be undermined by the judicial process, which is limited in scope to the senior leaders of Democratic Kampuchea and those most responsible for serious crimes.

In Cambodia this emphasis on national reconciliation has not meant that we have forgotten our past, and we have undertaken many efforts to document the record of what happened during Democratic Kampuchea. But what is still not yet achieved is rendering justice for the victims of that genocidal regime. It is a task that has been on our minds since 1979 when we established the People's Revolutionary Tribunal. Unfortunately, due above all to the geo-political situation at the time, the testimony and the verdicts from that court were simply ignored outside our country, and the task of achieving justice is one that we have had to keep on our agenda over the past years.

Now as we finally have established the ECCC, we keep in our minds firmly that this judicial process must not damage the process of reconciliation that I have described above. In Cambodia we seek justice in order to heal the wounds in our society.

We know that the next three years will not be easy, but I see on the faces of both the UN and the Cambodian staff of the ECCC that they are committed and determined to discharge the heavy responsibility that now rests on their shoulders – to establish a court that can bring justice to the victims and that meets international standards.

Now, as we move into the actual judicial work of the Extraordinary Chambers, is the time for all Cambodians, and all fair-minded people around the world, to do our utmost to make the Khmer Rouge trials a successful process. Let us pledge to work together towards this end.

In conclusion, may I congratulate the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung for organising this conference and for taking the initiative to bring delegates from other countries to share their experiences with us. I am sure that the Cambodian participants have taken note of a number of valuable lessons, and we hope that the Cambodian experience has been able to offer some insights also to the international community.

Thank you.