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## **Cambodia: Peace plan needs human rights safeguards**

**TOKYO** – Continued political killings and other abuses are fundamentally compromising the climate for free and fair elections in Cambodia, Amnesty International said at a press conference in Tokyo.

In a report issued today, the international human rights organization presents evidence that Cambodian security forces have continued the spate of political killings begun after last July's coup. At the same time, no action has been taken to investigate or act upon other extrajudicial executions despite repeated promises to international visitors such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

“Unless action is taken to protect human rights, elections scheduled for July will be jeopardised and the investment the international community has made in Cambodia's reconstruction will be put at risk,” said Rory Mungoven, Director of Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Program.

Amnesty International also raised its concern about the forthcoming trial *in absentia* of exiled former First Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh Norodom, due to begin this week.

“Whatever the case against Ranariddh, it is clear that in the present environment he cannot receive a fair trial. And yet the international community is giving its tacit endorsement to this process through the Japanese peace plan,” Mr Mungoven said.

“A show trial followed by an amnesty might be a convenient diplomatic fiction. But it flies in the face of commitments in the Paris peace accords to uphold the rule of law and human rights.”

The Japanese “four pillars initiative” was approved by the group of countries known as the “Friends of Cambodia” on 15 February 1998 and backed by Prince Ranariddh and Hun Sen. Its four components include no military cooperation with the Khmer Rouge, an immediate cease-fire, the speedy conclusion of Prince Ranariddh's trial followed by an immediate amnesty, and his participation in the July elections.

“When will the international community realize it can no longer paper over the cracks,” Mr Mungoven said. “The reason why Cambodia continues to suffer such problems is because nobody responsible for committing human rights abuses, such as those in recent months, is ever brought before a court, so the trials that should happen never take place. If this issue is not tackled in the peace process what chance is there for progress?”

Amnesty International is calling on the international community to back the peace plan with action on human rights, by setting clear benchmarks for human rights protection and monitoring as critical measures for the election process. These should include protection and support for local human rights defenders and the Cambodia Office of the UN Centre for Human Rights.

## **BACKGROUND**

Political killings of government opponents continue in Cambodia, and the evidence against the security forces in some cases is overwhelming. On 27 January, unidentified men shot dead 58-year-old On Phuong, a member of the Khmer Nation Party and his five-year-old daughter. On 19 February, soldiers shot and killed three members of the Bun family, apparently because a close relative was active in forces fighting the government.

Opponents have also been harassed and ill-treated by the government and security forces. On 11 January, opposition newspaper editor Nou Kim Ei was shot at while out driving with his family. Dozens of people have been briefly illegally detained and some beaten because of their political affiliations. Most were freed only after being forced to denounce allegiance to opposition parties. Cambodian human rights workers have also been harassed and some threatened with death.

Rather than tackle these issues, the government has spent its time attempting to discredit the work of the Cambodian Field Office of the UN Centre for Human Rights. In August 1997, Hun Sen publicly accused the staff of spreading false information and asked for some of them to be removed. While killings continued in the country, the government has yet to provide any proof that serious investigations are being carried out. In January this year, policemen violated diplomatic impunity by attempting to enter a UN vehicle and arrest without a warrant Chao Sokhon, a supporter of Prince Ranariddh, who had been freed from prison following the overturning by the Appeal Court of a criminal conviction, and was being escorted out of the country for his own safety.

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**Amnesty International is raising its concerns at a Press Conference in Japan.**

- 13.30 (Japan Time)
- AI Japan: SKY ESTA 2nd Flr. 2-18-23, Nishi-Waseda Shinjuku-Ku, Tokyo 169

**For more information, to arrange an interview or to receive a copy of the report, please call:**

**AI Japan: Tel: (81) 3 3203 1050**  
**AI International Secretariat: Tel: (44) 171 413 5566/5729**