

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 23/11/97

UA 135/97

Fear for safety

7 May 1997

KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA Kong Saran (m) and others

Amnesty International fears for the safety of Kong Saran, the Director of the Sihanoukville (Kompong Som) Information Service, and for those holding similar positions in other Cambodian provinces, following an attack on the television station in Sihanoukville on 4 May 1997, in which one person was killed.

On 22 April 1997, a senior member of the police in Sihanoukville, affiliated to the FUNCINPEC political party (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia), visited the Sihanoukville Information Service, a department of the Ministry of Information. He presented a junior official with a video cassette and a letter reportedly from the Sihanoukville Governor's office, requesting that the cassette be shown on television. The video cassette contained a political speech by a member of FUNCINPEC. Kong Saran was informed about the cassette and contacted Ministry of Information officials in Phnom Penh for advice on whether or not the cassette could be broadcast. He was apparently advised that it could not, for a number of reasons, including that the speech was political, and the national television station (which includes the provincial sub-stations) should be politically neutral. Kong Saran informed the senior policeman and the Governor's office of the Ministry's decision. A guard was placed at the television and radio stations in Sihanoukville, but was removed at the end of the month. On 4 May, at 7.45pm, seven men, apparently wearing military or paramilitary uniforms, attacked the television station in Sihanoukville. They fired at least two B-40 rockets, then three of the men entered the building, shooting from their AK-47s. Pech Eam, a technician at the station was shot twice in the stomach, and died the next day. Two other people were injured.

In light of this attack, Amnesty International fears for the safety of Kong Saran, who in his position as Information Service Director, may be the target of further attacks. The organization has also received credible reports that officials in similar positions in at least one other province have received death threats in the last two months, in an attempt to intimidate them into broadcasting certain material.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cambodia has a coalition government, of which the two main parties are FUNCINPEC and the CPP (Cambodian People's Party). However, the government has become increasingly fragile in recent months, as tension between the two major parties, and in particular within the leadership of the government, has become more and more apparent. Verbal accusations by members of each party against members of the other have been made and broadcast on local media. First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh recently accused the Minister of Information Ieng Mouly (who is a member of a smaller party, the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party, which recently joined an electoral alliance with the CPP), of bias against FUNCINPEC, and threatened to send tanks to the Ministry of Information if it did not broadcast a particular speech. A grenade attack on 30 March 1997 against peaceful demonstrators from the unofficial opposition Khmer Nation Party, in which at least 16 people died and over 100 were injured, has contributed to the increasingly tense atmosphere in the country. More than 20 journalists were among the injured, and one was killed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Kong Saran, and other provincial Information Service Directors in Cambodia;
- calling for those responsible for the attack on the 4 May 1997, in which one person died, to be brought to justice;
- calling on the Royal Government of Cambodia to ensure that the personal safety of all those working in the media in Cambodia is protected;
- urging that the right to freedom of expression is respected in the country.

APPEALS TO:

Samdech Krompreah Norodom Ranariddh
First Prime Minister
Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Faxes: +855 234 26054

Telegrams: HRH Norodom Ranariddh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

His Excellency Hun Sen
Second Prime Minister
Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Telegrams: HE Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

His Excellency Ieng Mouly
Minister of Information
Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

and to diplomatic representatives of the Kingdom of Cambodia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 June 1997.