

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR THOMAS HAMMARBERG, SPECIAL
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED
NATIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN CAMBODIA

I strongly condemn the violent coup d'état of 5-6 July which has displaced the lawfully-elected government of Cambodia. The overthrow of First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh by armed force violates the Cambodian Constitution and international law and overturns the will of the Cambodian people in the 1993 UN-sponsored election. In that poll approximately 90 percent of eligible voters courageously turned out in the face of widespread intimidation and violence to choose a new government.

As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Human Rights in Cambodia, I am particularly concerned about the large loss of life and injury in the current violence. The use of mortars, artillery and other heavy weapons in urban areas displayed a callous disregard for the lives and safety of the civilian population.

I am also concerned about the atmosphere of fear and intimidation which now prevails in Cambodia. Few people believe that it is safe to express their views publicly. The offices and residences of Prince Ranariddh, of FUNCINPEC and Khmer Nation Party officials have been attacked and looted by soldiers and police. Immediate steps to restore discipline over all armed forces must also be taken to end the current wave of looting of civilian property.

The safety of all members of the National Assembly, members of opposition political parties, human rights workers and journalists must be protected. No person should be arrested because of their political views. Any persons arrested or detained since the beginning of this action must be fully accounted for and held only in legally-established places of detention. The United Nations, ICRC and other relevant agencies should have full access to all places of detention.

The events of recent days violate the fundamental right of the Cambodian people to choose its government in a democratic fashion. I call on the de facto authorities to reverse this illegal action. The First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh must be allowed to reassume his office with full respect for his personal security. No members of the National Assembly should be expelled because they hold different political views.

If the current National Assembly is destroyed through unlawful and violent means, it will be difficult and perhaps impossible for the next national elections scheduled for May 1998 to have any meaning or legitimacy.

Finally, I strongly urge the 18 signatory countries of the Paris Peace Agreements to convene an urgent meeting to discuss these very distressing events. Democratically elected institutions and respect for human rights must be re-established.

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