

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 105/97

Fear for safety

21 July 1997

CAMBODIA Pen Sovann, politician

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Pen Sovann, a veteran Cambodian politician who has not been seen since 5 July 1997. Concern has been heightened because at least 30 people, most of them FUNCINPEC civilian or military officials or allies, have been extrajudicially executed since 4 July. Dozens of FUNCINPEC and other opposition party members have fled the country in fear for their lives.

A former president of the Council of Ministers during the People's Republic of Kampuchea regime (1979 to 1989), Pen Sovann was previously arrested in 1981 and sent to Viet Nam where he was detained until 1991, apparently on account of his peaceful political views. Earlier this year, he formed his own political party, the Khmer National Support Party (KNSP). The launch of the party took place at the house of First Prime Minister and FUNCINPEC leader Prince Norodom Ranariddh. The KNSP was reportedly going to join an alliance of other political parties with FUNCINPEC.

Pen Sovann was last seen at a meeting of the KNSP on 5 July. When fighting broke out in Phnom Penh the meeting ended and those present fled. On 21 July, a government spokesperson claimed that they did not know the whereabouts of Pen Sovann and appealed for him to make contact in order to offer him protection. Amnesty International does not know if he has been arrested.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cambodia has had a coalition government since elections organized by the UN in 1993. The two main parties in the coalition were FUNCINPEC led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) led by Hun Sen. In recent months the coalition had been increasingly fragile as relations between the two prime ministers became ever more hostile. Prince Ranariddh left the country on 4 July, ostensibly for a private visit to France, though it later transpired he had been warned of forthcoming violence. CPP forces loyal to Hun Sen launched violent attacks in the capital on 5 July and fighting continued throughout the weekend. By 7 July the capital was in the hands of the CPP troops. Sporadic fighting is still occurring in provincial areas. In addition to the more than 30 people deliberately killed, hundreds of FUNCINPEC soldiers and officials are believed to be in detention. According to reports some of the detained soldiers were severely tortured during the initial days of their detention.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Pen Sovann;
- urging that if he has been detained his treatment should conform with minimum international standards;
- urging that no one should be targeted on account of their peaceful political views.

APPEALS TO:

HE Hun Sen
Second Prime Minister
Office of the Council of Ministers

Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Telegrams: HE Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Faxes: + 855 23 42 6144 (if voice, ask for fax)
Salutation: Your Excellency

HE Sar Kheng
Minister of Interior
Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Telegrams: HE Sar Kheng, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Faxes: + 855 23 42 6144 (if voice, ask for fax)
Salutation: Your Excellency

HE Tea Banh
Minister of Defence
Office of the Council of Ministers
Phnom Penh
Cambodia

Telegrams: HE Tea Banh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Cambodia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 August 1997.