

Commemorative Day for the Paris Peace Agreements Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh – 22nd October 2014

His Royal Highness Samdech Norodom Sirivudh, Chairman of Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), Ambassadors, Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen who work for peace in Cambodia.

The Paris Peace Accords were signed on October 23rd 1991 and marked the official end of Cambodia's civil war.

At the first session of the Conference, Cambodia was represented by the four Cambodian Parties. At the second session of the Conference, the Supreme National Council of Cambodia, under the leadership of then President, H.R. Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk, represented Cambodia.

The co-Presidents of the Conference were H.E. Mr. Roland Dumas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, and H.E. Mr. Ali Alatas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. Both of these countries are here today, represented by H.E. Mr. Jean-Claude Poimboeuf, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to Cambodia and H.E. Mr. Pitono Purnomo, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Indonesia to Cambodia.

We are also thankful for the presence of CICP Executive Director, H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak, who was present at the peace talks and played an influential role in the post peace accord implementation period. We are honoured that those who created a space for peace then, are now here at our commemorative event.

Significantly, 18 governments signed the agreement: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, the Peoples Republic of China, the French Republic, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Additionally, and an interesting and quirky fact, is that the Non-Aligned Movement was represented at the Conference, as Cambodia is a member of the grouping. Its Chairman at the time of each session represented the movement, namely Zimbabwe at the first session and Yugoslavia at the second session. The Secretary-General of the United Nations and his Special Representative also participated in the Conference.

The Paris Peace Accords was unique in bringing together so many diverse actors. This is perhaps one of the only international agreements that brought together such an array of international players, and particularly at the time when the Berlin Wall had just fallen and the Cold War was still thawing.

The opening stanza of the Final Act of the Paris Conference on Cambodia reads:

“Concerned by the tragic conflict and continuing bloodshed in Cambodia, the Paris Conference on Cambodia was convened, at the invitation of the Government of the French Republic, in order to achieve an internationally guaranteed comprehensive settlement which would restore peace to that country.”

A proportion of the peace that we see now in Cambodia can be recounted back to this opening paragraph as a seed.

The Conference was held in two sessions, through August of 1989, and the second from 21 to 23 October 1991. At the conclusion of the first session, the Conference had achieved progress in elaborating a wide variety of elements necessary for the achievement of a comprehensive settlement, but the progress was not significant enough to reach this goal. The Conference was thus suspended so as to intensify efforts for a peace agreement, and the co-Presidents lent their good offices to facilitate this work.

Following the suspension of the first session of the Conference, the co-Presidents and the Secretary-General of the United Nations undertook extensive consultations, in particular with the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, with the Supreme National Council of Cambodia, and with other participants in the Paris Conference.

At the inaugural portion of the final meeting of the Paris Conference, on 23 October 1991, the Conference was addressed by H.E. Mr. Francois Mitterrand, President of the French Republic; H.R.H. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, President of the Supreme National Council of Cambodia; and H.E. Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Interestingly, the text of the peace accord was translated into Chinese, English, French, Khmer and Russian. I believe that there is not another agreement in the world that has been translated into all of these languages. The original peace accords are now in Indonesia and France; I hope that our

esteemed guests have brought their copies with them to prove that they exist.

In 2012 The Royal Cambodian Government made Paris Peace Accord Day a public holiday signifying its importance to the Kingdom, and thus creating an opportunity for us to raise the profile of this significant turning point; its associated efforts for peace in Cambodian history; and upholding it as an example of overcoming genocide and civil war. In the ASEAN region where today we are hailing the achievement of the peace processes in Aceh, Mindanao and Myanmar, let us show Cambodia's next generation how their own nation made such strides for peace over two decades ago, not just for Cambodian peace, but for its neighbours and the world. Cambodia was one of the first nations in the region to move beyond its post-independence conflict and establish peace. However, the agreement is a reminder that we are not done yet. An agreement is an agreement, and there are always going to be challenges on the long road of implementation.

A year after the peace accords were signed, Maha Ghosananda popularly known as Somdech Song Santepheap (the Leader of Religion for Peace) said:

“The suffering of Cambodia has been deep, from this suffering comes great compassion, great compassion makes a peaceful heart, a peaceful heart makes a peaceful person, a peaceful person makes a peaceful family, a peaceful family makes a peaceful community, a peaceful community makes a peaceful nation, a peaceful nation makes a peaceful world, and may all beings live in happiness and peace in our universe forever”.

It is this Cambodian resilience and ability to transcend and transform the past into positive futures that we have come here to celebrate today. We do not celebrate naively. We know in any peace process to heal the past there is much to be done and many setbacks along the way. It is critical for us all to memorialize the past and never forget the tragic and bloody years Cambodians survived. Our message is to a new generation of Cambodians: that this country is a centre of peace where at one time its leaders put aside their differences, and the world suspended its interest, to give the people of this country a chance to have sustainable peace.

Peace agreements take time, political will, patience, creativity and a belief there can be an alternative future. The implementation of agreements takes decades of hard work, patience, dynamism, long-term accompaniment both

internationally and locally, and the unfailing belief that an alternative future is possible. There are many people in this room today that held up these principles in the peace process.

This is why CPCS and CICP, both Cambodian organisations, have gathered you here today, and we hope again in to the future, to not only appreciate what is possible when the international community works together to put its political will behind a peace effort, but also to appreciate what is possible when a country says 'no more war' and embarks on a journey for peace.

And it is for this reason I am deeply honoured to stand here today along side His Royal Highness Norodom Sirivudh who himself has worked tirelessly through these years to make his own significant contribution to peace and who can bare witness to why October 23rd 1991 was a turning point in Cambodian history. Today we celebrate every Cambodian that has worked to up-hold the principles of peace in this country, and celebrate a peace accord signed in a distant country to give Cambodians a chance for sustainable peace at home.