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CAMBODIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON THE CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT TO RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF ETHNIC VIETNAMESE

On the day of the second visit to Chrey Thom of Justice Michael Kirby, United Nations Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia, Amnesty International is calling upon the Cambodian authorities to recognise the rights of all Cambodians, including members of ethnic minorities, to return to their country of origin.

"Over 4,000 ethnic Vietnamese Cambodians have been stranded on the border with Viet Nam for nearly two years and have been arbitrarily deprived of the right to return to their own country," Amnesty International said today. "It is time for the Cambodian authorities to recognise their basic rights."

Amnesty International has campaigned on behalf of these thousands of ethnic Vietnamese Cambodians since the 1993 massacres by the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK or Khmer Rouge), led to a mass exodus from the country. Although some of the thousands who fled later managed to return to their villages in Cambodia, more than 4,000 remain on the border with Viet Nam, prevented by the Cambodian authorities from returning home.

The Cambodian government claims that the majority of these people are in fact Vietnamese citizens who have no right to return to Cambodia. But during a visit to the border in November 1994, Amnesty International interviewed people stranded there who were able to show the organization Cambodian identity documents dating back over 40 years.

Ethnic Vietnamese at the border told Amnesty International that the Cambodian authorities have never given them the opportunity to prove their history of residence in Cambodia, although written records exist in their home districts.

Amnesty International later visited the home village of some of these people in Cambodia, and obtained copies of identity documents giving proof of residence for many years.

Amnesty International welcomes the fact that Justice Kirby is again drawing international attention to the plight of these people, and reiterates its concern that it is up to the Cambodian authorities to recognize the rights of ethnic Vietnamese Cambodians and allow them to return to their homes in the country.

ENDS\

INTERNAL

Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz

A ceremony will be held on 26 and 27 January in Krakow, Poland and Auschwitz to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Auschwitz.

AI has been invited to attend the ceremony, along with other Nobel Laureates, and Gerry O'Connell of the IEC will be representing AI. The Laureates will be drafting a joint statement to be delivered at Auschwitz on 27 January.

International media have been invited to the ceremony, and Gerry will be giving interviews for AI. The IS press office will be liaising with Gerry on his media activities.

Sudan launch update

Two other organizations are planning media events on or around 25 January -- the launch date of the Sudan campaign.

Medicins Sans Frontiere are holding press conferences in Nairobi and other countries where they are represented on 24 January to launch their Annual Populations in Danger report. In many countries they are also planning public activities for 25 January.

The United Nation's Operation Lifeline Sudan is also launching its Horn of Africa appeal at this time. The main launch is planned for New York on 24 January, and a press conference had been scheduled in conflict with ours in Nairobi on 25 January. Casey is discussing the timing of their launch to ensure it doesn't conflict with the Sudan launch, and although no final decisions have been taken by the UN they are being cooperative at this stage.