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Cambodia: Government should seize new opportunity to bring Khmer Rouge human rights abusers to justice

Following reports of internal divisions within the remaining membership of the Khmer Rouge political movement, and claims that its leader Pol Pot is fleeing the last Khmer Rouge stronghold, Amnesty International is calling on the Royal Government of Cambodia to arrest and bring to justice those suspected of having violated human rights.

Recent news reports from the region state that senior Khmer Rouge member Son Sen, his wife Yun Yat and ten others were executed before Pol Pot fled from Anlong Veng in northern Cambodia, along with several hundred supporters. Amnesty International condemns all such killings and calls to an immediate halt to any further executions.

None of these reports could be confirmed independently, and some analysts believe that this may simply be an attempt to allow senior Khmer Rouge leaders to retire quietly, while less well known members of lower rank are reintegrated into the mainstream Cambodian political process.

“If an opportunity exists to arrest those suspected of committing gross human rights violations, and to bring them to justice in accordance with international standards for fairness, it must be taken,” Amnesty International said. “If this opportunity is lost, Cambodians may never again have the chance to establish the truth about their recent past, and thus the opportunity to better protect their human rights in the future.”

“All those involved in this conflict should remember that impunity - literally exemption from punishment - is one of the main contributing factors to continuing cycles of human rights violations,” the human rights organization added. “Amnesty International has long campaigned against the phenomenon of impunity for human rights violators in Cambodia.”

There are also reports that several other senior Khmer Rouge cadres who were attempting to negotiate peace with the Royal Government of Cambodia are being held as hostages by Pol Pot and his supporters. If this is the case, they should be immediately released.

“The world remembers with horror the gross human rights violations committed during the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge Government, as well as continuing abuses of human rights after their fall from power,” Amnesty International said. “It is time to hold individuals accountable for their actions, and to bring to justice those against whom there is credible evidence.”

Amnesty International notes that the likely charges which may be levelled against senior Khmer Rouge cadres include crimes against humanity, which are crimes of universal jurisdiction -- that is, any state may bring those suspected of these crimes before a court, no matter where the crimes took place.

Amnesty International calls upon the international community to fulfill its responsibility to ensure that all those responsible for crimes against humanity and other gross human rights violations are brought to justice in proceedings which are consistent with international standards for fair trial.

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