



CENTRE FOR PEACE &
CONFLICT STUDIES



30 years
anniversary

PARIS PEACE ACCORD FROM WAR TO PEACE

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"Cambodia's journey from war towards peace: Reflections from Cambodian peacebuilders
on the 30-year anniversary of the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements"

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to be here in this online seminar to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Cambodia Paris Peace Accord. This cooperation between the Initiative for Peacebuilding at Melbourne University, Australia, and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Cambodia, is memorable and unique. It allows perspectives from the middle and grassroots levels to be shared to complete the story of massive international and national efforts to bring peace to a war-ravaged nation. Once, the country's population had lost all the hopes and the dreams to become normal again. Cambodians as well as the international community worked hard and creatively to bring back hopes of peace.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on War and Peace in Cambodia with the participants of this meaningful event. The Cambodia Paris Peace Accord symbolizes not only that peace has come to Cambodia, but it also represents world unity. It was the last world unity that occurred in history since the fall of the Berlin wall in Germany. It is rare for powerful countries such as the USA, Russia, China, and other key European countries to come together on the same page. The fact that they did is interesting enough to wonder how that was possible.

My generation all know about the cold war, the Khmer Rouge, the actors involved, different leaderships, and the circumstances. Growing up in the middle of such a horrible situation, I had many things to blame for what had happened to my loved ones and me. Still, I learned that I should be part of that blame if I were to be fair to the society that suffered the same way I did. Anybody who did not think or do whatever we could to prevent it should hold part of the blame. It does not matter how small you are.

Let me use this opportunity to explore what is more inspiring: things that come out from peace. Though Peace is very closely connected to War, things that come from war are not to be inspired about. Moreover, if we believe that Peace is a process and can be accomplished, we do not need to depend too much on war to find peace, or go through the worse to find something better.



There are many ways that a peace agreement can be achieved. Cambodia's Paris Peace Accord was a top-down approach. The process involved exclusively the top political leaders. There was no community consultation sought or organized. However, just a short period during flexible governance and encouragement by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia was enough for Cambodian civil society to take root and develop into professional institutions and experts in so many areas. They have become part of the firm foundation of today's Cambodia, and also contribute back to the region and the world.

This shows that civilians who are the ones who suffered the most from the situation are ready to take part in rebuilding and making things better. Sometimes, politicians need to remind themselves about this universal fact, that civilians are the solution to all major conflicts and wars. The world should have learned by now that peace cannot depend only on kings and politicians; I can say with absolute certainty that peace and stability must rely on the people.

During the 30-year experience of post-war peacebuilding, following the Paris Peace Accord, I am personally involved in many peace activities, including the Dhammayietra (Peace Walk); the campaign to ban landmines; civil disarmament via the working group for weapon reduction; pioneering conflict transformation skills training in Cambodia via the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS); and other activities at the regional level, ranging from East Timor, Sri Lanka and Myanmar to other parts of the region. With all of these experiences that I always remain to be proud of, there are things outstanding for me. Not only the work is still ongoing, but it makes me very much want to share that exceptional experience that I find very relevant, not only in Cambodia, but for the rest of the world. It is about my journey with the Cambodia Peace Gallery in Battambang province, my hometown.

Today, we are here to celebrate the signing of the Paris Peace Accord. It was the moment to signify ending the war in Cambodia. It was indeed the beginning of everything about Cambodia today. History can teach us one thing about war and peace: It is destruction and creation that occurs within both spectrums in any circumstances. War brings physical destruction; simultaneously, it creates a psychological impairment of individuals and society. While peace, on the other hand, rebuilds and reconstructs the society and systems. At the same time, peace destroys





the desire to seek answers through violence, and focuses us on fundamental questions such as healing, reconciliation, and the prevention of similar atrocities from happening again in the future. I must say that the work for healing, reconciliation, and violence prevention from the same situation takes many times longer than the war itself. The civil war in Cambodia was about 30 years before the Paris Peace Accord, and now, 30 years after the Paris Peace Accord, the fundamental questions I am talking about are just at a baby level. One whole generation, in fact, has been conditioned not to realize any significant reconciliation or healing. However, the good news is that true reconciliation, healing, and learning from past mistakes have proven possible intergenerationally with future generations. That is why it is important to explore the concept of intergenerational reconciliation.

Moreover, it is possible only when the older generation is well-prepared by subscribing to real wisdom and is willing to launch the younger generation. The guilt, the hate, the revenge, and the grievance of the older generation are always obstacles to future justice, reconciliation and healing. Suppose we are the generation who cannot do it, I mean, including the current political leaders. Please, do not stand in the way, but instead do anything possible to support the younger generation to reach their collective triumph in the future.

Lastly, suppose I can have my wish. In that case, I want to keep the Paris Peace Accord as a reminder that it was one of the world's wisest moments to ascertain unity. For Cambodians, that special day is the time to assess what we have successfully rebuilt, what was destroyed by the war, and how much we have deconstructed what was created by it.

Soth Plai Ngarm

Cambodian Peace Leader, Analyst, & Researcher
Founder, Cambodia Peace Gallery.

