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HUMAN RIGHTS AND CAMBODIA*

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THE HEINDORFF LECTURES

I am most honoured to be invited to deliver the Heindorff Lecture for 1995.

This lecture is named to honour the memory of Mr E W Heindorff, a noted citizen of this country.

Mr Heindorff was born in 1904. He trained as an accountant. When the First World War came along, he was too young to serve. When the Second World War came along, he was too old for active service. Instead he served as accountant in charge of wages and salaries for the South West Pacific Forces of the United States Army from 1941 to 1946.

Mr Heindorff was very active in a number of community associations including the Australian American Association. He was a member of the Queensland Branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs for many years. He served as its Honorary Secretary and encouraged its development as a

lively forum for the discussion of international affairs which always interested

When Mr Heindorff died in April 1968 his family made a bequest to provide for this annual lecture in his memory. My distinguished predecessors in the series have spoken of our changing country and its changing place in the world. In 1990, Mr Wayne Goss, the Premier, spoke of Queensland's external relations. In 1991, Sir Zelman Cowen revisited the history of the Commonwealth. In 1993, Senator Gareth Evans gave the lecture on the topic of the challenge of Asia for Australian foreign policy. In 1994, the High Commissioner to Australia of South Africa spoke on the great changes which have occurred in the Constitution of South Africa - a country with long traditional links to our own.

In this fiftieth anniversary year of the United Nations, I want to address the work of that body in relation to human rights. Because of my functions in respect of Cambodia, I will concentrate on the work of the United Nations for human rights in that country. It is work to which Australia has devoted much effort. Our successive Foreign Ministers, Mr Hayden and Senator Evans were progenitors of the Paris Peace Agreements. General John Sanderson was the Commander of the UNTAC Forces which superintended the free and fair elections. Our initial Ambassador, Mr John Holloway, took a leading part in supporting the reconstruction of Cambodia. Our present Ambassador, Mr Tony Kevin leads a dedicated team striving to offer Australian assistance in the rebuilding of Cambodia. A number of the Ministers of the new Cambodian Government, including H E Ung Huot, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, are Australian citizens.

My insight into the work of the United Nations derives from a number of activities in which I have been involved working with UN agencies on the building and reinforcement of human rights in many countries. Mine has been principally an experience in the agencies of the United Nations.

- For UNESCO, I attended the General Conference in Paris and have taken part in a succession of specialist committees designed to study the concept of "self-determination", promised in the Charter but the source of so many of the bitter conflicts in the world today;
- For ILO, I proceeded to South Africa, just before the democratic elections, to investigate the labour laws and to propose reforms of industrial relations law which are, at this very time, before the South African Parliament substantially for adoption;
- In WHO, I have had the privilege of serving on the Global Commission on AIDS truly a vital challenge to humanity which requires the concerted response of the global community, organised through WHO.

 The recent establishment of UNAIDS indicates the understanding, at the highest level of the United Nations, that this is a challenge of the greatest urgency and importance;
- For UNDP I was privileged to chair the Constitutional Conference of Malawi which helped the transition of that country from the one party regime of Dr Hastings Banda to the present multi-party democratic government. UNDP has also invited me to serve in a number of other African countries, struggling towards democracy and the protection of basic human rights; and
- Most recently, in November 1994, I was appointed by the Secretary-General as his Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia.

This is an important challenge which I pursue in the spirit of the dedication to the practical ideals of the United Nations.

SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE IN CAMBODIA

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Cambodia is one of about thirty such appointments. Some are thematic (such as the Special Rapporteur on the Status of Women and the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of the Judiciary and of Lawyers). Most are dedicated to scrutinising and reporting upon human rights in particular countries. The Special Representatives and Rapporteurs meet together annually to exchange ideas on methodology and procedures. They report, in the case of most of them, twice vearly - to the Commission on Human Rights in February/March² and to the General Assembly in November.³ I am now in my second year of service as Special Representative for Cambodia. In November 1995 I shall be presenting my second report to the General Assembly in New York. For that purpose I have just returned from my sixth mission to Cambodia. It occupied two weeks in August 1995. It took me to a number of provincial districts of the country, including Kampot, Kampong Cham and the capital, Phnom Penh. My work in Cambodia cannot be confined to luxury hotels in the capital. It takes me, and those who work with me, into the country regions. I had travelled to Sihanoukville shortly before the capture and murder of the three foreign tourists, including the Australian David Wilson, who were on a peaceful, youthful Journey on a train in pursuit of knowledge about Cambodia. So this is a task not

without risk. But one of importance for the building of human rights in Cambodia.

My function is to be informed, to encourage and to warn. My task is to visit Cambodia and to report to the Secretary-General and the organs of the United Nations. My obligation is to do so with complete fidelity to the truth but with sensitivity to the great problems faced by the Government of Cambodia of rebuilding human rights in a country shattered by almost three decades of revolution, war, genocide, invasion and international isolation. In Cambodia there are many difficulties. I do not plan to become one of them. Whilst my duty is to report with candour, it is also to avoid the sensationalised treatment of the problems of the country that seem to have attracted most international media attention.

Many think that human rights is a Western concept concerned wholly or mainly with civil and political rights. The provision of an "Asian exception" for human rights has been rejected by the United Nations, most recently by speeches at the Beijing conference. By definition, universal human rights are just that: a common heritage of all humanity. Human rights provide one of the three pillars upon which the United Nations has been established - securing peace and disarmament; pursuing economic and social development; and building the new world order upon the foundation of individual human rights and the rights of peoples.

The human rights with which the United Nations is concerned are stated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International

Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. There are now many other international instruments which express the dedication of the United Nations to fundamental human rights and peoples' rights. But if you look at these charters, whilst civil and political rights find their place amongst them, the priorities reflected in their language are typically, those which I hear voiced to me in Cambodia. As well as consideration of the issues of civil rights come the assertions of the right to equal dignity, of the right to conscience and freedom from discrimination of any kind. The United Nations statements of human rights include insistence on rights to free choice of employment, to adequate rest and leisure, to a proper standard of living with adequate protection for health and well being, to food, clothing, housing and medical care. The right to education is part of the fabric of fundamental human rights. So is the right freely to participate in cultural life and the entitlement to a social and international order where the rights and freedoms stated by the United Nations are fully realised.

In addition to these, there are the familiar civil rights which are of equal importance: not to be held in slavery or servitude; not to be subjected to torture or cruel; inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. To be equal before the law. To have effective remedies for legal rights. To be free from arbitrary arest detention or exile. To have fair access to the courts. To have particular rights when charged with criminal offences. To enjoy rights to privacy, to freedom of movement and to asylum from persecution.

In my tasks as Special Representative of the Secretary-General I am not the follower of my own idiosyncratic opinions on human rights. My function is to examine the laws and practices of Cambodia against the criteria of the United Nations' principles of human rights. It is then to report on any departures from these standards, first to the Government of Cambodia itself and then to the Secretary-General and the United Nations as well. The United Nations has earned its part in this reportage and scrutiny. It has done so by the remarkable work of UNTAC and the investment, not just of funds but of dedicated interest and concern for the well-being of the people of Cambodia and their good government. It has been invited to offer its aid by the Government of Cambodia, supported by the participants in the Paris Agreements.

Of course, human rights present many extremely sensitive questions. Some governments, unused to being criticised at home, do not take readily to being criticised in the councils of humanity. I well remember the report of the Special Rapporteur on Sudan at the Commission on Human Rights. His report engendered great anger on the part of the Government of Sudan. He was denounced and even, reportedly, threatened. But he had the support of his colleagues and of the Organisation. It is important that the United Nations should stand up for honest and fearless reporting by its Special Rapporteurs and Representatives. Otherwise, the result will be pusillanimous reports which whitewash great wrongs and ignore or hide - and thereby condone - departures from fundamentals.

In all of my missions to Cambodia - and all of my reports to the United Nations - I have collected and reported both the good and the bad news. I endeavour to do this with complete fairness and dispassion. Above all, with finesty. Frankly, I do not find this a difficult task. For more than twenty years, in various posts in Australia, I have been walking the judicial path. After a while, the life of neutrality enters the soul. So, I trust, it is in my work in Cambodia.

Not to foreclose my coming report on Cambodia to the Secretary-General and the General Assembly, I wish to review some of the good and the bad news that I have seen in Cambodia in my recent visits. Of the bad news, there is generally enough in the international media. It is the good news that is frequently untold. When I made this point at my closing press conference in Phnom Penh, at the conclusion of my sixth mission in August 1995, it gained undue attention in the news reports. To some extent, they ignored the troubling news doubtless in a quest for coverage of the unaccustomed good news which I was reporting. But now, I will tell it again as I did at that press conference. Necessarily, it must be in summary form. I will organise the report along the lines of ten items of good news with ten troubling developments that I feel must be told to get an accurate balance.

<u>CAMBODIA - GOOD NEWS</u>

Economy and infrastructure: The first thing to be said is that Cambodia is visibly picking up economically. At least this is so in the capital, Phnom Penh. The penetration of economic advancement to the provinces is, as

yet, less visible. But the streets of Phnom Penh are cleaner. Businesses are opening or re-opening. Cars and motor bikes have increased in great number. I have always made the point that an improvement in the economy, filtering down to the average citizen, is a vitally important step on the path of rebuilding human rights. I Cambodia. It helps to give a sense of well-being, purpose and commitment to society. It can provide the means to improve the quality of life. There is a need to avoid artificial and short term economic expansion. Such as any logging of forests that would destroy resources and outstrip reforestation. Or artificial wealth in casinos and like developments having nothing to do with the economic needs of the ordinary citizen. The economies in the region are taking off at a rapid pace. Cambodia realises that it must not be left behind.

- 2. <u>National Assembly:</u> The Cambodian National Assembly continues to function. The work of the Human Rights Commission of the Assembly has lately been enhanced by the establishment of a Centre for Research and Documentation. Legislation continues to receive scrutiny in the Assembly. Sometimes it is changed. Clearly, a properly working democratic Parliament is the fulcrum of the rule of law and of respect for human rights.
- 3. Active NGOs: The non-governmental organisations which flourished after UNTAC continue to work energetically for human rights. The Government ultimately accepted recommendations which I made that the phasing out of the court Defenders, who represent poor people in criminal trials, should be delayed. They may not be legally qualified. But their work is essential to the just disposition of court business. I have urged that the NGOs

should be regularly consulted by the Ministries on matters of mutual concern. Cambodia still awaits a law on civil associations. It is essential that this be liberal and encouraging of bodies which reflect and strengthen the diversity of a modern civil society.

- chr and branches: The office of the Centre for Human Rights is still busily at work in Phnom Penh. Indeed, in the year past it has expanded to establish offices in three provincial centres. More such offices are planned. The Centre provides technical help and assistance. Its existence encourages the human right NGOs. A proposal of the Government, early in 1995, that the work of the Centre should be phased out during the year was eventually withdrawn after a visit to Cambodia of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General (Mr M Goulding). The Government emphasised that they had no objection to the continuance of my mission. On the United Nations side, we have honoured not only the letter but also the spirit of the promise of closer consultation as worked out with the Special Envoy. There have also been some improvements in consultation on the Cambodian side.
- 5. Land mines: The problem of anti-personnel and anti-tank land mines continues to bedevil Cambodia. But the Government is committed to the eradication of these mines. Wonderful work is being done by the Cambodian Mine Action Group (CMAG) led by the Minister, Mr leng Mouly and by many NGOs and overseas military advisors. The Minister has supported my proposal for strong legislation to prohibit the further deployment of land mines in Cambodia. He has promised to look into the possibility of compensation for

their many victims. Cambodia's voice should be heard in the councils of the world as the international community considers strengthening international law against these vicious weapons that are so indiscriminate and cruel in their toll of human flesh.

Repatriation of KR: Good progress has been made in the defection of elements of the armed forces of the Khmer Rogue (KR). Under amnesties offered by the Government, large numbers of former KR soldiers and their families have returned to the constitutional side. In Chamkar Bei, I saw such a settlement with houses, a school and hospital built to welcome to the fold of the Cambodian nation people who had long lived in exile from the law. These are very positive developments. But they need the sustaining support of the international community. For instance, simple well digging equipment is needed as a means to translate the aspirations into reality.

Rights of the child: A major focus of my recent mission was a study of the rights of the child. The office of the Centre for Human Rights in Phnom Penh is assisting the Government in the preparation of its first report of Cambodia's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I examined the work being done by NGOs - including some from Australia - for street children, orphans and the disabled. Attention is now being given to the problem of child trafficking and the prostitution and abuse of minors. A Youth Rehabilitation Centre has been established by the Government for juvenile offenders, to separate them from hardened criminals. There is a huge post-war increase in the number of children in Cambodia. Almost half the population is

under the age of fifteen years. This presents both an opportunity for the future

Media: The news stands remain full of nearly forty regular journals from Cambodia, in the Khmer language and in foreign languages. These are regularly produced. A second journalists' association has been established. It has promised me to be vigilant for its independence. So far, in 1995 there has been no killing or imprisonment of journalists. I hope that this record will see out the year. Diversity of opinion is less evident in the Cambodian electronic media. But, in comparison to many countries of the region, Cambodia continues to enjoy a high number of press outlets, not always matched by the levels of professionalism, accuracy and fairness in press reporting.

Assembly. It contained a number of provisions which were contrary to my advice. The problem of the ethnic Vietnamese boat people held at Chrey Thom on the border with Vietnam remains, despite the efforts of UNHCR, ICRC and others. In Hanoi, in January 1995, the Governments of Cambodia and Vietnam agreed to solve their differences by negotiation. Thirteen ethnic Vietnamese families have been allowed to return to their villages from Chrey Thom and more may follow. I hope that this signals a commitment to respecting the rights of all minorities in Cambodia. Recent reports give rise to more concern about subordinate laws. Upon them I have sought assurances. The Khmer Rogue play ceaselessly upon ethnic tensions and hatreds which are by no means confined to

Bosnia or Rwanda. It is important that the United Nations continues to be a voice for tolerance and principle. In this regard, we have had the sterling support of HM the King of Cambodia, who has insisted upon respect for the human rights of the ethnic Vietnamese and other minorities in Cambodia.

UN agencies: And whilst the problems to which I will now turn continue to capture most media attention, the agencies of the United Nations press on with their vital work. WHO in the struggle against malaria and HIV. FAO in promoting higher yield rice grain. ILO in supporting work generation schemes WFB in providing food for work. UNESCO in training journalists and restoring the Ankor Wat. UNHCR helping refugees and displaced persons. UNDP in supporting many crucial projects of development. And the office of the Centre for Human Rights in Phnom Penh working tirelessly for the promotion and protection of human rights.

CAMBODIA - TROUBLESOME AREAS

Areas of concern in Cambodia must also be frankly described by me.

They include:

Constitutional arrangements: The Constitutional Council, envisaged by the fundamental law, has not yet been established. This is the body which will provide constitutional review to ensure that government and legislature remain within the Constitution and observe fundamental human rights there enshrined. The King has named his three nominees to the Council. But the nominees of the National Assembly and of the Supreme Council of Judicature are still awaited. In the absence of the Constitutional Council, it was

not possible to secure an authoritative national determination of the acute question, which arose during the year, of the disputed power of the National Assembly to expel a member.

Expulsions from NA: expelled National Assembly claims that this happened because he was a vocal critic of Government policy. He was first removed from his political Party. It was then claimed that this required, and authorised, his removal from the National Assembly despite the fact that he had been voted there by the people of his constituency. I cautioned that the expulsion appeared contrary both to the member's right of free expression and his political rights and also contrary to Cambodia's Constitution and laws. My concern is not the member, as such. It is to protect the rule of law and an Assembly, and a nation that accepts dissent and free expression. After his expulsion the member's bodyguards were allegedly arrested and harassed by people apparently in military uniform. These and other acts have been the subject of representations by me. Allegations do not prove the facts. But such serious allegations must be energetically investigated and publicly reported upon. Criminal wrongs, once found, must be redressed. Unlawful acts, once proved, must be corrected. As I left Cambodia, based on the unfortunate precedent of this expulsion, more expulsions, of members of another political Party, were being proposed. I urged the Chairman of the National Assembly, and all who would listen, to avoid such expulsions lest they damage the democratic legitimacy and reputation of the National Assembly elected at the conclusion of the UNTAC enterprise.

- Judicial independence: Another essential pillar for the rule of law and human rights in Cambodia is judicial independence. Yet Cambodia's judges are paid the equivalent of only \$US20 per month. Clearly, this is completely inadequate. Whereas other professionals can often supplement their earnings, judges cannot easily do so with propriety. There is an urgent need to pay them the minimum that will ensure that those with the will to do so can live with complete financial independence of the litigants. Improvements in the fixed scheduling of cases and the rigorous training of the judiciary are needed to enhance the reputation of the judges and the respect in which they are held by the community.
- Ambodia, is that of too many firearms. There is a need to collect these weapons and to instil strict discipline in those entitled, by law, to carry arms. There have been some serious instances of oppression by military commanders, including one alleged case of cold-blooded murder, drawn to notice but still not effectively brought to justice. Difficulties have arisen in the cooperation between judicial and police forces in different Provinces. These structural problems must be met resolutely so that in reality, as well as theory, everyone in Cambodia is brought under the requirements of law.
- 5. <u>Civil service immunity</u>: One legislative provision which came to notice during my recent mission provides a form of immunity to senior civil servants. They cannot be prosecuted without approval of their superiors. This provision, doubtless well intended, has made it difficult or impossible in some

cases for judges and prosecutors to bring powerful accused persons promptly before the courts. The provision should be repealed or radically amended.

Freedom of expression: Although press publications 6. plentiful, the Press Law, finally enacted in 1995, permits imprisonment of journalists to an extent that I believe conflicts with international human rights principles. It will be essential to monitor the operation of that law with close attention. The administrative power to close media outlets needs revision. At least, there should be a right to prompt court supervision and review. As a result of current proceedings against journalists, which pose the threat of imprisonment and closures of outlets, I have received many representations which complain to me about a perceived turning away from the principles of freedom of expression enshrined in the Cambodian Constitution and in the international instruments which Cambodia has ratified. A small group of students (the balloon six) were arrested on the very eve of my recent visit to Cambodia. I have seen the English language version of the pamphlet which they were handing out and which occasioned their arrest. It dealt with political issues; but in a respectful way. In fact it called for the assignment of more constitutional power to the King. This view may be thought misguided. But it is a political opinion which Cambodian citizens should be free to express, just as Australians can peacefully advocate a change in their Constitution. The lesson of this century has been that heavyhanded attempts to suppress political opinions always, ultimately, fail. I have continued to make representations on behalf of these persons who, at last report, remain in custody.

- Prisons: In all visits to the Provinces, I make it my business to visit the prisons. The prisons in Kampot and Kampong Cham are of a very poor standard. The latter is not really a prison at all, but a former school. Lacking full security, the prisoners are locked in their cells for twenty-three hours a day. There is a lack of proper exercise and recreational facilities. In one prison, I saw a cell with little light and even manacles and leg irons which appear still to be used. There is a need urgently to improve the condition of prisons. I applaud the support given by the Australian Government to this rather thankless task, with for the realities of respect for human rights.
- A: HIV/AIDS: The problem of HIV/AIDS continues to knock at the door of Cambodia. Well meaning steps by the Municipality of Phnom Penh to close brothels and to remove posters promoting condom use may be understood in the political and cultural context. But Cambodia must take very strong and brave steps if HIV/AIDS is not to spread so rapidly that it destroys the nascent indications of economic growth. Restricting information about, and availability of, condoms is not the way to confront this urgent new problem. Human lives are at stake, as well as economic growth. Fortunately, the King is a strong supporter of my efforts to enliven the interest of the Government and people of Cambodia in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. There is still time to achieve relevant prevention. But time is running out. Recent Government policies have been counter-productive.
- 2. Land law: The problem of land law remains unattended. As a result of the emptying of the cities in Pol Pot's time there are many dispossessed

people and countless land disputes between well placed occupiers and returnees.

I spent much time during my last mission with squatters and their organisations.

They are the by-product of homelessness. Their needs demand sensitive treatment, rehousing, facilities and education for children. This is a major source of deprivation of human rights and of flashpoints for conflict, violence and disaffection.

10. Cooperation: Although, during my last mission, I had the honour to be received in audience by HM the King and met the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Justice, Information and Children's Affairs, the two Prime Ministers declined, or were not able, to meet me. This is the first time since my appointment that such a difficulty has arisen. It comes in the face of the statement, before the visit of the UN Special Envoy in 1995, that the Government of Cambodia would continue to welcome my visits to Cambodia. The Second Prime Minister (HE Hun Sen) is reported to have said that if I wished to continue in my post I would have to change my attitude. If this means backing away from legitimate and honest criticism of the Cambodian Government and institutions where I see departures from fundamental human nghiss I am afraid I cannot conform. It would be a betrayal of my duty to the Secretary-General and the organs of the United Nations, to the Paris Agreements and of the hopes of the international community that post-UNTAC Cambodia would be rebuilt on the foundations of human rights and constitutionalism. Above all, it would be a betrayal of the Cambodian people and of the principles which I believe, the overwhelming majority of them want and support. They

still have faith in the United Nations. The United Nations must prove itself worthy of that faith.

As well, it is not in my character to back off. As a judge, I have never done so and I am too old to start doing so now. Yet it is not only HE Hun Sen who has given such a caution. The clandestine radio of the Khmer Rogue, monitored just after my departure from Cambodia, warned that if I continued my work in Cambodia, particularly in expressing support for the rights of the ethnic vietnamese minority, they would smash my head in. I will not be deflected by such threats from adhering to the principles which are enshrined in the ideals of the United Nations and expressed in the Cambodian Constitution and the international conventions which Cambodia has accepted. Human rights workers also wear notional blue helmets.

PROFESSIONALISM & IDEALISM

I remain hopeful about Cambodia. On balance, the good news is undoubtedly more important than the bad. Progress continues to be made. I carry with me many arresting memories:

• Of the mother, grieving in a village house near Kampot for the senseless death of her son, killed by the reckless use of one of the many excessive guns of Cambodia, apparently used in senseless anger. "He would have been a general", she moaned. She appealed to me to do what I could to help stop the lawlessness;

- I think of the villagers re-settled under the shadow of Vine Mountain: once a stronghold of the Khmer Rogue who there murdered my fellow countryman, David Wilson and his two European companions. This lawlessness is being replaced by resettlement. Banditry is gradually giving way to constitutionalism;
- I think of the eyes of the young judge in training at Kampong Cham, to whom I spoke candidly about corruption and its insidious effect on the reputation of the judiciary and the rule of law. We must find a solution to this problem. Otherwise, it will eat at the fabric of constitutionalism;
- And then I think of the prisoners peering at me as my eyes adjusted to the gloom of the cell in which they spend twenty-three hours of every day of their lives. They are humans too. Their dignity and self-respect must be defended. If the United Nations Special Representative does not speak for them who will?

I pay tribute to the many officers of the United Nations who devote their lives to the improvement of human rights in Cambodia and to helping the Government in its enormous task of reconstruction. I hope that the historical elements of intolerance and impatience of diversity of opinion will be kept in close check in modern Cambodia. It is essential that Cambodia should persist with the multi-party democracy, founded on political pluralism which was the commitment which Cambodia gave in the *Paris Agreements*.

I pay tribute to my colleagues in the office of the Centre for Human Rights, both in Geneva and in Cambodia. And to the High Commissioner for Human Rights who retains a vigilant interest in the success of the Cambodian operation.

I offer my respects to the Cambodian human rights workers who retain their faith in the United Nations and whom we must not let down.

ENDNOTES

- Adapted from the third Peter Wilenski Memorial Lecture, 1995, given by the author at the National Press Club, Canberra, 8 September 1995 sub nom "Human Rights, the United Nations and Cambodia".
- Special Representative of the Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia. Chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Commission of Jurists. President of the Court of Appeal of New South Wales. President of the Court of Appeal of Solomon Islands.
- I. See M D Kirby "United Nations Strengths and Weaknesses", unpublished paper for the United Nations Association of Australia, conference, Canberra, 2 September 1995.
- 2. See United Nations, Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights: The Situation of Human Rights in Cambodia (E/CN.4/1995/87, 24 January 1995).
- See United Nations, General Assembly, The Situation of Human Rights in Cambodia Report of the Secretary-General Addendum (A/49/635/add 1, November 1994).