

Ieng Mouly

On the Tortuous Path to Peace



Photo of the front cover, from left to right: Khieu Samphan, Im Chhun Lim,

Ieng Mouly, Hun Sen, Dith Munty, and Prince Norodom Sihanouk, at a meeting of the Supreme National Council in the Phnom Penh Royal Palace in 1992.

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REFACE

For a long time, I have longed to see Cambodians themselves write stories about Cambodia, for most of the books about this country have been penned by foreign authors, particularly Western writers. I am confident that knowledgeable people, and those with experience in professional, artistic, and political life, certainly have many topics related to their own lives. If they had written, printed, and published their experiences, or the stories they have come across, then Cambodians of generations to come could think about or learn from them.

As for myself, I initially wrote this book as an autobiography for my children and grandchildren to learn about my native village and the lineage of the Ieng family. Nevertheless, since I have gone through historic events for more than six decades, sometimes as an affected citizen, sometimes as an observer, and sometimes as a tiny stakeholder or a living witness, I am imbued with the idea of disclosing those events for the public′s knowledge. Hence, this book is a writing about the social, economic,

and political issues of Cambodia, written according to my memories and perceptions, as well as traditional documentation. This came about because I understood that books about Cambodia by Cambodians themselves have not yet existed in abundance. Alongside my personal stories, this book includes detailed accounts of historic or social events from one generation to another, especially those in the last decades.

My childhood was shaped by Cambodian society, which adhered to Buddhism and its customs and respected the monarchy, and by a political context that moved from the era of insecurity to the era of national independence. For a while, at a time when our country was at peace, other Cambodian kids and I grew up without the expectation that, one day in the future, our nation would experience unthinkable and incalculable devastation. In that peaceful era, the majority of the Cambodian people had absolute faith in the leadership of the late HM Former King Norodom Sihanouk, whom people in general called Prince-Father and who was highly revered, as equal to Buddha and God. Everyone was convinced that his rule

would be stable and would last forever; nothing could jolt it or bring it down. Nonetheless, the fate of our country was not as we had envisioned.

Beginning in March 1970, the flames of war intensified in Cambodia until an autogenocidal regime, unprecedented in our humanity´s history, was brought into being. The entire Cambodian nation and people suffered devastation beyond words. Those inside the country were victims of massacre, starvation, and forced labour, and were separated from their beloved wives, husbands, children, grandchildren, siblings, and relatives. They also completely lost rights and freedom, the dignity of human beings. Those unable to bear the sufferings fled to foreign countries, while some others rose in revolt and set up armed resistance movements to oppose the Pol Pot regime.

My youthhood life drifted along on the billowing strength of the war flames. In France, I, who was separated from my family and living alone as a refugee and who had already overcome some obstacles, could not sever myself from my blood and roots as a Cambodian. The events in the 1970s inspired me to engage in politics,

beginning in a foreign country. In joining the Khmer People´s National Liberation Front [KPNLF] in the early 1970s, the main idea of my struggle was to oppose the Pol Pot regime and liberate the Cambodian people from slavery. Nonetheless, due to a geopolitical foothold in favour of the Khmer Rouge, not only did this front defer the struggle against Pol Pot, but it also cooperated with the genocidal clique in the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, or the Tripartite Coalition Government. That was an alliance with the Khmer Rouge as the core force. That was an irony of fate.

In the geopolitical context of that epoch, the majority of the people in the tripartite alliance viewed the Vietnamese troops´ presence in Cambodia as an occupation of Cambodian territory. Therefore, the troops´ presence became a topic for the Khmer Rouge´s propaganda, in quest of support both in and outside the country. In fact, since the 1993 general election, the words of propaganda that Vietnam controlled in Cambodia have already been reduced to completely meaningless utterances. Nevertheless, such a propaganda topic has so

far been used by political high rollers to seize political advantages.

This book recounts the story of the anti-Vietnam resistance movements, in particular the Khmer People´s National Liberation Front of which I was Secretary General; the formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea; the functions of this government´s leaders; and the key role of then-Prince Norodom Sihanouk. In reality, the tripartite pact helped continue the political life of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge for another while. The internal dispute within the Khmer People´s National Liberation Front, which caused the front to decline and weaken gradually, will also be part of the account. Moreover, rivalries among the Non-Communist Resistance movements and the Khmer Rouge´s supremacy over its two other partners in the Coalition Government will also be raised. Those revelations disclose the juncture that led to the tripartite alliance´s failure to achieve victory and prompted Prince Norodom Sihanouk to seek ways and means to engage in direct talks with the Phnom Penh leaders. This stance was

opposed to the position of the Khmer Rouge and that of the Son Sann group.

Due to the Pol Pot regime being the common foe of all Cambodians, anti-Pol Pot movements in the interior of the country had broken out since 1977. In the resistance movements, a Regiment Commander, who was still a youth at that time, exhibited extraordinarily determined resolve and steadfast courage, hardly found in Cambodia′s history, until success was attained in knocking down the genocidal Pol Pot regime, once and for all. Hence, this book also recounts that historic heroism, which is the story of the struggle carried out by Samdech Techo Hun Sen, the incumbent Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia. Prime Minister Hun Sen is a Cambodian leader born into an authentic Cambodian peasant family. His adversaries misjudged his leadership capabilities. Eventually, the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge′s political and organisational structures were definitely dismantled thanks to Hun Sen′s win-win policy at the end of the 1990s. This win-win policy is a separate topic for research in another book.

By and large, the youth uphold the values of integrity and social justice and have strong patriotism. When the country was at war with foreign aggressors, most of them volunteered to serve as soldiers to defend the country. If there were a revolution, the majority of youths would volunteer to serve as frontline or vanguard forces of that revolution. Prime Minister Hun Sen, a young man in the 1970s, was among the youth mentioned above. As for myself, earlier, I also took part in activities against Pol Pot, but due to the geopolitics of that era, I was obliged to join the tripartite alliance instead. In his book entitled "10 Years of Cambodia Process," Prime Minister Hun Sen's consideration that any participation in the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea was boarding the Khmer Rouge ship was absolutely correct.

The account of the anti-Vietnam resistance movements' activities in the 1980s could be described as the exhibition of the scene from the trip on board that Khmer Rouge ship. The agreement on setting up the Supreme National Council, or in short, the SNC, gave me the possibility to jump off the Khmer Rouge "Democratic

Kampuchea˝ ship and eventually board the bigger ship. Since arriving in Phnom Penh by the end of 1991, I had resolved not to go back to the Cambodian-Thai border anymore to carry on the struggle. I still remember that in July 1992, in a car heading to Phnom Penh from Udong District, after participating in a Reforestation Day, US Ambassador Charles H. Twinning asked me if a bad event occurred, would I return to conducting the struggle along the border anew. I answered, "No;˝ I will not go back to the border, come rain or shine, for I have already gained more than enough experiences there.˝ I stressed that I would join and try my utmost to ensure that the election takes place. The issue of whether participating in the 1993 election was the turning point when Son Sann and I chose different paths. I maintained my unchanged position of participating in the election at all costs, while the pro-Son Sann faction was still sitting on the fence. At one time, it said it would take part, but at another, it asked to postpone the polls. Luckily, despite a raft of obstacles, almost all of our Cambodian voters throughout the country, except those living in the Khmer Rouge-controlled areas, went out in force to cast their ballots in 1993. As a result, the 1993

Constitution was proclaimed, which is the top law of the land and the only roof under which all Cambodians of all political shades can take shelter and live together in harmony.

Eventually, I joined the Cambodian People´s Party to serve further the people and the nation. This major Cambodian political party has adhered to the tradition of linking its destiny with the fate of the entire people. This is my political life, a life on a tortuous path. This is the tortuous path toward peace. The first part of this book focuses only on the Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting by the end of 1987, because it is the key point that broke the stalemate, paving the way for subsequent talks toward the settlement of the Cambodian problem´s internal aspects.

With the study of more than 2,000 documents, news articles, books about Cambodia, and some records, this book could be of interest to readers, enabling them to comprehend the issues facing our country in the past decades. This book contains many detailed points that readers may perceive as useless. Nevertheless, because they relate to private biographies, they are kept. I am

convinced that this book will be subject to criticism and high or low ratings, depending on readers´ sentiments and political inclinations. Anyway, taking into consideration the concrete process of life and the events that I have been aware of, I wrote this book by trying to make use of my head, not my heart. Because if based on emotion or sentiment, it might be leaning toward hate, love, or fear, and may be deviating from the truth.

As mentioned above, I am eager to see a growing number of Cambodians write Cambodian stories as a contribution to substantially building our nation´s intellectual resources. I used to listen to accounts given by many Cambodian citizens, especially by our fellow compatriots who went through the Pol Pot regime. They had countless stories to tell. However, I also realise that those storytellers are willing to write only if there are readers. Without readers, their writing is useless. We should read a lot of books to the point of creating reading habits; according to the adage, reading more boosts intelligence. In several developed countries, priority is given to investing in the building and strengthening of intellectual

resources. This book, entitled "On the Tortuous Path to Peace," is my meagre contribution to building Cambodians' intellect, in which each of us should take part, now and in the future, without fail.

Chapter One

From My Native Village

(The 1950s and 1960s)

I was born more than sixty years ago in a small village named Snay Pol in Prey Veng Province, situated in the eastern part of Cambodia. Snay Pol is the administrative center of Pearang District. At the time I was born, there were fewer than one thousand inhabitants. The village is in the east, about 70 km from Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. However, because the area's infrastructure was in very bad condition and we used to travel by bicycle or motorbike, it generally took half a day to reach the village from Phnom Penh, even though many people preferred to travel straight to Phnom Penh rather than to go to Prey Veng, the provincial capital town, which is about 30 km east.

Travelling from My Village to the City

In the 1960s, the road from Snay Pol to Prey Veng was still worse and suffered from seasonal heavy flooding. We normally used the road in the dry season, which lasts from November to May. Two buses, one painted red and the other blue, owned by two competing Vietnamese families, shuttled between the village and the provincial capital. The 30 km journey took at least three to four hours, as the buses made many stopovers to pick up more passengers and goods, including live chickens, ducks, or pigs, vegetables, or other commodities. Along the road, endless rice fields, marked by thousands of palm trees, separated a few villages. During the journey, passengers were sometimes asked to leave their seats and walk over several craters or waterways so the bus could move. Usually, when it passed through each village, some small children, naked or half-naked, ran behind it, as though running in a fierce 100-metre race, under the rain of sandy dust spread by the bus wheels. Those small creatures always enjoyed the attempt to catch the bus in motion. Almost every time, they

were covered from top to bottom in white dust. The lucky ones enjoyed a few minutes of free transportation service, clinging to the first bare irons they found available at the rear of the vehicle, while the others laughed happily.

The road was generally bumpy and was also used by oxcarts, bicycles, or motorbikes. The road to Phnom Penh was no different from a pathway and was not usable by cars. It was petite but easier for bike riders, as it passed through more villages where they could buy food or refreshments when needed. It crossed over a river called Tonle Tauch (Small River) and some other watercourses or streams, which were spanned by flimsy bridges made of bamboo or wood that could hardly support the weight of an ordinary car. This road passed through a long forest and a flat land and led up to the Mekong River, in a district of a neighbouring province named Kandal, where travellers would take a ferry or commercial boat if they were to continue the trip to the capital city. In the rainy season, both roads were abandoned for three or four months (from August to November) as the whole region was inundated. During that period, people would travel by boat. The

same two or three businessmen ran the fluvial transportation business every year. The boats carrying passengers and goods took half a day or a full day to reach Phnom Penh, depending on the season. The journey was sometimes pleasant, as we could take our lunch on board in the middle of an immense water reservoir, giving the impression of entering a real ocean. In September and October, the water level was so high that we could not distinguish the surface from the sky. In some remote areas, the water rose to the roofs of houses or almost completely submerged the few palm trees we could see. While we were travelling, hundreds of birds of various species and colours flew over us or swam nearby. Fish were also abundant. When the water went down, in some small rivers, we could see some unwise fish jumping out of the water whenever any boat passed.

At that time, I had no sense of ecology. When the water lowered further, the boat would move slowly, following limited waterways obstructed by many branches of trees crossing over the boat passage. In my village, people generally had both bicycles and individual or family boats so they could move in every

season. Others considered those who could afford to possess both a motorbike and a boat as rich fellows. This was the conventional standard of living at the time. My parents owned both means of transportation, although their boat had no engine. Later on in the 1960s, this standard of "to be called rich" was upgraded to "having a motorbike, a TV set, a motorised boat, and living in a wooden house under a roof covered by tiles".

The Daily Life of Villagers

Snay Pol was divided into two parts: Upper Snay Pol (Snay Pol Loeu) and Lower Snay Pol (Snay Pol Krom). People living in the upper village were mainly peasants. Their main occupation was rice farming. Early in the morning, they started their work in the rice field before the sun had turned on the heat. During the season of heavy work, peasants used to turn to one another for help. Very often, groups of farmers, or sometimes an entire village, were mobilised to provide the workforce for the family, which needed it during ploughing, planting, or harvest time. In turn, the

assisted family would take part in the next mobilisation to help other families, following the timetable agreed upon by the farmers themselves. Generally, the atmosphere of this collective and voluntary work was joyful. Men, women, boys, and girls spontaneously exchanged jokes, improvised songs, or sang various verses of poetry to forget their fatigue. They used the occasion to engage in talent competitions. After their farming work, most of the men spent their spare time climbing the palm trees to collect their juice.

The juice, when still fresh, can be sold as is or made into palm sugar or palm wine. Palm wine was very popular. It was not expensive and could replace Western beer for many people. Others would seek work in the more prosperous Lower Snay Pol as carpenters or as simple construction workers. Women either helped their husbands make palm sugar or plaited traditional mats made from dried palm leaves. For sure, palm trees provided many economic advantages for those poor farmers who worked so hard to earn not much, compared with their fellow villagers in other parts of the village. Many of their houses were mostly made of

bamboo, with roofs covered with thatch. Only a few were made of wood and covered at the top by tiles. The Cambodian farmers′ houses were, in general, built elevated so that the ground could be used as a cow shed. The two parts of the village, the upper and the lower, were separated by a distance of about one kilometre. But at that time of my childhood, it seemed far away to me.

The difference in living conditions also appeared striking. In the lower part of the village, the houses were mainly made of wood. Even some were made of brick. Many business people of Chinese origin and civil servants, mostly schoolteachers, lived there. The lower part was also a marketplace where people from neighbouring villages brought in their agricultural products for sale. Every day, almost at a fixed time, around 4 a.m., Horrifying cries of dying pigs woke up the village, as the animals had just received knife shots to their necks administered by the three Chinese butchers of the village. The way the butchers killed pigs provided fresh blood that they could sell after boiling it. The butcher sold not only pig meat but also other internal parts of the animal. From 5 a.m., the main road leading to the market became

busy. The first people came either on foot, by bicycle, or by motorbike, carrying goods for sale. They came to prepare their display, which was usually put on a kind of bamboo bed called "Kre."[1] The goods varied from vegetables to chickens, fish, and meats (beef and pork), and all kinds of cakes or fruits. Only consumable goods were on sale at the marketplace. The other goods, including clothing and home or field equipment, were sold by Chinese businesspeople along the main street. The marketplace was open-air. We could easily recognize peasants in black clothes and their Krama (a traditional cotton scarf made locally, marked with many small interspersed blue or black and red squares) (the Khmer Rouge had used black pyjamas and Krama as their uniform).

The Krama can be used in many ways. It can replace pants or pyjamas when staying home. It can be used to clean sweat under a hot sun or to pack anything found unexpectedly. The Krama can be worn around the head or the neck. My folks never

[1] Kre or Kreh រ៉ែគ Kre or Kreh is the Khmer name for a kind of bed made from bamboo or wood.

used a Krama outside the home, as it was a sign of peasantry. And peasantry was not well respected by any city dweller at that time. Yet, one could find the lazy as well as the hardest workers among the peasants. Some came to the market to sell the products they had cultivated in their family garden next to the house, or to sell live chickens they had raised in their spare time, away from the rice-farming work. All-season products were coconuts, bamboo shoots, or sweet potatoes. Others came to sell the products they had just collected in the bushes or fished in the river, given by Mother Nature. In the rainy season, live frogs could also be found for sale in the market.

Cambodian Farmers and Chinese Shop Owners

Between 6 and 7 a.m., the place became more crowded, mostly with women seeking cooking ingredients, vegetables, meats, or fish to prepare daily meals for the family. Normally, Cambodian women would spend the whole morning and afternoon cooking after spending some time at the market. At 9 a.m., the

market finished, and the place emptied. Farmers used the sale money to buy necessities from Chinese shops and returned home. A dozen smaller villages surrounded Snay Pol. It was a business centre of the district. Many peasants from neighbouring villages came to shop at any time of the day. Most of them enjoyed the trust and confidence of the shop owners as long as their business relationship lasted. Very often, goods were not all paid for in cash.

Even at night, some farmers would come and knock on the shop door and take home whatever they needed: gas, cooking oil, salt, fish sauce, agricultural tools, medicines, clothing, soft drinks, or alcohol. The Chinese shop owners were very patient. They just kept records and waited until the harvest time, in January or February next year, to clear all accounts. The peasants would pay interest and principal debts with the crops. After clearing all debts, the surplus would be saved for next year´s consumption and for contingency. Those who harvested good crops got a greater surplus and could afford to buy new clothes or new tools and improve their living conditions. Fixing their houses, or purchasing a new bicycle and a radio set, was a sign of a better life. Peasants

at that time earned just enough to pay their debts. Most of them owned their land both for farming and housing. But some did not succeed in paying all their debts each year, to the point that the accumulation of debts plus interest resulted in the confiscation of the land by the Chinese creditors. Those in this category would work for the new landowners and receive shared crops in return. They lived in an economic system that kept them working closely with the Chinese shop owners, who were the masters of the market. The Chinese fixed the prices of goods and commodities based on their connections with the nationwide Chinese network. Through the network, the Chinese supplied goods to the village. In theory, the system was a market economy. But the Cambodians were always demanding, and the Chinese were always offering. And demands were always unlimited, thus always exceeding offers.

Even in a small village like Snay Pol, those Chinese whose great adaptability facilitated their integration into the community dominated our economy. After two generations, they were completely integrated. If Chinese men could not speak Khmer

fluently, their wives or children did very well. Chinese families in the village were mainly Buddhist. The older women went to the same pagoda and sponsored religious ceremonies like their fellow Cambodian villagers. Later, the Chinese would marry their daughters to Cambodian boys who got jobs within the government civil service. In those earlier days of my childhood, for many Cambodian farmer families, sending children to school was not a high priority. Parents needed them to help keep cattle, cows, or buffalo. But for those who did, they were well rewarded, as their boys would earn positions within the government after graduation and, in turn, would help support their families. In the 1950s, anyone who graduated from a primary school could become a schoolteacher. In the 1960s, the ordinary schoolteacher position required at least the successful completion of the High School's 9th grade, which was attested by a nationwide annual examination. Holding a higher diploma would give access to a higher position. The monthly pay of a schoolteacher was equivalent to about USD 100, which was considered good pay and quite high compared with the standard income of an ordinary Cambodian. The schoolteacher position was so popular that any

Chinese businessman in the village would offer his daughter to marry its holder. The newly appointed bachelor schoolteacher was immediately high on the wanted list and would receive a motorbike as a present if he were to accept the hand of the businessman's daughter. The other positions within the government were also in high demand. But at the same level of position, only that of the schoolteacher was spread out in almost every village. In my generation, the Cambodian cohabitation with the Chinese community was trouble-free, and the Sino-Cambodians were well accepted as ordinary Cambodian citizens. In general, we did not have any problems with any ethnic groups in the village.

Racial and Religious Harmonisation

In addition to the two families who ran the transportation businesses, two other Vietnamese families lived in the village: one as a tailor and the other as a farmer raising pigs, growing vegetables, and selling Vietnamese foods. The Vietnamese were still considered more foreign than the Chinese, as the Vietnamese

did not practise the same Buddhist religion and did not go to the same pagoda. The last ethnic group consisted of two Muslim families whose main occupation was selling beef exclusively. The distribution of work was that the Chinese would deal with pigs and the Muslims with cows, as the Islamic religion prohibits Muslims from eating pork. In Cambodia, we called the Muslims "Cham" or "people from Champa," emigrants coming from an early neighbouring Hindu Kingdom that turned to Islam in the central part of Annam, which Vietnam annihilated in the 17th century. According to a history book, the last king of Champa, with most of his men, fled under pressure from the Annamites into Cambodian territory in 1720[2]. The Muslims were completely integrated into the Cambodian community under the official name "Islamic Khmer." The Cham, or Islamic Khmer, enjoyed the same rights as the Cambodians. In Snay Pol, the three communities cohabited peacefully and enjoyed excellent inter-religious and inter-racial relationships.

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[2]D G Hall, A History of South-East Asia, Third Edition, London, 1968, p. 194

The Civilization of Villagers

The Lower Snay Pol borders a small river or stream called "Stung Snay Pol," where some families can make their living by fishing. The village was also known for good Cambodian traditional noodles, "Num Banh Tiock." The noodles are made with only rice flour, no egg, and are consumed with fish soup prepared with citronella ingredients. Snay Pol noodles were so famous that important people would come from different cities to buy and eat them. Two or three families lived off the selling of this traditional noodle, earning enough money to send their children to further their studies in the capital, Phnom Penh. Other families made their living as rice or tobacco retailers. They bought rice in a 100 kg bag from two rice mills in the village and sold it, kg by kg, in other villages along the Mekong River, 40 to 50 km from home. Most men would begin their daily work early in the morning, between 4 and 5 a.m. carrying the 100 kg bag of rice on the back seat of their bicycles and spending their time selling rice from village to village. From the Mekong villages, some bought many kg of

tobacco to sell it in retail at home. They returned home around 2 p.m. to find their pretty wives waiting with a smile and some preparation, including a silk sarong (sarong is a kind of robe, in cotton or in silk, commonly used by the Chams as their daily clothes; non-peasant Cambodians wear a sarong as pyjama when staying home) and a perfumed soap for a relaxing bath.

The people living in that part of the village had the same lifestyle as any city dweller, in a "modernised" style. In fact, those people enjoyed dancing, playing music, and practising collective sports: soccer or volleyball. At the Cambodian New Year festival in mid-April of every year, they would spend the three nights in the street, dancing the traditional Ram Vong (dance in circle) (Cambodians celebrate the New Year for three days) using a drum, a guitar, or a mandolin (depending on which one they found available) and an accordion as musical instruments.

The village was also home to most of the district officials. The privileged ones took their daily breakfast at the only coffee shop that existed in the village, before going to work. The breakfast normally consisted of a single cup of black coffee or coffee with

milk and/or a bowl of Chinese noodles. No ordinary people or peasants could afford to take that kind of breakfast regularly. Only some schoolteachers and some district officials did. One of them, working as the district accountant, ran an indoor traditional and popular theatre called "Lakon Bassac" (a kind of Beijing opera in which actors play their roles in different personages, talking and singing). The troupe was composed of dozens of actors, musicians, and workers. Every day, between 3 and 4 p.m., some actors dressed as the personage of the moment, according to the role they would play later, accompanied by the noisy sounds of a big drum, showed up on the main street to announce the night's performance. They took an ox cart or horse cart to proceed across the village. A few years later, assigned actors would show up in a two-wheeled vehicle towed by a motorbike to advertise their show. From 6:00 p.m., we can hear noisy, uninterrupted, and repeated sounds of big drums from the theatre that kept the whole village alert for the upcoming art event while the theatre officials were selling entrance tickets.

The 1st class ticket costs about USD 0.30, giving rights to the 1st rank chair next to the stage. The lowest class ticket costs about USD 0.03, giving access to the last stair, almost 3 m high against the wall. The sounds of the drums were so exciting and created a crazy temptation that many children of my generation could not resist, insisting that our parents bring us to see the show or find our own way inside the theatre building, which was made of bamboo and covered with thatch. The simplest way to attend the show for free was to sneak in through any hole found in the wall. Each time before the troupe performed a new drama or comedy, the producer would add new acts and assign roles to each actor or actress to play different personages. There was no manuscript. Once they received an assigned role, actors/actresses would improvise based on their experience and knowledge of art. This role attribution took place most often on Sunday mornings. Some children, including myself, came to listen to the discussion from beginning to end until the preferred actor/actress was free, so that we could talk to him/her in private. The life of an artist was no better than that of an ordinary villager. The most popular star of the troupe earned far less than the schoolteacher. In general, the

Cambodian Buddhist culture favours monkhood rather than modern life. The theatre was the only entertainment we had in the village. Later on, in the mid-1960s, TV took its place, and little by little our theatre disappeared.

Like in other Cambodian villages, Buddhism was prosperous in Snay Pol. The Pagoda was the centre of social activities. Important events took place there. People went either to Snay Pol Pagoda in the upper part of the village or to Rokar Pagoda in a neighbouring village. My grandmother and my parents went to Rokar Pagoda, whose chief monk was a close friend of the family. Real Buddhists who practised the religion, especially elderly people, went to the pagoda once a week on Buddha Day to give offerings, mainly food, to Buddhist monks and receive from them the five or eight Buddhist precepts called "Sila." On that day, they abstained from eating after noon. In the afternoon, they would spend time praying or listening to various Buddhist teachings recited by Buddhist monks. But for children, Buddhism was a very simple religion as taught by our parents: "In heaven, one angel is watching us and keeping records of all our actions. "Depending on

our deeds, whether good or bad, as confirmed by the record, we will go to heaven or hell after we die." "Past good deeds help us in the present, while bad ones make our lives difficult."

The Ieng Family

My birthplace was in the middle of the two parts of Snay Pol, where there were only a dozen houses surrounded by rice fields. Our family house was built in the first decade of the 20th century. It was made entirely of wood and covered with ancient tiles. It was among a few big houses of the village. Its round columns were in smooth brown wood. The walls were also wooden and were constructed carefully so that not a single fixing nail could be seen. The principal house was added at the front by a veranda and at the back by a kitchen. Inside, cupboards carved with traditional decorative figures separated large rooms. The house belonged to my maternal grandfather, Yin Uch, who was a notable in the village, as he served year after year in many administrative

functions: chief of the commune, tax officer, chief of an administrative centre, member of the consultative assembly of the Kingdom, and finally a bailiff. I did not know him because he died when I was still a small baby.

Even living in a village like Snay Pol, my grandfather took an aristocratic way of life. He had a cook, a maid, and a driver who drove a light oxcart, the fast one. He was married to the daughter of another notable family in the district, my grandmother, Oung Kou. Through their marriage, they had seven children: five girls and two boys. My mother, Sokhar, was the third eldest of the seven. All attended school, but not all the girls had completed primary school. Only one of my four aunts, Samedy, got a primary school certificate and became a schoolteacher. My two uncles studied further and obtained proper positions in the civil service. Parents at that time did not want to send their daughters to school. Some preferred to keep them at home so they could learn household duties in preparation for their future role as a good wife. Others might fear that sending girls to school would be out of control, since they could not know how their daughters behaved

outside the home. My mother did not finish primary school, but she can read and write basic Cambodian correctly. She was raised under the protection of tradition.

As teenagers, girls had to stay in the shade, cut off from the rays of the sun. In every movement outside, young ladies must be accompanied. Girls could hardly talk to boys. At that time, parents arranged their children´s marriages. The future couple did not need to know each other beforehand. Normally, the boy´s family asked for the girl´s hand. If the girl´s parents accepted, the boy´s family would give a present or gift in gold or money, rice, or other commodities, in accordance with the conditions agreed upon during the negotiations. In addition to the present, the groom candidate must spend some time on probation, working for the girl´s family. The duration of probation generally lasts for one year. During this period of probation, if the girl´s parents were not satisfied with the performance of the groom, they could refuse, at any moment, the hand of their daughter. While reversing their decision, they could still keep all the presents or gifts they had received. It was under that strict tradition that my parents were

married. It was the opposite of the 1960s, when Chinese shop owners married their daughters to Cambodian boys.

My father, Ieng Muth, came from a smaller village in a neighbouring commune bordering the small river "Tonle Tauch." He originated from a farming family of Grandfather Kong Ieng and Grandmother Hu Or: a family of six children, with two girls and four boys. My father was the fourth and youngest boy in the family. Except for the two girls, all received Buddhist education as they entered monkhood at an early age. Between the ages of 13 and 15, they became novice Buddhist monks. They would live in the pagoda, learning Buddhist teachings, Cambodian literature, calculus, as well as vocational training such as carpentry, art, painting, or traditional medicine, until the age of 18. Between 18 and 21, the novices can either leave their monkhood or continue as more mature ones, called "Bhikku." As ordinary boys, they would come back home and stay with their parents, helping them with farming work. Any former novice monk was called "Chee." At 21, some Chee would reenter the monkhood and become "Bhikku." Others would definitely leave the monastic life, get

married, and found families. But a Bhikkhu might later decide to quit monkhood at any moment or continue it until the end of their life. My father and his brothers were all Bhikkhus. One of his elder brothers, Ieng Bun, lived as a Buddhist monk until he died in 1974. After some years, my father and his two other brothers renounced the life of Bhikku. Any former Bhikku was called "Banditt," the scholar, or commonly called "Anteeth."

At 28, my father left the monkhood and began to work as a farmer, helping my grandmother, who became a widow after my grandfather died. When the time came to get married, he was 30 years old, an old boy to marry. My mother was 18. The two families arranged the marriage. My father did not know my mother, and vice versa. My father's family did pay a high price in terms of gifts, as their situation was quite different from that of my mother's family. In addition, before the wedding took place, my father had to prove to his future parents-in-law every skill he had. He had to work full time, 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and stand ready for any mission 24 hours a day. During his one-year probation, he not only had to work hard, especially in the rice

fields, but he also had no right to talk to or see his future wife. Finally, my father passed the examination successfully. The wedding took place in 1945.

The probation was a good experience for my father, as, in the end, he gained confidence and trust from his father-in-law. Immediately after the marriage, my grandfather trained him to become his successor as a bailiff. The bailiff in Cambodia was an independent court officer whose responsibilities included implementing court judgments or sentences, especially in civil litigation, as well as maintaining order in the courtroom. The office could be transmitted from father to son or sold. The function of bailiff was later confirmed, through a nationwide examination, by a committee presided over by the minister of justice. Just a year before I was born, my father inherited the office of bailiff from my maternal grandfather. The latter died a few months after my birth.

In Cambodia, we bear the family name first and the given name immediately after it. The family name is established either by the name of the grandfather or the name of the father. My father used his father´s name as the family name, Ieng, so his full name

became Ieng Muth. I was told that Grandfather Ieng was a man of many professions. When he was young, he learned the martial arts and specialised in using a stick or cane. In the late years of the nineteenth century, one of the young Ieng´s uncles was a chief of the commune and was a master of martial arts.

As a master of martial arts, he was constantly sought by competitors who travelled from faraway villages to test their skill against his, keeping him very busy and his life full of deadly fighting. So the uncle decided to set a rule prohibiting his relatives from learning any martial art. But for those who dared to violate the rule, the only condition was to measure their skill against the commune chief, and if they beat him, they would be allowed to stay in the commune. Those violators would be punished with exile if they failed to beat the chief. My grandfather failed many times in the contest, and each time he was defeated, he was forced to leave the village for several years. Finally, he beat his uncle after he met a female master in her thirties who had trained him until he was able to jump up to two or three meters high. Since that time of victory over his uncle, Ieng was authorised to

live in the village named Mesor Prachan until the end of his life. I was also told that his good and skilful experience in martial arts once saved his life from a tiger attack in the forest next to the village. Three months after the attack, he successfully avenged the tiger by killing the animal after a deadly fight lasting several hours. I saw the dried skin of the tiger, which was exhibited on the wall of the kudi (monk house) of my uncle, the senior Buddhist monk, Ieng Bun, in a Phnom Penh pagoda, Saravone Decho, in the 1960s. Maybe it was for the same reason that my grandfather never taught, nor allowed his children, including my father, to be taught, the martial arts. However, martial arts skills once brought my grandfather to the Royal Palace, where he served as a Maha Thlek (royal servant) for a while. In the later years of his life, he worked as the master of ceremonies in the pagoda of his village. At that time, the pagoda owned a racing boat, with my grandfather as captain of the rowers' team. As is practised today, boat racing was a very popular sport, and the whole village supported the team. The captain normally trains his teammates but does not participate in rowing. He sits in the boat in front of his colleagues and gives signals for a regular or accelerated rowing rhythm so

the team rows in the same movement. Spectators might see the captain dancing each time he makes a gesture to his teammates, using his oar up and down, fast and slow. As a master of ceremonies in a pagoda, commonly called "Achar," or the teacher, my grandfather was one of the respected figures in the village.

My parents had eleven children, with nine boys and two girls. I was the third in the family. My brothers and sisters were raised in accordance with the traditions and customs of the village. I was born as a premature baby. In my case, my mother had only a seven-month pregnancy. Each time my mother gave birth to her child, she was under the care of the same old lady in her sixties, named Grandmother Ka, the only midwife in the village. The midwife performed her duties in an ancestral way that had been perpetuated in our society, from generation to generation.

Giving Birth in Snay Pol

Giving birth was deadly risky. Common Cambodians called it "Chhlang Tonle," "swimming across the river." The mother and/or the baby could sink and die. In the 1950s, in Snay Pol, there was only one nurse, who was the highest health officer of the district, but no midwife trained in the modern healthcare school. When sick, many people preferred to resort to traditional medicine rather than consult the nurse. At the moment of birth, when the mother was in labour, no men would be allowed to stay in the same room. In the next room, the father was preparing a special wooden bed under which he burned charcoal in three baked-clay stoves. Charcoal in the fire would keep the bed warm. In the minutes after the birth, the mother would rest in the warm bed for three days. Keeping charcoal in the fire, burning firewood, or keeping the warmth for his wife was the responsibility of any husband. His responsibility within the union would be tested throughout this special event. No good husband would miss this special event in life. In a sense, the responsibility was translated into being fully in

charge of the birth materially, psychologically, financially, and legally. The midwife would work with the assistance of some women she found at hand. She might recommend using traditional medicines prepared with herbs and plants blended with rice alcohol. My mother preferred drinking rum instead of medicinal alcohol. To protect and beautify the skin of the new mother, the midwife would recommend applying saffron powder mixed with herbs and rice alcohol to her body.

After three days, the stoves could be removed from under the bed, and there was no need to continue burning charcoal or firewood. Cambodians called this stove removal "Tumleak Changkran." Mother could have a rest for as long as she needed. Father did not find a name for the newborn baby. Our tradition did not favour giving names to the would-be newborn; in contrast to Western civilisation, where a baby gets his name several months before he is born. Maybe our ancestors wanted to make sure that any newborn would survive the first week or month of birth before giving him a name, taking into account the high rate of infant mortality. Some fathers consulted friends, Buddhist monks, the

village chief, or the commune chief to obtain the desired name for their children. It was the same for the declaration of birth, which was generally not immediately done.

In some cases, the father declared the birth of his child a month later, to the point where he forgot the corresponding birth date in the Gregorian calendar and accepted any date given on the spot by the commune chief or any officer in charge. Frequently, the officer recorded the date of declaration as the birth date. But generally, many parents perfectly remembered the hour, day, month, and year of their children's birth, referring to the traditional calendar. Many young Cambodians kept this birth date in mind for life, as it would be used for astrologer consultation. However, what was told and what was stated in the official certificate were sometimes not the same. Since my childhood, my father told me that I was born on Tuesday in the month of Assoja (September and October) in the Tiger year. My birth certificate read, "2 November 1950." Thirty years later, I found the exact date, the 24th of October 1950, corresponding to the traditional calendar that my father had told me.

In the past, ordinary villagers did not celebrate their birthdays. In our family, my parents did not organise any special ceremony on the occasion of each child's birth. Still, children received benediction many times a year, as Buddhist monks were invited to perform this religious act whenever my father was told by his astrologer. In fact, the astrologer came to visit us three or four times a year from a neighbouring village named Prey Pnov Village, which is about 10 km down the road to Prey Veng. Grandfather Yee, or in Cambodian "Ta Yee," was the astrologer's name. He was a kind of confidant of the family. He would predict good or bad fortune and make recommendations accordingly. My father followed the astrologer's recommendations, whether to keep good luck coming or to chase away evil monsters or ghosts. The most common recommendation was to invite a Buddhist monk to give a benediction or a blessing to the whole family or to an individual member, or to take a holy bath provided by a senior monk, the head of a pagoda. We had the same senior monk who came to provide everything every time we needed. He was the head of Rokar Pagoda. Our religious practice was more Brahman-like than truly Buddhist, as Brahmanism had entered Cambodia in the early

days of Cambodian history, long before most people practiced Buddhism, and our population confused the two religions in their daily religious rituals.

My Childhood and My Father´s Works

I grew up surrounded by my two parents, two elder brothers, Chhoeun and Sinoeun, my maternal grandmother, and my aunt, Samedy, my mother's youngest sister. My paternal grandmother, Hu Or, died a year after my eldest brother, Chhoeun, was born. We lived in the same big house, but unlike my grandparents, my parents did not have a maid, a cook, or a driver. The light oxcart was already outmoded. We were entering into an era of bicycles and motorcycles. My mother took care of the household, assisted by one or two of my father´s nieces, depending on the needs. Those cousins came from my father´s village and might have been staying with us for one or two years. One cousin who helped take care of me during my childhood was Chhrouk, with whom I had no

memory, as I was too small to know her well. But my mother told me some years later that Chhrouk was attending her three final-year classes at the primary school of our village. She spent her spare time from school helping carry me from one place to another or entertaining me by playing or singing. After primary school, cousin Chhrouk attended the national health-care school and became a professional midwife. She married a businessman and probably died under the Khmer Rouge, as we had no sight of her afterward. While my mother was busy feeding me with her natural milk and taking care of my two brothers, as well as doing other household work, including cooking, my father was dividing his time between working at home and travelling. He was absent from home many days a month, as he had to attend the courthouse in the provincial capital, Prey Veng, and travel to other districts to implement the court judgments. The province was divided into ten administrative districts, and there were only three bailiffs for the whole provincial territory. So the distribution of work implied that three districts, namely Pearang, Sithor Kandal, and Kanchrieach, fell under my father's jurisdiction. As a bailiff, he was not paid a

fixed salary but in honoraria. Therefore, our family had no fixed income.

In those days, my father could not afford to buy a new motorbike. Most of the time, he used a second-hand one. Often his motorbike broke down on the road in the middle of the forest or the rice fields, forcing him to walk the machine for many kilometres until he reached a repair shop. Sometimes, he came home late, walking his motorbike along. Many times, he had complained about using second-hand equipment. He never had a chance to enjoy a brand-new one. The best he could do was complain less; his second-hand French-made motorbike called "Mobilette," which he kept in use until 1970, even though Japanese-made motorbikes had invaded our village since the middle of the 1960s.

My father hired an aide who knew how to read and write to help him deliver court citations to the parties, the plaintiff and the defendant. He paid his aide by the day. To implement the court judgments, he always needed assistance from the local authorities, mainly the police. Most of the cases dealt with divorce and debts, which led to the removal of properties. In some cases,

my father had to hire workers to help dismantle an entire house so it could be put up for sale. Sometimes, he had to confiscate buffalo or cows from their owners so that the debts in the litigation could be settled. In all cases, the presence of the police officers was unavoidable. My father´s job was a risky one, as some losing parties might use violence against him in response to his actions. Thanks to his permanent contacts with the authorities, he became one of the few notables in the village.

At home, he used to work like an attorney at law, giving legal consultation or helping a plaintiff prepare his case. He received his clients in the main room of the house, decorated with two giant wild-cow heads and a large glass door behind his desk. Prey Veng Province was rated as one of the places with many cases in court. Most of my father´s clients were peasants. They generally travelled by bicycle from different regions of the three districts, whether to have a legal consultation or to present the court judgment for implementation. While travelling, male clients did not yet wear pants, but only wore a krama, just covering their underpants, because wearing pants would get dirty with the dust or mud they

could encounter on the road. The pants (in general, a piece of pyjamas made with smooth material in black called "Khor Lanh") must be clean and ready to be worn at any meeting with important people. Usually, when a client arrived at our house's front door, he placed his bike against the fence. He began to change his clothes by removing the krama, to replace it with the "Khor Lanh" that he had managed to bring along, and fastening it to the bicycle handlebar. Once he felt he had a smart appearance, he entered the house. This was a sign of high consideration or politeness that peasants wanted to show to important district officials. Eventually, this respectful gesture could be accompanied by some coconuts, jackfruit, bananas, or other fruits as a gift.

My father would spend the rest of his spare time gardening and planting fruit trees, mostly coconut, mango, and jack trees, on a plot of land he had just bought next to the existing backyard. We had no running water for either consumption or agricultural work. People needed to dig a well or a pond to obtain or keep water. Our family had a medium-sized pond, 50 m from the house, inherited from my grandfather. We used a dozen big jars to keep rainwater

for daily consumption until the next rainy season. When the rainwater ran short, we hired a coolie to carry water from a well in a neighbouring house, 200 m away. I learned some time later that not many people would be eager to be hired as our coolies, fearing being called "convicted prisoners." As in the past during my grandfather's time, the district jail official, a friend of the family, used to send those prisoners to work in our house, especially to carry water.

My First Day at School and Our Respect for Teachers

When I reached the age of 6, I managed to get my enrollment in school. There was no pre-school or nursery school in the village. Children would be admitted to grade one only at the age of 7. Many feared school, and their first day in school was generally dramatic, with crying and tears. The decision on when I should go to school belonged to my aunt, Samedy, who was

teaching the superior class[3] at the only district elementary school. She was an attractive, beautiful, and young lady, a model of the village. Like my two brothers, I was excited at 6 about the idea of attending school. But my parents preferred to send me to school only after my 7th birthday. One day, Aunty was washing her clothes in the backyard; I went next to her, showing my right hand behind my head to touch my left ear.

I shouted to her, "Eh, Eh, Aunty, my arm is long enough, and I can touch my ear now." The rule of the time for a child was that he had to wait until he had grown big enough for his right arm to reach his left ear when placed over his head, to be sent to school. So, the rule was to put the arm over, not around, behind the head like what I did. My aunt looked at me, smiling, and she said, "Do it again." I repeated the same movement. She nodded her head again, smiling, and said, "You're kidding. But okay, tomorrow, you go to school with me." The next day, early in the morning, she put me on the back seat of her bicycle and brought me to school.

[3] It is equivalent to Grade Six.

I was so proud to attend the 1st day of school, accompanied by the most beautiful lady in the village.

I enjoyed my years in primary school. By the 4th grade, we started to learn French, and from the 6th grade, almost all of our homework was in French. Knowing French was a sign of being "intellectual." To be regarded as intellectual, many Cambodians spoke Khmer mixed with a few words of French. Our tradition gave much respect to teachers. Teachers were considered the second parents in our society. By order, the teacher was placed third behind the Buddha and both parents, the father and the mother, to whom we had to pay most respect. Any artist before performing his art must first pay homage to his teacher, whether physical or spiritual. A schoolteacher enjoyed the same status vis-à-vis his student. The tradition helped him tremendously in his job, as schoolboys or schoolgirls had to listen to and obey what the teacher said. Even though our teachers often employed violent methods that were not very pedagogical for teaching, in every classroom, three or four rotten or wooden whips or sticks hung on the wall or lay on the teacher's desk, ready to be used to hit any

bad student who dared not remember his lessons. Some teachers were so mad at us, little human creatures who were so afraid to the point where we would avoid them in the street or in public places. But students kept for life the memory of the teaching benefits they received from their teachers.

One year later, my aunt Samedy got married to a customs officer, a native of the lower village. I did not know how they knew each other, as the officer was working in Phnom Penh. Immediately after the wedding, she moved out and went to live with her husband in the capital. Since my parents' wedding, the tradition had evolved. There was no need for the groom to work in probation anymore. Once both parties agreed, the wedding could take place at any moment. However, the tradition still recommended that families consult an astrologer on the auspicious wedding days. The bride was not obliged to stay in the shade, as my mother had done more than a decade ago. Despite some changes, the tradition remained the same for the three-day wedding ceremony. A few days before D-Day, we were very busy with the preparations. A dozen of ladies, group by group, were

busy making special, traditional cakes or delicacies. Workers were coming into the courtyard to erect a huge tent decorated with coconut branches and leaves. The tent would host a banquet for about a hundred guests. Another smaller tent was also installed. It would be used as a lodge for the groom during the ceremony.

From the lodge, musicians who could be comedians and singers as well would perform their art for the whole ceremony, playing integral Cambodian traditional music and singing popular and folkloric songs. In the backyard, they dug a dozen holes for stoves on which they would place the cooking pots so that the chef could prepare the feast. At the age of 7, I was amazed at the sight of that enormous preparation. While I was looking at those workers undertaking their jobs, one question came to mind. Why, in the village, did no one think to create a permanent big hall, fully decorated and equipped with sufficient chairs and tables to accommodate guests, a hall that we could hire for that kind of ceremony? I thought, "It would be a good business." I did not realize that such a hall had already existed in some hotels in Phnom Penh.

Activities after School Hours

My aunt left, but our home received newcomers. Our family was growing year after year. Before I moved to Phnom Penh in 1964, I had two sisters, Vanny, who was born in 1952, and Sithan, in 1954, and four brothers: Vannak, in 1956, Naroeun, in 1959, Vuthean, in 1962, and Vutheun, in 1964. Two other little brothers were born after I left the village: Vuthea, in 1966, and Sophear, in 1970. During those years, we were growing up surrounded by our best friends, cats and dogs (a dozen in all). In some years, my father had transformed our residence into a real farm as he raised, in addition, a cow or a horse not for work, but certainly for the natural fertilizers he needed for his garden. We also raised some chickens and ducks. A fence like the one in the front did not limit the compound behind the house, but it was surrounded by bushes and a score of bamboo and palm trees, providing shelter to a variety of birds, such as crows, sparrows, and turtle-doves. We used to go around the palm trees to collect fallen, ripe fruits for my mother to make palm cakes or palm jellies. We could not climb

the palm trees, as they were tall, up to 20 m or more. On one of the tallest, a couple of storks made their nest.

One morning, I found on the ground not only the two or three ripe palm fruits as usual but also a baby stork crying desperately with unheard sounds, probably because of repeated long efforts to cry. The baby made no move, and I took him home. So we also raised a stork among our best friends, except that the stork was fed with fish. Day after day and month after month, the stork became friendly to us, like the dogs that followed us everywhere when we were walking or welcomed us when we were coming home from school. The stork had lived with us until the day he was able to fly on his own to find his liberty.

For some period of time, we also raised a female monkey. In addition to the usual cries of dying pigs every morning, the monkey woke our family up from the early hours. We did not keep her in a cage, but at night she was attached with a 2m-long chain to one of the two supporting wooden columns of a hammock on the veranda. Every morning, the monkey jumped endlessly from one extremity to the other or just moved the supporting elements

of the hammock to make unbearable noises, to the point where we woke up and shouted, telling her to stop. During the daytime, we released her to enjoy her freedom. The monkey lived in harmony with the other animals. She made friends, especially with dogs. Usually, after lunch, when many adults took a siesta, the monkey spent her time with dogs or cats, finding or catching fleas or other insects, or cleaning their fur.

One day, one of our dogs gave birth to five babies. The monkey loved the puppies very much. She spent a lot of time caring for and playing with them. A few days later, while my parents were taking their usual nap after a noon meal, I was doing some homework in my room next to my parents'. I heard loud, uninterrupted barking from a group of dogs. It was so intense that I had to stop working and rush to see what was happening. From my room window, I could already see the movement of two or three dogs running around a large tamarind tree, 20 m behind our kitchen. When I arrived, the three dogs continued barking, especially the mother that had given birth a few days ago. They were jumping, trying to climb up to the upper part of the tree. Over

there, on one of the middle branches, the monkey was sitting quietly, with one hand holding carefully a puppy about a week old and the other searching for fleas for it. The puppy was in a comfortable hand but attempted timidly to cry from time to time. To convince the monkey to bring the puppy back to its mother, I managed to get from the kitchen a banana, show it to her, call her by every name that came out of my mind (we did give names to our dogs and cats, but not to other animals) and promise to give her the banana as a reward if my appeal were to be heard. The monkey´s first response was grimacing, with funny movements in her mouth and eyes. She repeated the same gesture each time I talked to her. Finally, after almost half an hour, the monkey decided to climb down slowly, holding it carefully as always, and placing it on the ground, to the great relief and happiness of his mother. A few months later, we decided to donate the monkey to a pagoda in a neighbouring village. We believed she would find peace and freedom with the Buddhist monks in the pagoda and in the forest nearby.

During my childhood, I liked playing very much, as being a teacher, a Buddhist monk, or sometimes a king or chief of state, with other children. I liked to play any role that required others to pay respect. I used to imitate the chief of state, then Prince Sihanouk (former king of Cambodia), because the prince had dominated our whole lives since Cambodia became independent in November 1953. During my childhood, he came to the village twice. Many times a day, we heard his improvised, hour-long speeches on the radio. At the time, the Cambodian people venerated him as a god.

I also used to make my own film using my own technique. In fact, we had no projector. I used a looking glass to shimmer the light of a candle or a burning oil lamp in a dark room. On the glass, I put different forms on paper according to the stories I was telling. Through the gleam, the forms would reflect their shadows on the screen, which was usually the wall of the room. The forms could be animals, men, women, or objects. I could move the forms up and down, left and right, or slow and fast so that the shadows would be in motion. Jokes or exaggerated comments often

accompanied the shadows I made on the spot to entertain, especially my younger sisters and brothers. I became the elder when my two brothers left to further their studies in Phnom Penh, after they had completed their years of primary school in the village.

The life of our villagers was amazing with the arrival of electricity. It was in the early years of the 1960s when a local businessman took the initiative to invest in an electricity business in Snay Pol. A first 15-20 KVA generator was running to provide electricity only for lighting, from 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. and from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., and not for any other kind of consumption. Later, the businessman upgraded the power to 30 KWA. Our family subscribed to a fluorescent lamp of 0.30 m, for which we paid about USD 1 a month. With one lamp, we could only provide enough light for the main room, which was arranged as a lounge and as my father's office. The light could also penetrate other rooms, as the lamp was placed up to the roof, high over the cupboards. Our house had no ceiling. But the lighting intensity was not sufficient in those rooms. So, to do my homework at night,

I had to move to the main room, using my father´s desk. Many times, I fell asleep until the next morning. To avoid this kind of inconvenience, one day, I managed to get an extra light by myself. I just bought a bulb lamp from a Chinese shop and connected it to the power supply line, using not the electric wire but the ordinary one I found available in the house. My parents never questioned my ingenuity, and I had no sense of electrocution. For many weeks, I had gotten extra lighting without paying. I thought I was doing what others did. But they did it properly. I used the electricity free of charge for many weeks until the day I noticed that the exposed end of the connecting wire was reddening and catching fire. I was very frightened that this might have set fire to my ancestor´s house. I did not tell my parents about the incident, which I managed to end quickly and quietly.

My Earlier Initiation to Politics

In general, there was no public lighting in my village. But at night, with some lights coming from the fluorescent lamps in the neighboring houses, the main street looked lit; we could see, from time to time, some bicycle or motorbike riders or walkers passing through. People were enjoying more nocturnal activities than before. From the veranda, almost every time, I could see any unannounced visitor who might be coming. If someone arrived, I would alert my father. Most often after dinner, many of our neighbours came to visit us, spending time chatting with him until they fell exhausted and went back home. They were generally talking about politics, curiously more international than domestic. They analysed the world situation from the Korean War to the Congolese conflict, or from the wars in neighbouring Laos and Vietnam to the nuclear race. They also commented on the roles played by the giants of the world: the USSR, the USA, France, the UK, China, etc. Their comments were mainly based on the news they got from the radio, which broadcast the information three

times a day. And the comments were no different from those of our chief of state, who managed to make his voice heard nearly every day through the national radio, the only channel at the time, when he was visiting his fellow citizens in different parts of his kingdom.

On national politics, my father and his neighbours rarely debated, except to make comments about individual ministers or important people whom they knew personally or whom they had just heard about. But in general, they praised the man who ran the country, Prince Sihanouk, who was regarded as the father of the nation. I learned that kind of world politics by listening to every evening discussion as I served them hot jasmine tea. I also learned, some years later, that my father had been a candidate for the post of deputy in an election organised by the prince's party, "Sangkum Reastr Niyum," or "The Popular Community." But he failed to get elected.

The chief of the district convened a weekly meeting of all the chiefs of communes in his office, called "Sala Srok." We had ten "Khum" or communes. The chief of my father's native commune

was his cousin. Every time, after the meeting, the cousin came to visit us either for lunch or just for an informal chat. He came by bicycle and, years later, by motorbike as his finances permitted. He used to park his bicycle or motorbike under the veranda and then go up the stairs to meet my father in the office. While the cousin was busy chatting upstairs, I was given the immense pleasure of controlling the cousin's belongings. On the back seat of the bicycle or motorbike, I usually found a pile of weekly magazines, especially the one published by the state, entitled "Neak Cheat Niyum" or "The Nationalist," attached with an elastic cord. Since I could read and write, I had always taken one or two copies of "The Nationalist" from the middle of the pile, and the commune chief never noticed. I enjoyed reading a few articles and many pictures that showed the government's activities. I was very interested in the international news, which helped me better understand the subject my father and his neighbours were debating every afternoon. I liked the cartoon portraying the "giants," among whom the most publicized were Eisenhower, Khrushchev, and De Gaulle. The cartoon about Prince Sihanouk

and his ministers also drew much of my attention. This was my earlier initiation to politics.

I Like to Make Merit

When I reached the 6th grade, my parents began to notice my patience and my talent for drawing, painting, and reading. I liked to draw or paint animals, houses, cars, trees, and landscapes of the countryside, the seaside, or the riverside, etc., often using watercolours. But most importantly, I painted the Buddha in different versions and in different actions from his holy life. My grandmother and my mother were very enthusiastic when they saw my paintings. They encouraged me to paint more so that I could distribute my works to the older adults in the village. They said this was a great deed that could take me to heaven in my next life. I was also good at reading, as I read the Buddhist teachings in the same way as any Buddhist monk did.

One day, I was on a trip to a neighbouring village with my grandmother. In the guesthouse, I found an old Buddhist textbook. I chose one chapter and started to read loudly, clearly, but slowly, with correct punctuation and intonation. While I was reading, a dozen elderly ladies came and sat down respectfully and quietly around me. One of them lit a lighter to burn a scent and put it in front of me, giving the impression of being in a real session of a religious ceremony. They were treating me like a real monk. In this situation, I dared not stop, but continued reading until the end. Once again, my grandmother told me that my actions were a great deed. I was attracted to Buddhism to the point where I was about to choose between entering monkhood as a novice or furthering my studies in high school at the age of 13. Finally, I chose the latter. Even though I was always ready to do good deeds in a Buddhist way, I often drove my father´s "Mobilette" and when I saw an elderly person or a Buddhist monk walking alone under the hot sun, I would volunteer to carry them to their destination. I was always ready to render service at the drop of a hat.

I Like Reading Books

Next to our house, in the west, lived one of our cousins. He had two children younger than me. He had just built a new house and changed his job. For many years, he had been a technician, assembling or repairing bicycles and selling their spare parts. As bicycle businesses declined because many people now used more and more motorbikes, he decided to close his bike shop and open a bookstore, which was the second in the village. In the bookstore, he sold stationery, school textbooks, Buddhist textbooks, and some novels. From time to time, we could find some magazines, but no updated newspapers. More and more books were accumulating week after week. Since the bookstore opened, I had spent most of my spare time helping my cousin and his wife, putting books in order by title, subject, or author, and eventually selling them to customers. I also took advantage of the chance to read almost every Khmer book available in the store. I read not only educational or informative books but also novels written by well-known authors and young writers. I read all kinds

of books, from sex education and cartoons and comics to the most reliable ones. I was so absorbed in reading that I spent more and more time in the bookstore than at home. Most of the time, my mother had to shout from the veranda to call me for lunch or dinner, so I was always late for the family gathering. But this reading behavior would help me significantly in my further studies.

Losing My Number-One Ranking

Because of My Desire to See Phnom Penh

When I was studying in elementary school, I used to walk from home in the morning and afternoon; each time, one kilometer to go to school and vice versa. But when I attended junior high school, which was named "Pearang Junior High School," I could no longer walk, as the distance from home to school was three times longer than that to the previous school. Therefore, my parents bought me a bicycle. In high school, our way of life changed. First, we were no longer called "schoolboys" but

"students." We became big boys. Second, we did not have one permanent teacher, but many "professors" who taught us specific subjects, one professor for each subject. Third, our uniform changed too. Instead of wearing a white shirt and blue shorts, the students wore a white shirt and khaki pants. The last change was the lessons we had to learn. Except for Khmer literature, which was still taught in Khmer, other subjects were taught in French. My first year at Pearang High School was good. I received high ratings in history, science, mathematics, and composition in both Khmer and French. I was supposed to be the number one student in my class, but unfortunately, I finished the year in third place. This result was because I missed one of the subjects' control examinations in the first semester.

At that time, Phnom Penh, with its busy streets and avenues, all sorts of cars in circulation, many shopping places, beautiful gardens, and well-designed public and private buildings, was so attractive to me. Many times a year, I tried to make a trip to the city. Each time my elder brothers came to visit us, I always asked them to bring me along. And I always failed to get my parents'

approval. For me, visiting Phnom Penh was equal to receiving a reward. Normally, we went to the capital every year, but only on special occasions such as the Water Festival, Independence Day, and Congress Days (twice a year, the "Popular Community" organized a three-day congress so that ordinary people could talk to the ministers about any issue). One day, my brother, Sinoeun, came home for a weekend and proposed to my parents that I go with him to Phnom Penh. The idea was so exciting to me that I invented some good reasons to convince my parents to allow me to go with my brother. I did not tell them that I was having an examination. If they had been aware of my timing, they would have prevented me from taking pleasure in my unconscious and unnecessary desire. The student's performance was rated from 0 to 20 points. So, for one of the examinations in the first semester, I got an awful zero.

Throughout the year, the school council may reward the best students with prizes and honour awards. The awards consisted of certificates, prize certificates, and honour certificates. The prize certificate was delivered to the highest-rated student. But the best

among the best would receive an honour certificate. One day, the school management was organising an awards distribution ceremony. With a rating of zero in one subject of an examination, I had no hope of receiving any awards, and I did not pay much attention to the ceremony. I came to school late that day. When I arrived, a hundred students were crowding in front of the Director´s office. The director was calling the winners of the awards one by one. Those whose names were called were jumping with joy. Once they had received the certificates from the director´s hand, some of them just disappeared; some stayed, probably awaiting additional rewards.

I felt very sad and frustrated at the idea of losing the award just because of a stupid desire to go around the city. I was moving slowly to get closer to the place. Finally, the crowd seemed smaller. The director was now announcing the next winners of the honour award. Suddenly and unexpectedly, I heard, "Ieng Mouly" and then applause. My name was coming up first to receive the award. On the spot, I did not believe it. I was not so sure of

winning the prize, but when all eyes had turned on me, I became certain of my lucky moment.

I was so astonished to see this surprising and happy event happen. I was so proud to receive the honour certificate from the director, surrounded by many of my professors and friends. At that occasion, almost all students were cheerful.

Goodbye, Snay Pol.

Since my two brothers were sent to further their studies in Phnom Penh, sending children to study in the capital has become our family′s tradition. It was now my turn. My eldest brother was in charge of finding an appropriate high school in the capital. He was always taking care of our school problems. He had helped my second brother, Sinoeun, to be enrolled in one of the best high schools in the capital, Lycée Preah Yukanthor. For me, he found a place in his high school named "Sangkum Reastr Niyum High School," the "Popular Community High School." Finally, I moved to

Phnom Penh in 1964 after one year of studies in the junior high school.

I left my native village at the age of 14, with only a simple idea of furthering my studies, as I never thought that one day our family would have to move out, too. While living in Phnom Penh, I kept visiting Snay Pol often until 1970, when the war between Lon Nol and Sihanouk-Khmer Rouge took place. Afterwards, I had to wait 22 years to return to my birthplace. What I witnessed in the village during my childhood always remained in my mind. During these 22 years, like other villages in Cambodia, my village had suffered from wars, revolutions, separation, massacres, invasions by foreign troops, collectivism, totalitarianism, and political uncertainty. What was happening to my village could apply to many other villages as well because of the similarity in cultural, socio-economic, and political environments throughout the country. I always think of my native village as a source of inspiration for life, for freedom, for our traditional values, for human dignity, and for progress.

Chapter Two

Learning and Working in the City

(The 1960s and 1970s)

Just a year before I arrived, my father had bought a small wooden house in Phnom Penh so that his three elder boys could stay all together. Phnom Penh was a beautiful city, with most of its public buildings well designed and well maintained; its multicoloured gardens; and its busy streets well illuminated. But we were living in the poorest part of the city called "Phsar Doeum Kor," or "The Kapok Tree Market." The place looked more like a slum than a real agglomeration of the capital. For many years, we had had no electricity and no running water. At night, we used a burning oil lamp to provide us with light long enough to do our homework. We used charcoal that we bought from a Chinese shop next door for cooking. We also bought clean water from any retailer who got it from a distribution point and sold it from house to house in a container placed on a two-wheel cart that they towed while walking. Of course, in the city, everything had to be bought.

Nothing was for free. In the rainy season, we saved some money, as we used the rainwater provided by Mother Nature instead of city-bought water. Two years later, we finally got both running water and electricity.

A Small Wooden House in Kapok Tree Market Place

The house was 4 m wide and 6 m long, and was elevated high enough to leave the open ground as a place for a kitchen and a space large enough to put together, fastened to the columns, two or three handmade wiring hammocks. The wooden stairs led us to the upper part of the house through a veranda of 1.50 m by 1.50 m. The roof was covered with zinc. There was no real bathroom. We bathed in an open shelter of thatch that could only hide just the lower part of our bodies. Inside the shelter, we stored clean water in a used black oil container, exclusively for bathing. We called this facility our "bathroom," which was installed on the ground 2 m next to the stairs. We lived in a compound that was 12 m wide and 24 m long, delimited by a bamboo fence. The WC was

behind the house at the extremity of the compound. The section where we lived was crowded with working-class people: cyclo drivers, street vendors, factory workers, and lower-ranking civil servants. The hygienic conditions were not always adequate, as worn water did not run smoothly through the open drainage conduits, providing unpleasant odours and a perfect refuge for mosquitoes. At night, we had to sleep under a mosquito net to protect ourselves from mosquito bites.

From the main street in the area, Mao Tse Toung Boulevard, which had not yet been asphalted, we had to take a small but busy 300 m road to reach our house. The road had to pass through an open-air market before it could connect to a small wooden bridge that crossed over a stream full of garbage. The road was covered with clayey soil. During the rainy season, even walking was slippery. The area was also not safe from thieves. Every night, we had to carry our bicycles to the upper part of our house. Doors and windows had to be locked before we could go to bed, even though we were not living in well-furnished rooms. The most "sumptuous" furniture we could afford comprised one bare

cabinet, two tiny tables, a few standard chairs, and one wooden bed with a mattress, in which my elder brother used to sleep. My second brother, Sinoeun, and I shared the remaining space on the floor, enjoying the comfort of our separate handmade mats under the protection of our individual mosquito nets. We practically slept next to our much-loved and indispensable bicycles.

Our Daily Life

Among us, the distribution of household work was such that my elder brother took care of all general issues, from supplies to house maintenance; my second brother took care of food and cooking, and I helped both of them in addition to a specifically assigned task of cooking rice. We cleaned and washed our respective bicycles and clothes on the weekend. When we were busy with our studies, we just bought cooked food from a small food stall that sold cheap, popular meals to cyclo drivers. Once we had cooked the rice, we usually bought a kind of sour soup with tomatoes, pineapples, and fish or chicken for a meal, costing

around USD 0.10 per can and enough for three people. A few years later, I would continue to pay the same price for a more voluminous soup as I became a regular customer and got to know the lady who owned the shop. When we were running short of supplies, one of us would rush to our village, Snay Pol, to resupply with rice, dried fish, sausages, or salted duck eggs from our parents′ home. We would return to Phnom Penh with plenty of supplies and some money on the back seat of our bicycle. Each time, we would generally be given the cash equivalent of USD 2 or 3.

To our great happiness, sometimes our father would surprise us by visiting incognito. On such special occasions, he would take us to a Chinese restaurant on Mao Tse Toung Boulevard. We would enjoy better Chinese food the entire time Father was staying with us. Mother rarely came, as she had to bring along my younger sisters or brothers. But we were not completely isolated from relatives, as one of my aunts′ families- one of my mother′s elder sisters- lived 200 m away on the same road. So, frequently, my cousins came over to play ping-pong, do their homework, or

enjoy relaxing with us in the hammocks almost every afternoon. The homework consisted of mathematics, chemistry, physics, or French language practice. We learned our lessons in the traditional way, inherited from the older generation, which obliged us to repeat, sometimes loudly, the same readings from the courses we got from school until we could remember them by heart. On days close to the exam, our neighbours would hear long hours of our repeated voices reading our lessons. At the time, I was not really a hard-working student. Many times, I fell asleep in the hammock while reading my textbooks. One of my cousins came regularly after lunchtime. When he arrived, he saw me most often snoring with my face under the cover of an open book. He used to joke about my way of learning. He said, "I don't understand how you are going to learn your lessons by sleeping?"

Attending High School

In my high school, Sangkum Reastr Niyum High School, secondary studies were divided into two parts. One part was reserved for classes from grades seven to nine, and the other for classes from grades ten to twelve. My elder brother went to the second group of classes, located in the prestigious area of Phnom Penh in the south, named Chamcar Mon, next to the residence of the Chief of State. More modestly, I had to go north, to the opposite part of the capital, in a popular section named Tuol Kok. Almost every morning, I rode my bicycle at top speed across the busy Mao Tse Toung Boulevard, passed over the URSS Boulevard[4], and continued through Samdech Penn Nouth Street[5] until I reached the Music School (Faculty of Music), the final site of my

[4] It is now called the Russian Federation Boulevard.

[5] Part of Samdech Penn Nouth Street is now called Marshal Kim Il Sung.

destination. In fact, the Music School's building[6] was next door to our school.

The school was mostly built with ordinary wood and covered either with fibre-cement or street tiles. The furniture was not quite different from what I had seen in my village, even though the classroom here had electric lights. Most of the students came to school by bicycle, like me. But many came by motorbikes, and some came by cars, accompanied by their parents or only by their drivers. The way the students came to school already revealed the social setting they belonged to. From this point of view, my social situation was categorised in the lower and majority class. Yet my situation was still better than that of many other poor students who had no roof over their heads and were obliged to live with Buddhist monks in pagodas. At the time, there was no class struggle among the Cambodian people. Influenced by Buddhism, we generally believe that class disparity is caused by our past and

[6] The music school had moved to a new location.

present deeds, since we are masters of our own destiny; our lives are shaped by individual reincarnation.

In Phnom Penh, many of my teachers were women. They were mostly married to high-ranking officials or wealthy businesspeople. Some couples, husband and wife, were both teachers. They came to work by car, driven by themselves or by their drivers, except for some school staff. I had not seen any "professor" in my high school come to work by bicycle or motorbike. Any high-ranking official married to a teacher was considered smart, intellectual, and then "chic." In any case, it was always better than marrying an ordinary woman. Some of my female teachers had been living with their husbands in France for a while before they took the teaching jobs. They spoke French perfectly and were generally pretty attractive women, wearing fashionable clothes. For many decades, France had been the place of our dream, a place to produce our elite. For any woman or man who had been in France, whether for visiting, staying, training, or studying, they always got something more than the others in terms of respect and esteem. Those people were

commonly called "Choeung Srok Baraing," or "French people leg." If the schoolteachers were popular in the countryside, the "French people leg," especially the student group, would be in higher demand in the capital. The "French people leg" was so well regarded that some high-ranking officials or rich businessmen would give their daughters' hands to them. Until 1970, France had been the most visited European country by many Cambodian nationals.

At school, I began the year with difficulty. Impressed by city life, I probably needed some time to adapt. Among forty students, I finished the first semester as the 23rd in the class. But at the end of the school year, I rose to 18th in class ranking. I found most of my classmates more informed than me in general knowledge, certainly taking advantage of being city dwellers. However, I was thrilled to notice that, despite my provincial origin, called "peasant," I beat them in all French compositions. This was unthinkable, as the "French language" should be the language of the "intellectual or smart guys." If the best of my classmates got 11 or 12 marks, I received higher marks of 13 or 14. Many times, the

French teacher called me to read from her desk, in front of the entire class, my works that had won the highest rating. I was so proud of my French, although I was not speaking this language fluently yet.

Going Out to Practise the French Language

To practise French, in addition to the way we did at home, from time to time I went to an old part of Phnom Penh where the French community lived, the biggest European community in the country. The location could be recognised by its trademark, colourful and ornate parks and villas or buildings in colonial style. Normally, I could see many French tourists and residents walking in the park in front of Lycée Descartes and in the area near Wat Phnom. Wat Phnom is the hill that gives its name to the capital. Phnom Penh is the contraction of Phnom Daun Penh, or the hill (Phnom) of Grand-ma (Daun) named Penh. Often, I left my bicycle under a big peacock or flamboyant tree, among others planted along the street, and watched for any French passers-by

so that I could speak to them with my broken French. I could hardly articulate such expressions as "Monsieur or Madame, comment allez-vous? Où allez-vous?" It was a surprising but pleasant question for passers-by to hear my Cambodian accent. Sometimes I did not catch the answer, as it seemed to me that the Frenchman or Frenchwoman was talking too fast. But I was satisfied with my exercise. In other classes at my high school, students practised the language directly with their native French-speaking teachers. They did not need to watch for any French passers-by at Wat Phnom, as I did.

In Phnom Penh, our classes were often interrupted by numerous demonstrations organised by the government in honour of foreign dignitaries, presidents, heads of state, and prime ministers of friendly countries during their visits to Cambodia. To welcome those important guests, the authorities mobilised students and schoolboys or girls (youth in general) at the airport or along the streets. Cambodia under Prince Sihanouk had friends all around the world, many coming from third-world countries. Each time, I had to wear a youth uniform. The regime had created

a youth movement named "Yuvann" or the "Khmer Royal Socialist Youth." The uniform consisted of a cap with the golden royal insignia, pants, a long-sleeved khaki shirt all in khaki, a black tie, and a picture of our "beloved Prince father," Norodom Sihanouk, which was hooked to the left pocket of the shirt. We had to buy student and youth uniforms from the Chinese shops. We wore the student uniform on school days and the youth uniform on social days. In addition to welcoming important guests, we also had to participate in many political activities, such as mass meetings or demonstrations, which were generally initiated by the youth movement in support of the prince, Chief of State, and in social activities for collective works of general interest.

My Years at the Business School

One year later, my elder brother, Chhoeun, left high school after he had successfully passed a nationwide exam for schoolteacher training. He moved to a village called "Kampong Kantout" in Kandal province to live in the national pedagogic

training centre, a boarding institution about 30 km from Phnom Penh, where he would be trained in a two-year program. But, as always, my brother looked after my schooling. One day, on our vacation trip to the native village, he handed me a large envelope. It contained an application form for an entrance exam to the only business school in Cambodia, the Faculty of Commercial Sciences, now called the Commerce Faculty. I had neither known nor heard about the school. I had no idea about business studies or the job opportunities. My parents had no specific reaction to my brother's suggestion. Business studies were a new subject to us, especially for my parents, who expected their children to earn a living in the government civil service rather than in the private sector.

Job opportunities for any business diploma holder were generally offered in the private sector and rarely in the civil service. Finally, I agreed to apply for admission to the business school. The conditions for the first level of studies required, among other things, at least the completion of grade seven. There were 40 places for 800 candidates whose school levels ranged from grade seven to eleven. The exam comprised a Khmer composition and a

few other subjects that could generate high scores. For preparation, I did not make any special effort, except to revise and memorise some basic calculus. In the Khmer composition exam, candidates were asked to write about a local businessman's activities. Drawing on my frequent contacts with some Chinese shop-owners in Snay Pol, I described a busy workday of a grocer named Chek Seng, or Uncle Seng, an imaginary figure I invented on the spot for the exam. I pictured him as an early bird, always smiling at his customers, running his shop efficiently, and keeping the most-demanded goods always available. Uncle Seng's story was just a made-up story. Ultimately, I remarkably passed the entrance exam, probably with a high mark for my writing work on Uncle Seng.

The 40 successful candidates came from families of all walks of life: ordinary workers, civil servants, high-ranking government officials, and rich businessmen. Among them, I made a few true friends in the weeks after the class began. Two young ladies were there; one of whom was the daughter of former Palace Minister

Ung Hy.[7] Her name was Ung Kanitha. The other was a relative of a rich businessman. Her name was Keo Sodara. The two came to school in their luxury cars, driven by their chauffeurs. They had attended French schools, one in Phnom Penh at Lycée Descartes, and the other in a boarding school in a seaside resort city south of the capital. Both young women spoke French fluently. Among the boy students, one young man named Oum Muntha, whose father was a city policeman, regularly rode a Japanese-made motorbike to school. He always wore a T-shirt and jeans, and kept his long hair in a hippie look. I was one of the youngest students in the class and found two friends, one named Sun Sarom and the other Nou Vanthan. They were the most senior of the class.

Muntha, Sarom, Vanthan, and I formed a group of close friends. Sarom's father was a veterinarian, so his family had no financial problems. Sarom was gay. At the time, we did not pay

[7] Under the Presidency of HM King Norodom Sihanouk, Ung Hy held the position of Palace Minister in a government that lasted from March 18 to August 13, 1945, with the title of Akka Moha Sena, equivalent to that of Prime MInister, Ministère de lÍnformation, Cabinets Ministériels Khmers, du March 18, 1945 to March 18, 1970, Phnom Penh, 1970. p. 34.

much attention to his sexual behavior, except to crack jokes about his effeminate manner. Sarom was always with Muntha. Vanthan was a unique son of an old, widowed lady from a good family. He was not better than me in terms of social standing. Before applying for business studies, he had been a professional boxer. He would go to fight at least once a week to earn a living and support his old mother and his young sister. I was with Vanthan almost all the time, since he was my neighbour, about 300 m next door. He had no bicycle and needed me for traveling, using my second-hand bike. In practical terms, he made the most physical effort. While he was pedaling, I quietly sat behind him. Every morning, before the start of class, our group would go for our habitual breakfast, a noodle soup, in a Chinese restaurant a dozen meters from the school. Each time, Muntha volunteered to pay the bill, and we never refused his offer. Because of his easy way of spending money, we thought of his father´s job, a city policeman, as a very lucrative position. However, we later learned that the man supporting his family financially was an important person: a middle-aged man, not a royal family member, but a high-ranking official of the royal palace. Muntha had a pretty attractive sister,

one of the promising stars of the royal ballet troupe, whom the distinguished palace man was courting.

In class, we were learning both languages, French and Khmer; commerce, applied mathematics, accounting, an introduction to civil and commercial law, and economics, among other subjects. Lecturers were mostly experienced executives, high-ranking officials, politicians, or ministers who held university degrees, especially from France. Many were very busy people. In addition to their regular jobs, they wore many hats, teaching at our school as well as in law, economics, or other institutions. Among them was Khieu Samphan, who had become a famous politician because of his close association with the Khmer Rouge leadership. By word of mouth, he was initially famous for the three-wheeled motorbike, a Vespa, which he rode to his workplaces, even when he was a high-ranking official, until he got a second-hand Volkswagen. In his late thirties, he was also famous because of his confirmed bachelor status. He had already gone into the jungle to join the Khmer Rouge revolution when I arrived at the business school. Khieu Samphan was a special case, as other lecturers

would be driven to the school by their uniformed chauffeurs. In contrast, the vice-dean of the faculty showed up every morning with his expensive convertible car. Many students whispered that the vice-dean spent his regular nights in a nightclub next to the central market.

At the beginning, it was hard for me to understand all the new subjects. But at the end of the first year, I became one of the best students. I used to compare my situation with the movement of a solid object that, at first, when thrown into a river, slipped deeply to the bottom of the water for a while, but later, little by little, would emerge to the surface. I was very good at accounting and economics. But what was astonishing again was my superiority over my classmates, including those who had attended French schools, in the French language.

Staring at Lycée Descartes´ girl students,

Playing on the Ground

We had a French teacher named Nicole Berrier. From her, we learned French grammar and how to compose business correspondence. After I entered the commerce school, I no longer needed to practice my French in the park. I would converse frequently with my French teacher. Even though we still managed to visit the French section of the city from time to time, not for the purpose of learning, but for sure, just for the pleasure of watching. In fact, during break hours between courses, we usually spent our time staring at Lycée Descartes´ girl students playing basketball or volleyball court in their short sports suits, a few meters from the sidewalk. Looking at those young ladies, we were so excited at first sight of their well-formed legs; they seemed so beautiful, so smooth, and so eye-catching. At that time, I was unaware that the girls were wearing transparent tights. In our family, no one used that kind of material or fabric.

Government Grants

At the end of the first year, I applied for the government grant because our family was under critical financial pressure. A few weeks after the second year started, I was informed that the government had decided to grant me a quarterly subvention equivalent to USD 20. On that good day, I was so happy with the good news that I rushed immediately to my native village to tell my parents. Unquestionably, my mother was thrilled by the news, as the grant would reduce our family's burden. When the day of the first payment came, I invited my two brothers, Chhoeun and Sinoeun, to spend time together. Chhoeun travelled from his training centre for the occasion. He had just bought an old motorbike. So, for sightseeing in the city, the three of us would enjoy riding it. We spent the night going out, eating delicious food in a Chinese restaurant, shopping, especially buying new clothes, and going to the cinema, watching Western films. But at the time, according to the traffic regulations, no more than two people were authorised to ride a single motorbike. So, we rode out of sight of

the traffic police. Each time, long enough before we saw any policeman at any street corner, one of us had to get off and walk away until we felt safe from any police watch. The grant was a meagre income, but it did give us great happiness.

In addition to business studies, I managed to spend my evenings learning Chinese. At the time, many foreign embassies, especially the Chinese, German, and USSR embassies, were providing, in close competition, free-of-charge language training courses to Cambodian students. Every night, starting from 8 o'clock p.m., the classes took place at Lycée Preah Sisowath. All the teachers were Chinese nationals from Beijing. They spoke Khmer fluently. Some of them were learning our Khmer language at the Faculty of Letters. I had been learning Chinese for one month, just to be able to write my name and sing a song in Chinese written by Prince Sihanouk, which was translated from Khmer, when the Great Cultural Revolution happened in China and forced all those teachers to return to their country. From that day onward, I never had another opportunity to study Chinese again.

Getting the Number One at the Final Year Exam

The first-level business studies program lasted two years and would be sanctioned at the end with a diploma after an examination. One day close to the exam day, while we were in intensive preparation, Sarom suggested that, to pass the exam successfully, our group should not ignore the power of the spirit guarding the school's compound. Therefore, we should pay tribute and offer him something. The offering usually consisted of a boiled pig's head and some wine or liquor. In fact, the Business School[8] was situated next to the Place of Buddha's relics and the railway station. In the north, a score of banana trees marked the border of the school's compound. Just a few meters from the entrance gate, a hundred-year-old banyan tree stood impressively. Beneath the tree, a small cabin was erected to serve as the shelter of the school's spirit, which we then called Neak Ta. A family of school workers lived nearby, too. In the past, many students of every

[8] The site of my former Commerce School is now occupied by the Vattanac building.

class had given offerings to the spirit. So, our group decided not to miss the tradition.

Just one night before the exam, Sarom prepared food and drinks; afterwards, he brought them into the compound. The ceremony took place at around 9 p.m. on a dark night, under the lighting of a bulb lamp. However, it was still dark, as the lamp could hardly light the ground beneath the giant tree. We lit a candle, burned a couple of incense sticks, and each of us made our wishes, one by one. Traditionally, we needed a master of ceremonies for such a non-Buddhist ritual. A few minutes later, we left the place, giving all the offerings, including some unopened bottles of beer, to the spirit, without removing them either. We thought the offerings would serve as an excellent and additional meal for the worker's family, who used to enjoy all foods and drinks left behind after the ceremony. I guessed the worker might be behind the idea of the spirit's power, as he had been living with that kind of practice for many years. In the end, I passed the examination with honours, getting the number one spot among the other 19 lucky candidates to receive the diploma. I guessed I

did well not because of offerings to the spirit, but certainly because of my hard work. On the list, Muntha was 3rd, Sarom 5th, and Vanthan 9th. The two other friends, French-educated young ladies, Kanitha and Sodara, failed at the first session and passed the second examination a few months later. In addition to the diploma of business studies, which I also received as the number one candidate at the top of all candidates, the state certificate of accounting studies.

As holders of the diploma in business, we should apply for jobs in nationalised or private companies because, at the time, the government's policy was to provide young people with professional training in response to the needs of those companies for business employees or the workforce. But for me, I was not interested in any job, as my only desire was to further my studies. At the time, the rules required that I apply for a re-entry exam to the second level of business studies. But unlike the external candidates, I had the right to choose a subject that I had learned at the first level instead of mathematics for the entrance test. I chose accounting, for which I believed I would get high marks. But what was my

strength turned out to be my weakness. I failed the re-entry examination because of an error in the accounting test. Consequently, I had to search for a job by myself. Immediately after receiving my diploma, my friends in the group were recruited as clerks or bookkeepers by the state-run Brewery Company called "SKD," thanks to Kanitha, whose fiancée headed its finance department.

In the World of Factory Workers

By my own efforts, I got a job at the state-run glassware factory on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. I was recruited as an assistant bookkeeper. But I had worked for only one month, from September to October 1968, in this factory. I was earning only USD 40 per month, not enough to pay for daily transportation and food costs. The factory was situated 20 km west of Phnom Penh, too far for me to ride my bicycle. Every working day, I had to take a towing-motorbike taxi to go to work. As an office worker, I should also demonstrate that I was up to standard. I would have lunch in

a private restaurant not far from the factory. I had to wear a clean shirt and pants, with a smart appearance, to arrive at the office early in the morning, at seven o′clock, and to return home at 6 p.m. I worked in the office of the chief accountant, along with two other colleagues: the deputy chief and a cost accountant.

The chief accountant was one of the well-known lecturers in the Business School. He was a French-educated aristocrat who came to work, smoking a pipe, and always sat in the back seat of his French-made car, a Citroen DS, driven by a uniformed chauffeur. He was married to a French lady. He came to the factory only once a week because he worked for many companies, both private and public, as a chief accountant, chief finance officer, financial controller, or auditor. When necessary, we had to visit him at his home or in his other offices to get his approval for what we did. I had heard that working as his staff would have a bright future, but he did not pay a good salary.

Like other state-run factories, the glassware factory was a donation from communist China to Cambodia. Upon my arrival, some Chinese technical advisers were still working there. During

the one-month period, I got to know my chief well but never met the chief executive officer, who was a high-ranking government official with the rank of "Oudom Muntrey" or "Superior Officer." When I submitted my resignation letter to him, my boss said, "Have you really decided to quit? Of course, I cannot afford to pay you more for the time being." I just replied that my wage could not match the high cost of living in Phnom Penh. However, at the time, I did not ask for the moon. I left the glassware factory at almost 18. At this age, I may be wet behind the ears, but I was well trained to do my job. It was my first experience as a factory worker.

A Job in a Brewery Factory (SKD)

Finally, I applied for a job at SKD, the state-run brewery company, where my friends had been working since they left school. Thanks to Kanitha, once again, I was recruited as a secretary-accountant, or a junior accountant, under the authority of her fiancée. But I was assigned to work in an alcohol distillery

on the northern outskirts of the capital, called "Kilometre Number Six" or "Kilo Six." I had to work in a cost-accounting section with a dozen colleagues who were former students of my business school.

In the new position, I earned double what I had received in the glassware factory. Every day, I had to take a private three-wheel taxi called "Lambretta" from the "Kapok Three Market" to the central market station first. Then I took the same kind of vehicle in another direction to go further to Kilo Six, as there was no direct commuting line from my house to my new workplace. Regularly, at noontime, I returned home for a lunch break that would last for two hours. On the way back, in the central marketplace, I would spend a few minutes standing or moving around, to buy and taste, in a hurry, some kind of Chinese appetisers prepared with cooked pork offal that some Chinese vendors were selling on mobile stands, during the few-minute wait for the departure of the next vehicle. After having two or three mouthfuls, I jumped on the "Lambretta" and made my way home. We had two work sessions

a day: the morning from 7 a.m. to noontime and the afternoon from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

While working, I still wanted to Further My Studies

After a few months in the distillery factory, I was finally transferred to the headquarters in Phnom Penh. While working, I still held the same idea of furthering my studies. I arranged my schedule so I could attend evening courses to prepare for the final degree in accounting. I went to a private business school named "Institut Commercial" located in the same compound as Lycée Voltaire, attending evening courses in various accounting studies. After two years of preparation, I finally took the examination for a "Certificate of High Degree in Accounting" delivered by the Business School or Faculty of Commerce. The exam consisted of written and oral tests. To my surprise, on the day of the oral test, I had Ing Phourin as my examiner: my former boss, the part-time chief accountant of the glassware factory. When we were face to

face in the closed-door room, he first asked me, "Are you Ieng Mouly?" as if he were recalling past memories. To which I replied, "Yes, Sir." Then he ordered me to choose one of the many folded papers in a box containing the test subjects. In 1970, I obtained my certificate, which was the final degree in accounting in Cambodia, and it gave me the idea to continue my studies in France.

Looking Forward to Studying in France

The idea was reinforced by the fact that when you held any kind of diploma from France, you would always be well considered, well regarded, well respected, and well paid. But my wishes were clouded by the political situation in Cambodia, as the country had just plunged into political uncertainty following the March 18, 1970 military coup.

At first, having no hope of leaving the country in wartime, I decided to look for an alternative. I chose the distance-learning

method. I wrote to some institutions in France, and their replies were the same: I must get my diploma recognised by the French Ministry of Education before I can be accepted in any French establishment. But the process of diploma recognition must be the business of both governments: Cambodia and France. To this end, I made many contacts with some officials of the Business School to obtain the necessary information on how to obtain this recognition. No one was able to provide me with clear answers on the issue.

After many months of fruitless efforts, on January 22, 1971, I decided to write directly to Paris to the Ministry of Education, explaining my purpose and the studies I had completed in Cambodia. I was reasoning, in particular, that once any French establishment accepted my enrollment, I would continue my studies until I became a Certified Public Accountant while working in Cambodia. But month after month, I did not receive any response from the French authorities. My hope in distance learning was fading day by day.

I Wanted to Be an Independent Accountant

In the meantime, I was thinking of becoming an independent public accountant in Cambodia. At the time, there were no specific regulations governing the status of public accountants. But, to my knowledge, not long before, many experienced accountants, especially Vietnamese nationals, had been recognised by a commercial court as independent accountants. The practice was that public accountant candidates should register their activities in a professional list with the court. Once registered in the list, the accountants would be able to work independently. So, in 1971, I applied for the same status at the Phnom Penh Commercial Court. But maybe at the age of 21, I was too young, and the president of the court, whom I had met many times, just replied that he did not know any rule governing such registration.

My desire to become an independent public accountant was finally vanishing too. But I hoped against all hope that, in the end, I would find a way to advance my professional career. I began to search for professional associations in France for help. Finally, I

found two or three addresses. I wrote to one association named Société de Comptabilité de France (SCF), telling them what I was doing and asking which professional category I should belong to. I applied for its membership, providing them with detailed information outlining my professional activities. In fact, in the last few years, I had not been at the bottom of the ladder anymore. Three months after I was recruited as a secretary-accountant in SKD, I became an accountant. By 1971, I had accumulated enough professional experience to look for a brighter future. I had left SKD. I was now working as a confirmed accountant in a Scandinavian group of companies and earning triple what I had earned in my previous position. The SCF, by its letter dated August 24, 1971, informed me that its board of directors had decided to admit me in the category of the "Qualified Accountant's Member" "Membre Comptable Qualifié" of the society. This qualification was very important to me, but at the time I did not realize its value. I was so happy with the qualification, which again aroused my desire to further my studies in France.

Yet, I did not know that the French authorities had responded to my letter of January 1971, almost one month later. In fact, a letter from the French Ministry of Education dated February 11, 1971 allowed me to be enrolled in the French "Institut National des Techniques Economiques et Comptables." But the letter ended up in the dusty piles of papers on the desk of SKD's chief of personnel. Not sure that my mail would get through to my home address, I exchanged correspondence with the French ministry using my SKD's office address. Unaware of the contents of the French letter that had been sent to me a year before, I renewed, in 1972, my request to have my diploma evaluated for enrollment in French universities or institutions. At the time, I enjoyed writing and exchanging correspondence. This time, unlike previously, the French Ministry of Education asked me to support my request with an official document detailing the program of studies conducive to the completion of my degree in accounting. Once again, I contacted the same officials at the Business School, but they were still unable to satisfy my demand. I could no longer rely on them. One idea came to mind: I should produce the program myself, detailing exactly all lessons learned, and send it to France. Using

a typewriter, I worked my way to obtaining the document I needed. With the assistance of a faculty worker, I had my program officially sealed and sent to France. By its letter dated November 20, 1972, the ministry allowed me to prepare the probation examination for a "D.E.C.S" or a "Diploma of High Accounting Studies." This time, all hopes were renewed. Again, I could revive my dream of becoming a CPA.

One week after receiving this good news, I visited SKD to see my friends and former classmates, who were still working there. Upon my arrival at the entrance of the building, the chief of personnel, calling me by name, invited me to come to his office. I was surprised to see him behaving very friendlily toward me. While I was entering his office and not yet seated, he showed me a letter from France and handed it to me. I looked at it. The letter was dated one year earlier, February 1971, and was addressed to me by the Ministry of Education of France. It was in this way that I learned one year later that the French authorities responded quickly to my letter. If I had received this letter on time, I would not have wasted my time waiting and fabricating the program paper.

The chief looked leisurely relaxed. He did not realize how much his behavior was hurting me. I left his office, deeply disappointed.

Changing Situation

Since the beginning of my professional life, many events had happened in our family circle. My elder brother had been sent to teach in a primary school in one of the remote provinces of the northern part of Cambodia, in Preah Vihear Province, bordering Laos, in an agglomeration named Kampong Sralao, a village near the Lao-Cambodian border. From time to time, he would come to visit us, bringing with him some smuggled goods he could find in the border area, especially French liquors or perfumes. Working in a remote area gave him special credit and priority to apply for the next posting in a better place. Therefore, by 1970, he succeeded in being transferred to a school situated a dozen kilometres from the capital, almost a first-class posting. My second brother, Sinoeun,

got a job as a clerk in the national bank, while continuing his law studies at Phnom Penh University.

Our small house had been renovated and raised higher so that the lower part could be arranged as a real ground floor with full walls, appropriate lighting, and a running water supply system. By the third quarter of 1970, the war's effects began to have real impacts on our lives. Immediately after the coup in March 1970, Cambodia was divided into two parts: one was under the control of the Lon Nol government, and the other was under the Khmer Rouge, which was called the "maquis." The "maquis" was, at first, mostly in a small, remote area, but little by little, day after day, it expanded to cover the eastern and northern parts of the country.

In my village, Snay Pol, local authorities of the former regime had left immediately after the coup. We found no policemen, no district officials, and no other civil servants on active duty. Many schoolteachers had left, too. My mother, along with my sister Vanny and my four youngest brothers, Vuthean, Vuthoeun, Vuthea, and Sophear, had moved to Phnom Penh since April, leaving my father, my sister Sithan, and two other brothers,

Vannak and Naroeun, to stay in the village. We had expected that the war would not last long. In our minds, the move of the half family to Phnom Penh was simply temporary. But a few weeks after the departure of my mother, a couple of combatants in black uniforms, using the name of Prince Sihanouk, made their appearance in the village, coming by motorbike from a remote area. They rapidly set up, in the name of Prince Sihanouk, a new administration in the form of a "District Revolutionary Committee." The district committee would organise, at a later phase, commune and village revolutionary committees.

One of my two uncles, my mother's youngest brother, was selected to head the district committee, with the same authority as the district chief in the Lon Nol administration. My uncle was one of the Cambodian textile technicians who had been trained in China in the 1960s. Accused of being "red," he had been jailed by the Prince Sihanouk regime for many years. In fact, he was not a communist; he just had good connections with some "intellectuals" of socialist thinking. A few months before he struck the coup against Prince Sihanouk, General Lon Nol had released

all political prisoners, expecting that they would support him politically. My uncle was among those released prisoners, but, by the irony of fate, instead of siding with the Lon Nol government, he chose to join the maquis in my native village, Snay Pol. He was appointed by the new revolution to serve on the district committee when the eastern part of Cambodia became a safe maquis.

Once the new revolutionary administration was put in place, the village was cut off from the capital, as the Khmer Rouge banned any contact with any enemy zone, including the capital, Phnom Penh. Consequently, one half of our family was separated from the other. We lived without contact with each other for quite some time. My father later told me that during that time, which lasted almost one year, he made many attempts to sneak out of the village. In one attempt, he succeeded in escaping the control of the Snay Pol village committee. However, the authority of the neighbouring district caught him as he reached the last checkpoint. He was ultimately detained for a night.

Probably to assure the local Khmer Rouge authorities that he would not escape anymore, my father decided to marry my

youngest sister, Sithan, at the age of almost 16, to a schoolteacher. The wedding took place in the absence of the other half of the family. At the time, the Khmer Rouge-controlled administration was still seeking support from the people. They allowed the wedding to proceed in a traditional way, although freedom of speech, freedom of movement, and freedom of religion were gradually restricted. Buddhist monks began to receive political indoctrination, helping to mobilise the people to support Prince Sihanouk in his struggle against US imperialism and Lon Nol, their "lackey."

The new revolutionary youth was first encouraged, before they were forced, at a later stage, to join the "Sihanouk Army." As in other maquis areas, the anti-Lon Nol government propaganda was so effective that many young girls and boys volunteered to join the Khmer Rouge army, to the point where holding a gun and wearing black pyjamas was in-style fashion. Many young people would take their picture in a black uniform for their souvenir photos. It was probably because of this propaganda, too, that my sister preferred to get married and continue to live in the village rather than join the rest of the family in Phnom Penh.

A few months after the wedding, my father, along with my two brothers, finally succeeded in escaping, travelling by boat and making up as fishermen. Their journey was very dangerous, as the Lon Nol forces attacked, firing missiles or dropping bombs from fighter jets on any target they suspected of being an enemy. My father´s boat was under heavy shelling, too, but maybe, in the end, the pilot of the striking plane realized it was a small fishing boat. The day they arrived, my young brother, Vannak, was covering his face with a krama. When I looked at his face, I saw that it was all burnt, giving me the impression that he had been injured in the airstrike. We were shocked at the first sight of the black, burnt skin that covered his youthful face. A few minutes later, we were assured that the burning had been caused by an accident rather than by the consequences of the war, when the boy was playing with gasoline and an oil-burning lamp. I was so happy with the arrival of my father and brothers, even though our joy would be greater if we were all reunited, including my sister, Sithan. I took the next day off so we could all go out and eat good food. Fortunately, our house had just been enlarged to accommodate more newcomers.

Marrying My 1st Elder Brother

For quite some time, we had been looking to marry my older brother, Chhoeun. We had been waiting for my father to conclude a deal. His presence among us now gave momentum to the idea of making it concrete. Just before my father arrived, my brother had already chosen his future wife. He often talked about his former classmate in the teacher-training centre: a schoolteacher of his age named Sinath. Finally, my father had no problem with the choice. One month later, we officially married them. For the wedding, I was in charge for the drink supplies, as I had a connection within SKD, which was the exclusive agent of all imported liquors. Through my network of friends, I got special prices for any choice of wine or liquor. We had chosen rum mixed with iced soda water as the principal drink. The banquet took place in a restaurant in the old marketplace called Phsar Chas. My second brother, Sinoeun, invited two French nationals who were his French teachers at Lycée Preah Yukanthor to the wedding. One of them, named Guy Tardy, filmed the ceremony with his 16

mm cinema camera. The film was very popular when it was shown later to some wedding guests. My brother Chhoeun was very good at public relations because, immediately after his wedding and through his network of friends, he succeeded in having his wife, Sinath, transferred to teach in the same school.

Our house became more crowded with new comers: my new sister-in-law, her mother, and her two sisters. The war made our living harder and harder. More and more refugees were coming to live, mostly concentrating in Phnom Penh.

Working in Private Companies

In February 1971, I left my work and my friends at SKD, as I had just found an interesting job at a dairy factory of a Scandinavian company named Sokilait. In fact, after the coup against Prince Sihanouk, the Lon Nol government implemented an anti-Vietnamese policy, a kind of ethnic cleansing policy, forcing the entire Vietnamese community to leave Cambodia. Many

Vietnamese were arrested and sent to the transit camps before they were repatriated to Vietnam. The hunt for Vietnamese nationals was so violent that any Vietnamese found outside of the transit camps would risk his or her life. Because of this fearful situation, one day, Guy Tardy, the French teacher who had a young and pretty Vietnamese girlfriend, asked Sinoeun and me to help evacuate her from their apartment in Phnom Penh to a safer place. We agreed to help. One afternoon, we decided to accompany him and the Vietnamese girl in the Frenchman´s car to Neak Luong, a town situated on the Mekong River, known as the Vietnamese base in the east, about 40 km from Phnom Penh. We asked the girl to wear a sarong so she would look like a Cambodian woman. We asked her to keep quiet and not say a word when asked by police or military guards at any checkpoint. We were very lucky, as we had passed through all the checkpoints and reached Neak Luong without difficulty. The girl was finally very happy to find her relatives. She said goodbye to us with a profound expression of gratitude. We returned safely but late, at night, to Phnom Penh.

It is also because of the hunt for the Vietnamese that many Vietnamese professionals, including some accountants working in Sokilait, had left the company as well, leaving some positions for Cambodian nationals to fill in. This is why, I got a new job as an accountant in Sokilait.

In the new company, I learned new ways of doing business because we were completely in the private sector, which required effective performance to compete with others. Compared to SKD, which was a state-run enterprise where people seemed more relaxed, spending time going out or chatting endlessly, our work in Sokilait was more productive, and the company's working style was always under time pressure. Even though the way people worked in SKD was already much better than in government offices, Sokilait had to be run in accordance with international standards, as the company was a multinational with shareholders from Denmark, Australia, Sweden, and Cambodia. The head of Sokilait's parent holding company was a Danish national. He was the Consul of his country accredited to Cambodia. The Consul was appointed chairman of the board, with Cambodian and Swedish

vice-chairmen. The Danish and Swedish were mainly in charge of management, while the Australian took responsibility for the production, maintenance, quality control, and the research departments. I liked the Australian team very much, as their engineers actively participated in hard work in the same way as the ordinary Cambodian workers. The Cambodian engineers would stand aside, giving only instructions or recommendations to the workers rather than getting involved in physical work.

I was recruited to replace a Vietnamese accountant because the Cambodian chief accountant of Sokilait, named Lon Mean, who was one of Lon Nol′s relatives, was looking for a young and experienced Cambodian accountant with a hard-working spirit to join his team. The team was finally composed almost entirely of former Business School students. The chief accountant spent most of his time doing more public relations than real accounting work, as the company dealt with the government and its agencies on many issues, starting with bank overdrafts and import-export to price compensation. Under Prince Sihanouk's rule, there were no private banks. The Prince decided to nationalise the country's

banking system, leaving no place for private banks to operate. After the coup of March 1970, some private investments were brought into the sector, but Sokilait continued its daily business with the same government-owned bank. The Danish-dominated company had chosen a pragmatic way of operating in Cambodia. Like the Chinese businessmen, the company would bribe bank officials. One of them, Sokilait, was working with the Khmer Commercial Bank. Because of its excellent public-relations exercise, Sokilait always obtained huge amounts of overdrafts, or could easily extend the terms of its loans. In addition to cash facilities, the company was also in a permanent need of preventing any difficulty with the authorities in importing equipment or raw materials, as well as in exporting finished products. The company maintained very good relations with the Ministry of Commerce, as the ministry was in charge of administering product pricing. Sokilait was successful in obtaining government compensation for the difference between the market price, which included the fast-growing inflation borne from the burden of war, and the price of milk products fixed by the government. Normally, after government officials had checked with the company′s cost accounting section,

leaving a reasonable margin for profit, the price of the products was fixed. Every day, the Ministry of Commerce made public the prices of all consumed products, including the price of milk, which was rising constantly. If the ministry acknowledged that the market price was higher than that fixed by the government, the latter would compensate the difference to Sokilait, which, to my knowledge, was the only lucky company that received such favourable treatment from the government.

With good personal arrangements with the concerned government officials and their connivance, the company would not only obtain a good price but also be safe from inflation. Good arrangements also made the payment of the price compensation faster. So the better their relations with the government were, the better the company's interests were served. Lon Mean was very good at his public relations exercises. Probably using Lon Nol′s influence, he had many personal and friendly relationships with high-ranking officials, including the bank's top executives and many ministers, especially successive ministers of commerce. The chief was well supported by the company's top management of

the company, who allowed him to withdraw large amounts of money to pay or entertain government officials. The company had a marketing department; one of its tasks was to promote the products in the market. The department employed a dozen young women as hostesses, wearing beautiful uniforms. Many of them spoke English and French perfectly. They were either educated in French boarding schools or abroad. Among them, there were two or three Cantonese or Taiwanese young women who were employed just to lure the high-ranking government officials, especially ministers. To those young women, the company had granted special benefits for the beauty and service they provided to entertain the Cambodian VIPs.

Talking to Each Other Through Dictionaries

After I had been working for six months, the chief accountant was replaced by a Danish national who spoke only English, in addition to his mother tongue. At the time, I could only speak

French and Khmer, not English; I needed an interpreter to communicate with my new boss. The company recruited one. The interpreter, who spoke good English, was a young Cambodian who had no experience in finance and accounting. Many times, I did not understand the chief's instructions well because the interpreter could not explain them correctly to me. To improve communication, the chief and I decided to use two dictionaries: French-to-English for me and English-to-French for him. Each time I needed to explain something, I opened the corresponding page of my dictionary and pointed to the English words for him. The chief would do the same for me with the English-to-French words while both of us were making a resolution to study the needed language, French for him and English for me, within one year. We bet that after one year, each of us should speak and understand our respective learning languages. From that day on, I spent my late evenings learning English on my own with books and a tape recorder. I listened first to the tape and then repeated after the lesson until I was able to pronounce the English words correctly. Finally, the goal was met. After one year of intense learning, I was able to understand the language quite well, but not

to speak it fluently yet. We did not use dictionaries. However, a new problem was arising, as we had to struggle with each other to speak the language we had learned. When I spoke to him in English, my boss replied in French, or vice versa. It was a very good experience. I kept a close friendship with the chief accountant.

During that time, I discovered that I had a good memory, so I could remember any data I had just read for a long time. I responded quickly to any question my boss asked, whether about the numbers, the amount of money, the categories of accounts, etc. I was also good at learning foreign languages. I had studied Italian through books and a tape recorder until I was able to write letters to some Italian universities to request their documentation. But I was not persevering, as I was doing many things at the same time. After a few months, I abandoned my Italian studies, which remained so limited.

The Tax Officer Asked Me If I Was Ready

Just before he left, Lon Mean, the former chief accountant, was kind enough to allow me to work extra time as a part-time accountant in two small Phnom Penh branches or agencies of the same French mother company, whose regional office was based in Saigon, Vietnam. One branch was situated next to Sokilait; the other on the prestigious Norodom Boulevard, not so far from the Independence Monument. So after regular work, I spent my breaks, evenings, and almost all my weekends working for the French company. At both branches, I worked directly under a Frenchman who was the director of both. Once a month, a senior accountant would come from Saigon to check the accounts. They had the same problem as Sokilait did after the departure of the Vietnamese personnel. For more than one year, they had not updated the accounting and were two or three years late in paying taxes. I had to put order in all files and managed to ensure regularity with the taxation offices. In fact, for the regularisations, it was not as complicated as when our system of administration was

so corrupted. It sufficed to negotiate with the officer in charge how much money we had to pay him to obtain the official regularisation of the situation. At first, I knew that the system was corrupted, but unlike Lon Mean, I was a babe in the woods when it was time to play the real game.

One day, I asked to meet the tax collector, whose official title was "tax controller," to submit the company's purchase and sale book records so that the added-value taxes could be determined and payment could be discussed. The day we met, the officer asked me to show him the book and said, "Everything is ready?" I replied, "Yes, sir," thinking of the work I had done. But the officer kept asking the same question while leafing through the pages of the book, looking for something else. I did not understand his language. In fact, "Everything is ready?" meant "Did you put any envelope inside?" And the officer did not find the valuable envelope despite my answer, "Yes, sir." So we could not conclude our deal that day. I had to come three weeks later with an envelope full of money inside the book. This time, it was very quick. In a few minutes, we had agreed on almost everything.

Having a Bank Account at Crédit Lyonnais

In those days, I was very busy. I kept burning the candle at both ends. I did not see my parents, my sisters, and my brothers while they were living with me in Phnom Penh. I earned money just to feed my folks and distant relatives who had been crowding day after day because of the war, and to face the rising inflation that was outpacing our income. By 1971, I had saved enough to buy a Japanese-made motorbike, a Honda PC50, which was mostly used by women because it was very easy to ride and the cheapest among all the categories.

Later, I succeeded in opening a bank account in France. I was so proud to hold a chequebook in French Francs of the Credit Lyonnais, sent from Paris, while I was still living in Cambodia. In fact, I had only a few hundred French Francs in the account.

Comin Khmer, the Last Company I Worked for in Cambodia

In September 1972, I received a new assignment to work for the mother holding company named "Comin Khmer" in the newly set-up department called "Electronic Data Processing" department, or EDP, headed by a US-educated Cambodian named Leas Chanthon, no longer in the accounting department. I heard that Chanthon was one of the best Cambodian executives. He held a bachelor's degree in business administration and was close to the Scandinavian top management. He was behind the reform and reorganisation of the company's departments.

My new workplace was on Kampuchea Krom Boulevard, one of the busiest boulevards in Phnom Penh, much closer to home than Sokilait. By that time, I had already stopped working part-time for the French company because they had ended their business in Cambodia while the war was intensifying throughout the country. My new position was "EDP controller," the only position in the

company. My job was to control the codification of all documents before they were processed by computers. During processing, if errors occurred, I had to identify and correct them. I also had to check all final computerized documents before distribution. In fact, Comin Khmer was among the most modernised companies in Cambodia, equipped with its own electronic system using punch cards. We called it the "System of 80 hole-cards." Later, just before I left for France, the company introduced disk-system computers.

I worked in an office with a software programmer named Phan Soriyasy, who had just returned from France. He was clean and well dressed. Our two desks were initially arranged so that we would sit face to face. But Soriyasy asked me to change the arrangement so that his desk would be at the back of the room and mine next to the door. I agreed. But I read his thoughts: "This guy thinks I might have some contagious diseases that could contaminate him." In fact, I was so skinny because of hard work and probably malnourishment. I had dark skin that made me look like a person of African origin. Soriyasy finally became one of my

closest friends. Our office was between the punch-card room, where a dozen young ladies were working, and the boss's office. Almost permanently, we were visited, not to say disturbed, by both sides.

After a few months in the new position, the company sent me to take a test for "software programmer" training organised by the local branch of IBM. I passed the test and attended the evening courses to learn a programming language called "GAP" for the IBM 360/20 computer. Immediately after the result was announced, Soriyasi told me about his intervention, saying, "I have recommended to IBM that you pass the test" (?) Anyway, I must believe him. At the end of the training, I was able to write some accounting programs. On June 29, 1973, I passed the exam for the completion of the courses organised at the Chamber of Commerce, and I obtained the certificate issued by IBM-Cambodia.

Despite my new job in a new discipline, I still remained attached to my accounting studies. I continued to look for distance learning within French schools.

To face inflation and respond to the increasing need for cash during wartime, Comin Khmer was authorised by the government to issue bonds with an attractive interest rate. In addition, they organized a lottery that gave high prizes to the bondholders and the winners. The operations were very popular and successful, as customers rushed to buy them. The company became a financial place where both rich and less-rich people came to invest.

Unannounced Strike

The ground floor of our office was always crowded with customers and completely invaded by them on lottery day. As smart as a fox, the company leadership succeeded in settling the financial problem the company was facing, but they failed when dealing with social disorder, as years of war had taken their toll. One day, in the middle of heavy work, a colleague in the finance department told me that all the gates of the company, in and out, were closed and locked because the Union of Workers had ordered a general strike. I was very surprised, as we were not

aware of the existence of any union within the company, and more surprised not to have received any warning notice before the strike started. In fact, the government had just authorized the creation of a Union of Workers, headed by a US-educated advisor to President Lon Nol for certain political purposes, as factionalism was growing more and more. When Cambodia changed the regime from a Kingdom to a Republic, Lon Nol had made himself President of the Republic. He arranged a presidential election in 1972, and he was elected. The strike had interrupted all company activities. We were just gathering inside our offices. The top management spent their time talking on the phone with different government officials. The chief of personnel tried his best to negotiate with the newly appointed union representative to end the strike, but with no success. I did not reach my brother, Sinoeun by phone at the national bank, despite many attempts; so our family did not know that, since 3 p.m. I had been practically detained and locked up in our office. We did not have a phone at home. No hot news about the strike was reported by the national TV or radio. Only late in the evening did my parents realize I was missing. Fearing for my safety, my elder brother, accompanied by his wife,

drove their motorbike and rushed to the company building, only to notice that we were locked up inside. Just a few minutes after his arrival, the union representatives had received an order from their headquarters to end the strike and release all workers. After 10 p.m., we went home, and the incident was closed. Throughout the incident, I did not understand the reason for the strike, nor did I know the result of the negotiations that led to its end. Nevertheless, the incident made me return to the idea of leaving the country again. We discussed my initial and revived project to go to France seriously within our family. All agreed I should go.

Finally, I decided to go to France.

Many students and young professionals succeeded in obtaining Cambodian or foreign government grants to study or to be trained in different skills abroad. But I decided to go on my own. I saved enough money to buy an air ticket. In preparation for my future life in France, I wrote to the SCF in my capacity as its active member, asking them to help me find a job in France. The SCF

kindly advised that I must apply for work once I was in France, as employers could not interview me elsewhere. To be allowed to study in France, I needed authorization from the Ministry of Education, as the ministry had to certify the correctness of my request and the possibility that I could afford to further my studies. After a few steps, thanks to my brother, Sinoeun, who had some friends in the ministry, I got the authorisation. At the time, any Cambodian travelling abroad had to obtain a Cambodian exit visa first; otherwise, foreign embassies could not issue an entry visa. I had no passport or identification card. I decided to proceed by applying for those documents at the police department. The police department, especially its immigration bureau, was the place of heavy bureaucracy and corruption. But thanks to Sinoeun's connections, we simply followed the ordinary administrative process, which took more time than doing it through bribery. One of the police inspectors in the immigration bureau was a close friend of his. I used his influence to obtain my ID card, my passport, and the exit visa. In the last step of the process, before the exit visa was signed and officially sealed, I had passed through at least 20 desks where my case had been reviewed, checked,

rechecked, controlled, and inspected. Normally, ordinary customers had to pay or give a present to the officer in charge at each desk. With the Cambodian exit visa and the formal authorisation from the Ministry of Education, I obtained an entrance visa from the French embassy.

Marrying My Second Elder Brother

Just one month before my departure to France, another important event happened in our family. Sinoeun was going to marry. Unlike my elder brother, Chhoeun, Sinoeun did not know his future wife long before the marriage. In fact, my aunt, Samedy, had initiated the idea after many months of careful watching of her neighbours, with whom she cultivated an excellent relationship. A district chief's family was among them. The chief held a middle-rank position, but his grade was very high, up to "Oudom Muntrey." He was a quiet person but very agreeable to talk with. His wife was very intelligent. She came from a high-class family.

Her father was a very well-known medical doctor. She had a brother named Huot Sambath, who had held ministerial positions in the past.

At the time of the coup d′etat in March 1970, Huot Sambath was the Cambodian Ambassador to the United Nations. Since then, he had joined Prince Sihanouk′s exiled government in Beijing. By the time of Sinoeun′s wedding, Huot Sambath was one of the Prince′s exiled ministers. But the family maintained a close relationship with Lon Nol, too.

The district chief had a young and beautiful daughter named Tepthida, who was still attending the French Petit Lycée next to Lycée Descartes. My aunt and the chief′s wife were good friends and agreed that Sinoeun should marry Tepthida. My aunt talked to my mother, who in turn talked to my father. Finally, everyone was satisfied with the choice, except that the two interested parties did not know each other. Before the conclusion of the engagement, my two brothers, Sinoeun and Chhoeun, tried their way to see how pretty Tepthida was. They went to the Petit Lycée, sat inside Sinoeun′s car (Sinoeun had just bought a second-hand Russian-

made car, the Muscovite), looked out at the school's gate, and waited for Tepthida to appear at the end of her class so that they could watch her carefully. For Sinoeun, it was love at first sight. For nearly one week, my two brothers enjoyed watching Tepthida from inside the car. Finally, the wedding took place just one month later. For our family, it was an important and last social function they could have before everything collapsed. Many high-ranking officials attended the banquet at one of the big restaurants in Phnom Penh, "La Lune," or "the Moon." Sinoeun and his family-in-law had many friends among high-ranking officials. My brother had joined the "Democrat Party." He became a board member of the party, which was an official opposition to Lon Nol rule. Sinoeun was listed as one of the brilliant young members of the "Democrat Party" leadership. If the "Democrat Party" were to govern Cambodia, he would be appointed to a ministerial position. After the wedding, Sinoeun moved to his parents-in-law's house, bringing with him half-empty luggage.

My Last Days in Cambodia

I kept working in Comin Khmer until I resigned and was released from my duties just a day before my departure for France. My mother had prepared some dried food made of beef and pork, fearing for her son's starvation in a faraway country. My father looked after every detail, including clothes and luggage, and recommended not to forget fifteen kilos of rice. It was August 5, 1973, when the day of departure arrived. My father asked me to come to him, burning three pieces of incense in his hand. I bowed down three times before him and before my mother so that they could bless me, according to our tradition. Chhoeun prepared hot bathing water for me. He made me feel very comfortable. Sinoeun took care of my air ticket and all administrative arrangements: my passport and visa. But the flight was delayed until August 6, 1973.

On the final day, I bowed down again three times before my parents to say goodbye. It was the last time I paid respect to my father. Chhoeun prepared hot water again for my bath. It was his last act of affection to me. The airport was crowded with

passengers and well-wishers to see their relatives off. Many were crying to see their loved ones leaving. Except for Sithan, all of my brothers and sisters, as well as my parents, were at the airport to see me off. At the age of 23, I left Cambodia with less than USD 300, 15 kg of rice, some dried food, and some clothes. Once I slipped into the aircraft, I never saw my father or my four brothers, Chhoeun, Sinoeun, Naroeun, and Vuthean. At the time, I did not realise that the trip would take me away for almost 20 years before I saw my country again. I never thought that Cambodia would become a theatre of unimaginable and unthinkable tragedy through which millions of innocent people would die. I never thought that the Cambodian revolution would be the costliest in the world and the most destructive one for our nation.

This section of my life marks my first struggles to overcome hardship. The love of my parents, my family, and the spirit of brotherhood were most resourceful to me. It helped me tremendously to keep my strength. I never forgot this precious experience from the early phase of my life.

Chapter Three

Cambodia on Fire

(The 1960s and 1970s)

It was in March 1970, when the whole Cambodian nation was preparing to render its last respect to the late supreme patriarch of the Buddhist monks, Samdech Preah Sanghareach Chuon Nath, that the history of Cambodia turned a new page, ending a "golden era" of peace and stability and plunging the country into decades of darkness with endless sufferings, inevitably alternating between destruction and separation, injuries and deaths, genocide and foreign occupation, all in bloodshed and tears. Many Cambodians have learned an adage: "Once a great man dies, the world will be shaken." This was probably said by our ancestors: each time a king died, infighting broke out over succession to the throne. Cambodian children learned from history textbooks that, for decades, Cambodia rarely had a peaceful transfer of power from

one ruler to another. Even though the supreme patriarch was not a ruler holding real power, his death could be an evil presage for the country.

In fact, the supreme patriarch was the nation's most respected figure, as he was not only the leader of the Buddhist religion but also a great Cambodian scholar who had sacrificed his whole life to protect and promote Khmer arts and literature. He authored the Cambodian dictionary and many other books. He spoke many foreign languages, including French, English, Thai, Lao, Burmese, Vietnamese, and some Chinese dialects. He taught Pali and Sanskrit at universities and gave weekly interviews on the national radio on the Khmer language, its grammar, its writings, and its vocabulary, which was a very popular program that drew in a large audience. I was one of the regular listeners, a loyal fan of the program.

The patriarch had many students who became ministers or VIPs. According to the protocol determined by the royal palace, his rank rose to the same level as the reigning king and queen, to whom we must speak in royal language. Somehow, the Khmer

language is rich; for example, we have more than ten words for the verb "to eat." Special vocabulary is used depending on people's social categories. In September 1969, the patriarch had died at the age of 83. Because of his rank, protocol required the ceremony to take place at least six months later, probably in March 1970, so as many people as possible, even from remote areas, could pay their respects to the great man. From the day he died until the final cremation day, religious ceremonies had been organised every day, day and night, as delegations were coming from everywhere across the country. The patriarch's body was put inside a golden urn. It was displayed for the public at his official residence, Unnalom Pagoda. To honour the late great Buddhist monk, police and military men, and members of the youth, Yuvann, all in uniform, were dispatched to the residence.

The 18th of March 1970 Event

For many months, my other duties were to be posted as a guard at the main entrance of the patriarch's residence. Every day,

once I arrived at the pagoda, I remained immobile, standing in that place from 3 p.m. until 9 p.m. At the time, I was still working for the state-run brewery, SKD. I was among low-ranking officials who were ordered to fulfil the duties of honouring the late King-monk, his official title in our language. I did not know precisely when the cremation ceremony would take place. I only imagined that the ceremony would be grandiose, commensurate with the respect and love the people had for him. But the whole nation was awaiting the arrival of the Chief of State, Prince Sihanouk, who had left the country in January for France for a medical check-up. He had changed his schedule several times. Now, by word of mouth, he might be arriving within days, in mid-March.

During his absence, the country's political situation deteriorated steadily and critically. For weeks and months, the local media, usually loyal to the Chief of State, had revealed many scandalous stories about his entourage´s corruption, and armed incidents had occurred frequently at the border between the Royal Khmer Armed Forces and the Vietcong. In the streets, people talked openly about the Viet Cong´s sanctuaries inside Cambodia.

Rumours were circulating that some high-ranking officials had lent support to the Vietcong and had closely collaborated with them, providing them with ammunition and food supplies.

On March 8, people demonstrated in a village named Chantrea in Svay Rieng Province, at the border with South Vietnam, denouncing the Vietcong occupation of Cambodian territory. On March 11, in Phnom Penh, student demonstrations turned into violent riots against the North Vietnamese embassy and the office of the Viet Cong representative, which was the embassy of the "Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam." Thousands of people sacked the two communist Vietnamese embassies. But for the Cambodians in the streets or the ordinary peasants, no one could imagine or think that those incidents would be the starting point of an event that would lead to the coup against the venerated Chief of State.

On March 16, another student demonstration took place, during which demonstrators violently beat one man because he had hurled insults at the person of the prince, the "beloved Father of the Nation." The man was severely injured. The crowd alleged

he was launching sabotage and treason activities against the royalist regime. Generally, people saw the March 16 demonstration as likely supportive of "the prince" rather than a precursor to his upcoming fall. Many believed it was a political orchestration to support the Chief of State's diplomatic activities, including his astute deal with the communist bloc. Rumours were spreading across the country that even the anti-Vietnamese demonstrations had gotten the prince's approval. At the time, unlike school and university students, I did not participate in any of them, as employees or civil servants were not all mobilised. Finally, what was bound to happen was happening. It was a grave but bewildering period of our long tragedy.

The afternoon of March 18, 1970, was a tragic moment in our history. That afternoon, under the heat of the sun, I was walking up the dusty road from my house to "The Kapok Tree Market" bus station to take the three-wheeled vehicle, a Lambretta, to Unnalom Pagoda as usual. As I neared the bridge before reaching the station, I heard, through the transistors in the shops and houses along the road, amid the noisy sounds of car horns and engines,

the last part of the national anthem. Eager to learn more about it, I stopped walking, stepped next to a small shop nearby, and lent my ears to the radio broadcast, thinking to hear an important message from the Queen Mother[9], as normally only after an important message, a speech, or an allocution by the Queen would the national radio air the national anthem. Looking inside the shop, I noticed people were talking seriously in small groups. I waited for a while; immediately after the national anthem, the radio program aired only military-march music. Suddenly, the military music was interrupted, and the radio aired the official announcement again. This time, it was the voice of Cheng Heng, the President of the National Assembly, acting as interim head of state. As Acting Chief of State, he had the right to end his speech with the airing of the national anthem. Cheng Heng was reading a short statement saying, in brief, "The National Assembly and the Council of the Kingdom, meeting in a congress, have decided to

[9] Queen Mother Preah Kosoomak Neary Roath was the mother of Prince Sihanouk

remove their confidence from Prince Norodom Sihanouk in his function as Chief of State from March 18, 1970, at 13h00.[10]

On the spot, I was shocked and decided to rush back home, abandoning my initial plan to fulfil my duty to honour the late scholar. At home, my two brothers were busy listening carefully to the radio. They agreed that I should stay home and that we should be prepared for the worst. We stopped all activities except listening to the radio. In my mind, I tried to gauge the full extent of the situation. Unfamiliar with political uncertainty, I imagined the possible beginning of the "Third World War." In contrast, Sinoeun, like many university students, seemed optimistic and approved of the coup. He did not hide his satisfaction at seeing the end of the royalist regime. He believed the event would be a milestone for a true democracy in Cambodia.

The radio kept alternating between military-march music, the acting Chief of State's announcement, and the government's

[10] Ministère de l'information, Documents, Cabinets Ministériels Khmers, du 18 Mars 1948 au 18 Mars 1970, Message á la Nation de Son Excellencee Cheng Heng, Président de l'Assemblée Nationale, Exerçant les Pouvoirs de Chef de l'Etat, Phnom Penh, 1970, p. 170.

communiqué. Since its formation, the government had been called "the Government of Salvage." In fact, Prince Sihanouk appointed the government, with then-General Lon Nol as Prime Minister, at the end of January 1968, after the resignation of the previous one, calling it the "Last Chance Government." Under his reign, either as King or Chief of State, a royal government lasted approximately six months. At the time, Prince Sihanouk appointed and dismissed his government at will.

From time to time, we also heard announcements from Prime Minister General Lon Nol, the strongman, informing the public that he had removed the police commissioner of the capital, one of Prince Sihanouk's close aides. The strongman also appealed to the Cambodian people to unite behind his government to avoid bloodshed. We had spent hours and hours listening to the radio, which finally aired the entire debates of the National Assembly until late in the night.

Lawmakers raised constitutional issues rather than the military coup. Most speakers were known for their loyalty to the prince. All speakers, including In Tam, the acting President of the

National Assembly, had turned against him. They attacked the Chief of State violently. During the debate, lawmakers charged the prince with five chief accusations: treason, constant violation of the constitution, squandering state property and public money, corruption, and the annihilation of national prestige and dignity. As little people, we did not understand "politics" very well. We were just surprised by the accusations. But the way lawmakers presented the case, debating articles of the constitution on how the Chief of State was chosen and appointed, made us believe it was unlikely to be a military coup. According to those lawmakers, it was just a constitutional issue for which the parliament had full powers to act.

They Said Acting in Accordance with the Constitution

In fact, the Kingdom's first constitution was promulgated in May 1947, when Prince Sihanouk was still a young king. In 1941, the French protectorate had chosen him to succeed to the throne when his grandfather, King Sisowath Monivong, died. At 18, he

became King of Cambodia. In 1955, King Sihanouk abdicated the throne in favour of his father, King Suramarit, to play a more active role in Cambodian politics. This was a special case, as the throne was generally transferred from father to son. Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy with the king as the head of state. Since he abdicated the throne, the former king has, on several occasions, held the position of President of the Council of Ministers, which is equivalent to Prime Minister. But in the pre-1970 period, the President of the Council of Ministers was sometimes aided by a Prime Minister who acted effectively on his behalf. Son Sann is one example. Son Sann was appointed Prime Minister in 1968, while Prince Sihanouk, Chief of State, held the position of President of the Council of Ministers.

When his father, King Suramarit, died in 1960, Prince Sihanouk moved to amend the constitution by creating a position of Chief of State. He then occupied this position by giving Queen Kossamak, his mother, a symbolic role as the Guardian of the Monarchy, as the constitution prohibited women from reigning. According to the constitution, the chief of state was nominated by

the Sangkum Rreastr Niyum, "The Popular Community or the People's Socialist Community," the prince's rallying movement, and appointed by a joint vote of the National Assembly and the Council of the Kingdom in a special session called "congress." (Prince Sihanouk never referred, in the past, to the Sangkum Reastr Niyum as a political party. He preferred to call it "the Rallying Movement for National Unity"). On March 18, the parliament pretended to do the same for his dismissal: the same way in, the same way out, except that the party or the rallying movement did not meet to dismiss him and choose a candidate to replace him. The Rallying Movement for National Unity did not recommend to the Congress that Prince Sihanouk be dismissed and that a replacement be nominated.

The first night of that historic day was quiet and peaceful, but we were so scared that we did not sleep well. The next day I went to work as usual. In the streets, I saw incessant movements of military vehicles. Some heavily armed military officers were escorting VIPs of the Sihanouk regime in military Jeeps to unknown locations. I was told that those VIPs would be detained. I

also saw many tanks or armoured vehicles in front of the public and government buildings. Traffic seemed smoother and more orderly than before. For at least one month, law and order had been well maintained and respected.

Lon Nol Government Was to Chase Away Communist Vietnamese

Nevertheless, the new regime had based its legitimacy on the anti-Vietnamese sentiments of a large portion of the Cambodian people. Cambodians looked at the Vietnamese as their hereditary enemy. Cambodia had lost an important part of her territory to the Vietnamese in the past centuries. The Vietnamese occupation of any new Cambodian territory would inflame a very high Cambodian patriotism and exacerbate nationalism. Most Cambodians were fundamentally nationalist and patriotic. In those days, we were genuinely incapable of thinking about a civil war or Cambodian killing fellow Cambodian. But Cambodians were ready

to sacrifice their lives for their motherland in the event of foreign aggression. We were ready to fight foreign invaders. Still, we are in the present time.

Lon Nol government launched a violent campaign against the communist Vietnamese, the Vietcong, and the North Vietnamese. They justified the coup as an indispensable operation to stop the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodian territory. In fact, the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese governments did enjoy strong support from the Vietnamese community in Cambodia, in addition to a special friendship with Sihanouk's regime. Lon Nol then carried on dismantling all Vietnamese networks throughout the country. The process began with the arrest of suspected enemies and gradually it led to the systematic expulsion of Vietnamese nationals from Cambodia. Every day, I saw the police searching for Vietnamese immigrants from house to house. Those Vietnamese would be sent to transit camps, which were set up in the main cities before they were definitively repatriated to South Vietnam or maybe sent to a third country. Many Vietnamese were selling out their belongings in a hurry and volunteering to enter the camps

rather than to get caught by the Cambodian police. Taking advantage of the situation, I bought a cheap world-band receiver radio from a Vietnamese family that later allowed me to access world news in response to the events of March 18. The Lon Nol anti-Vietnamese policy received strong support from students, intellectuals, and city dwellers. Many young Cambodians volunteered to join Lon Nol's army. Without proper preparation and training, they were sent to fight the Vietcong, who, by contrast, were among the most experienced combatants in the world. Many perished in the first fight. Thousands of young Cambodians would die in the first months of the war, believing they were dying for a good cause.

Unlike my second brother, Sinoeun, who strongly supported the new regime, I was more conservative and worried about our fate. We often clashed in words and arguments, but my elder brother, Chhoeun, always supported me. So, we were two against one. With the world-band receiver, I had easy access to Radio Beijing, a popular radio station at the time. Its programs in Khmer

and its political editorials echoed the general sentiment of many people who still loved the former King.

Reaction of Prince Sihanouk

Prince Sihanouk left Paris for Moscow on March 13, a superstitious day for some in his entourage, who had jokingly advised him not to make the trip. The prince was on a five-day visit to the USSR. The day he was deposed, he was about to leave Moscow for China. His entourage learned the bad news on the radio but did not decide to inform the prince, the chief of state. Soviet Premier Kosygin brought him the news in a car en route to the airport. According to his book entitled "My War with the CIA," he answered Kosygin's question about what he intended to do in response to the coup. Prince Sihanouk wrote, "I am going to fight, of course."[11] His reaction was immediate. It was to resist, fight

[11] Norodom Sihanouk, La CIA Contre le Cambodge, Francois Maspero, Paris, 1973, pp 13-21

back, and to take revenge. When he arrived in Beijing, Premier Chou En Lai of China greeted him, having invited the diplomatic corps to welcome the prince at the airport and assuring him that he was still recognised as the legitimate head of state of Cambodia. According to the same book, Chou En Lai asked the same question of the prince, who replied, "I will fight until the end," but the Chinese Premier asked him again to think it over within 24 hours to ensure the prince's decision was definitive. The next day, Prince Sihanouk met with Prime Minister Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam, who made a special trip from Hanoi to Beijing to discuss the Cambodian situation. The Vietnamese premier pledged his full support to the prince in case he chose to fight back. He promised to help the Cambodian leader retake his power within a short period of time.

On March 20 and 21, Prince Sihanouk publicly announced his decision to resist. On March 23, he appealed to the Cambodian people to join him in a "maquis," in a united front, and to support a united royal government dominated by the Khmer Rouge that he would set up on May 5, 1970. Since his arrival on Chinese soil,

Beijing had become his rear base, and Radio Beijing his important campaign tool to reconquer power. Every night, at a regular hour, I spent a significant amount of time listening to the radio, hearing, in hiding, his appeal for rebellion and revolution, in his regular speeches or messages to the nation.

Who is Lon Nol ?

Before March 18, 1970, ordinary Cambodians knew Lon Nol as one of the prince's trusted military men. We called him the "General" because he was the only active military commander wearing "stars" known to the public. We learned that he began his career not as a soldier but as a magistrate, later as an assistant chief of district, or "Balat Srok," from which he rose to governor of a province. In the 1950s, by the time King Sihanouk began his campaign for national independence against the French protectorate, Lon Nol held the position of governor of Battambang, a rich western province of Cambodia. The king had appointed him as a "Colonel" to take care of the military component of his royal

crusade. So, he started his military career from the rank of colonel in a campaign against the French and the Vietminh (a Vietnamese communist group that occupied part of the Cambodian territory during the First Indochina War)

According to official records, our general had not been trained in a military academy.[12] But despite his civilian background, Lon Nol was respected by most soldiers. Because of his dark skin, they called him "Black Papa." Lon Nol looked like a pure Khmer or Khmer Angkor, although he was taller than most Cambodians. He also originated from my native province, Prey Veng. He was very superstitious and would not take any risk without first consulting an astrologer, receiving a Buddhist monk's benediction, or wearing amulets with supernatural powers. For many years before the coup, he had been very active in helping Buddhist monks and building pagodas across the country. In January 1970, he had just donated a power generator to light a pagoda in my native district. So far, I did not know the exact level of his knowledge or the depth

[12] Later on, Lon Nol may have received military training, but I am unable to obtain verified information.

of his understanding of Buddhism, but for sure, Lon Nol was well known to the public for his strong belief in the magic powers of the abstract world, gods, and spirits. He organised many religious ceremonies, visited many holy places, and invited well-known masters of those powers to visit him many times a year.

Lon Nol had a very good and well-respected wife named Chumteav Kheng, or Lady Kheng, who died in 1969. He also had a younger brother named Lon Non, who would become his right-hand man and, later, his political burden. I heard that, in March 1970, Lon Nol was reluctant to stage the coup. According to rumours, he acted only under pressure from one of his closest associates, Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak, cousin of Prince Sihanouk and, at the time, a Deputy Prime Minister. People in the streets, including myself, learned by word of mouth that Lon Nol was not willing at first to depose the prince and that Prince Sirik Matak was the man behind the coup. However, we did not know the exact details of the coup operations. It was just rumours. I did not know how close Prince Sirik Matak was to Prince Sihanouk, or what kind of associate he was to Lon Nol. Many history books

described Sirik Matak as a co-founder, along with Lon Nol, in the late 1940s, of a political party named "Khmer Renovation Party" or "Khemarak Ponnakar" in Khmer.

Prince Sirik Matak and Disputes in the Royal Family

Prince Sirik Matak was a member of the royal family who had held many ministerial positions. Official records show that he was appointed, for the first time, Secretary of State for National Defence in 1952, when King Sihanouk was leading his royal government and beginning his crusade to gain national independence from the French. Prince Sirik Matak had served as minister many times in different governments, overseeing defence, education, tourism, and information. At the time, in Cambodia, there was a general understanding that members of the royal family had, for many years, been in conflict over the succession to the throne. In fact, there were two lines of the royal family: Norodom and Sisowath. Both were descendants of King Ang Duong. Prince Sihanouk originated from both lines: Norodom through his father, Norodom

Suramarit, and Sisowath through his mother, Sisowath Kossamak, while Prince Sirik Matak is only from the Sisowath line.

King Ang Duong was recognised as the ruler of Cambodia in 1845. He was officially crowned King in 1848 amid Thailand and Vietnam's rivalry over domination and interference in Cambodian politics, which had intensified since the 18th century. He was the first King of Cambodia to propose French protection to help Cambodia escape the dilemma of either Thai or Vietnamese rule. A protectorate treaty was concluded, and it was effectively established after he died. King Ang Duong had three children from different wives: King Norodom, King Sisowath, and Prince Sivutha. Only the two lines of King Ang Duong′s descendants, Norodom and Sisowath, were entitled to accede to the Cambodian throne, as Prince Sivutha, the third, rebelled against his elder brother, King Norodom. Members of the two lines of the royal family remain eligible for the kingship according to today′s constitution, which was adopted by the constituent assembly in September 1993. The people of Cambodia elected the assembly in a general election organised by the United Nations in May 1993.

The Cambodian monarchic system has no designated crown prince. In the past, when the reigning King died, a council would select a new king among many prince candidates from the two lines. Female descendants are not allowed to claim the throne. Our princes were equal competitors. They were not prepared to accept easily any predominance of their princely adversaries. However, the reigning king, before his death, might wish to designate his son, his brother, or his nephew to succeed him. In general, the designated heir in such circumstances was the reigning king's son. Traditionally, the elder one was chosen if the king had many children. And our King, having many wives, had many children. Our princes often had many half-brothers or half-sisters.

At the time, King Norodom, the elder son of King Ang Duong, made an exception. When he was still alive, he had appointed his brother, Sisowath, as the vice-king or second king. In Khmer, we called him "Preah Obaraj." Before he died, King Norodom officially designated Preah Obaraj Sisowath, his half-brother, as the heir to the throne, provided that, in turn, after his reign, King Sisowath

would restore the throne to King Norodom′s son. King Sisowath did not honour the promise. Instead of returning the throne to the Norodom line, he designated his own son, Monivong, as the next King of Cambodia, which caused a succession conflict between the two lines.

Prince Sihanouk acknowledged this royal dispute. But in the same book he wrote in 1972, the prince blamed the French protectorate for the royal family′s division. The issue worsened when King Sisowath Monivong made his last will, leaving the throne to his son, Prince Sisowath Monireth. If nothing had changed, the Sisowath line would have assured its continuity. But this time, the French protectorate believed the throne should go to the Norodom line. So, they tried to find a balanced solution acceptable to both lines, Norodom and Sisowath. In 1941, when King Sisowath Monivong died, the French officials chose a young prince named Sihanouk. The French thought the young prince would be easily manipulated, and the choice would be an ideal balance, as his father, Prince Suramarit, was a grandson of King Norodom, and his mother, Princess Kossamak, was a

granddaughter of King Sisowath and a daughter of the late King Sisowath Monivong. The choice of young Prince Norodom Sihanouk instead of Prince Sisowath Monireth made the Sisowath line unhappy. Many ordinary people of my father´s generation knew those stories and told them to their offspring. But the history textbooks on Cambodia may give a more accurate account of the throne conflicts. So, the Cambodian public, in general, understood the March 18, 1970 coup as revenge by Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak against the ex-King Norodom Sihanouk, the Chief of State.

In the same book, Prince Sihanouk´s first reaction to the coup was as follows: "It was no surprise to me that Sirik Matak made the coup. He had hated me since my childhood because he believed that Prince Sisowath Monireth, his uncle, should be chosen to succeed to the throne, instead of me. He might believe that one should choose him to be king too"[13]. Curiously, many years later, in the 1980s, in our common exile, I got to know a Cambodian couple whose husband was a son of Prince Sisowath

[13] Norodom Sihanouk, le CIA contre le Cambodge, ibid, p. 19.

Sirik Matak and whose wife was a daughter of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The two lines of the royal family were finally reconciled.

Prince Sihanouk Did Not Trust the US

Behind the coup was a group of politicians unhappy with Prince Sihanouk´s past policies. In 1955, when he founded his political movement, the "Sangkum Reastr Niyum, or the Sangkum, the "Popular Community" or the People´s Socialist Community, after eliminating other political parties through elections, referendums, mass demonstrations, and other political manoeuvring, Prince Sihanouk led the country in his personal style. By 1963, the prince nationalised all private banks, insurance, the import and export trade, and distilleries. He restricted the importation of luxurious goods. He created many state-run enterprises, including SKD and the glassware factory, where I got my first jobs in late 1968. He cut off diplomatic relations with the USA, depriving Cambodia of US military and economic assistance, and he made friends with communist powers such as China, the

USSR, Eastern Europe, Cuba, North Korea, North Vietnam, and Vietcong. In the Western world, he chose France as the alternative to the USA. He admired General de Gaulle.

Prince Sihanouk had his reasons to take an anti-US stand, as the US and its allies, especially South Vietnam and Thailand, had supported a group of rebels called Khmer Serei, or Free Khmer, who were operating in the border area. The Khmer Serei was led by Son Ngoc Thanh, a fierce opponent who was installed as Prime Minister in August 1945 by the Japanese when they briefly took power from the French in a coup de force in Cambodia in 1945. Later, Son Ngoc Thanh was imprisoned by the French and the Allied forces and fled to South Vietnam and Thailand. He was followed in his rebellion against Prince Sihanouk in the late 1950s by Sam Sary, one of Prince Sihanouk´s aides who had helped him form his political movement, the Sangkum. At the same time, a plot by another pro-US military man named Dap Chhuon, a powerful governor of Siem Reap Province, in a coup attempt, was uncovered, giving clear evidence of US, South Vietnamese, and Thai connections and backing. Dap Chhuon, the

author of the plot, was shot dead in a military operation led by Lon Nol, who, at the time, was gaining enhanced appreciation and trust from Prince Sihanouk.

Another plot to kill the prince and his parents, by US allies, occurred on August 31, 1959. A pair of suitcases, supposedly containing gifts for his parents, King Suramarit and Queen Kossamak, was delivered to the royal palace. One of the two suitcases exploded when Prince Vakrivan, the chief of protocol, opened it, killing him and another palace official on the spot, while the two monarchs were meeting, in an adjoining room, with Son Sann, the governor of the national bank and Vice- President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Son Sann, who became my boss in the national resistance against the Vietnamese occupation in the 1980s, told me this story too, 20 years later.

The repetition of plots against him, with often strong evidence of US and its allies' involvement, in addition to many examples of coups and political assassinations orchestrated by the CIA in their search for surer anti-communist allies in the region, made the

prince fearful of any relationship with the US and the West, except for France. Prince Sihanouk labelled Cambodian politicians who were pro-Western or sympathised with the Khmer Serei as Blue Khmer or Khmer Khieu. As anti-Sihanoukists, many Khmer Khieu were also labelled as republican. Any Khmer Khieu, Blue Khmer, or republican found in obvious contact with the Khmer Serei of Son Ngoc Thanh would be accused of treason. He would be arrested, imprisoned, or executed. Prince Sihanouk would also encourage people to use airtime on the national radio to hurl insulting messages at the Khmer Serei or the Free Khmer, voicing support for the prince′s political actions against their propaganda. The Khmer Serei′s combatants were operating an anti-Sihanouk radio station from the Khmer-Thai border area. After the coup of March 1970, Son Ngoc Thanh returned to Cambodia and became Lon Nol′s Prime Minister in 1972.

The Khmer Rouge and Khmer Intellectuals

In contrast, the prince labelled another group of politicians whose ideology was to support communism or socialism as "Red Khmer" or "Khmer Kraham" or, in French, "Khmer Rouge." Khmer Rouge became well known to the Western world because the prince always referred to them by their French appellation. In those years of the 1960s, a man, one of the fellow natives of Prey Veng province, much older than me asked me, "Do the Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer) have a red face or red skin?" I was so surprised by the stupid question, because the guy was not completely illiterate. While the Prince distanced himself from the US and their allies, and while he moved closer to the communist bloc, he had also imprisoned the Khmer Rouge. Many people, including teachers and intellectuals, were arrested and jailed. It was the case of my uncle, who was imprisoned only because of his training in China. Others would escape from prison and join the Khmer Rouge secret bases in remote areas. This was the case of Khmer Rouge leading figures such as Pol Pot (or Saloth Sar),

Khieu Samphan, Son Sen, Ieng Sary, Hou Youn, and Hu Nim. Khieu Samphan, his two associates, Hou Youn and Hu Nim, disappeared in 1967 when, in Phnom Penh, many people assumed that Prince Sihanouk's police might have killed them. Some socialist-inclined intellectuals who had been trained in France were known to the young students or workers like me for their integrity and their nationalistic, revolutionary, and anti-Western ideology. Many of them educated us to reject Western civilisation, especially the US, which they called neo-colonialist and imperialist. They highlighted their beliefs to the point where some "red" teachers would suggest that our "Pek Kuok" or "yam bean" tastes were far better than apples; as in Cambodia, apples were one of the symbols of luxury products we imported from the Western world."

In Cambodia, the circle of intellectuals was small, but alongside other high-class people, they were active in politics. Ordinary Cambodians were ready to respect the authority of any leader, so far as its legitimacy could be proved, because legitimate leaders were accepted as "merit-makers," following the traditional

norms of Buddhism. At the time, I saw two categories of intellectuals: the Buddhist-educated and the Western-educated.

The first category of intellectuals belonged to the new generation of Buddhist monks, which was also called the "new church" or, in Khmer, "Thor Thmei," which, in principle, they had a good knowledge of Buddhism, especially its triple canons or "Tripataka" (the Buddhist holy scripture), and they held that politics were not forbidden to Buddhist monks, so long as political activity was meant to promote peace and the happiness of the people. New church monks translated the Buddhist teachings into Khmer, while the old church "Thor Chas" repeated the teachings in Pali, an old language practised by the Buddha in his ancient time. But this openness of mind sometimes led them into struggles for more rights and freedom. That is why we found them in the street, in mass demonstrations since the 1930s, either to protest against the French protectorate or to support any movement for more civil liberties. As non-conservative, their activities might also hurt the monarchy, which was part of the Cambodian Buddhist

tradition. Many of these intellectuals remained attached to the nationalist camp; very few followed the communist path.

The second category included former students who had studied either in the capital, Phnom Penh, or abroad, particularly in France. Many were members of the royal family or families of high-ranking officials, and very few belonged to the middle and working classes. The latter could not pursue their studies without enormous financial support from their parents or scholarships from the Cambodian or host-country governments. In this category, there were a group of the "big and rich" and a group of the "poor."

Those who chose to engage in politics did so because politics led them directly into the upper class or kept them at the same level of social status, or because of political belief. Most of the "big and rich" remained conservative, while most of the "poor" had a tendency toward socialism, certainly because of a complex of materialistic inferiority. Faced with capitalist ways of life, spoiled by wealth, the power of money, and the honours the first group received due to their status, left-leaning intellectuals inclined to the left suffered from complexes, felt offended, and dreamed of

liberating themselves from their state of inferiority. They wished to re-establish justice for all and took Marxist approaches to combat social injustice. Prince Sihanouk used to say in his public speeches in the 1960s that "our students, who were sent to France, came back as communists, while those sent to Moscow came back as capitalists."

It is true that when one entered a developed country like France, where all luxurious things and comforts existed that one could not afford due to a lack of means, one would feel a victim of social injustice and would be receptive to the communist doctrine. Many Khmer Rouge leaders were in this category. In contrast, those sent to Moscow were able to see and to live with communism. They realised that with communism, they would never have freedom and individual rights.

Among the "leftist intellectuals," the majority were teachers, who had a considerable influence over the youth. They knew how to attract young Cambodians and spread the ideal of several honest and honourable intellectuals who were also competent and industrious. Those intellectuals provided valuable support to the

Khmer Rouge at a later stage in their fight to gain control over Cambodia.

I Became a Member of a Commando

During the war, after the coup, the Lon Nol government ordered all civil servants to form several groups of "commandos." Military officers were dispatched to different ministries, departments, or public establishments to train civilians in combat skills and the use of weaponry. The "commandos" "main duties were to guard public buildings, especially their workplace, day and night, and to provide logistical support to the military when needed. As an employee of a state-owned company, I could not escape those duties. Like my colleagues, I received military training such as self-defence, military discipline, and some gun-firing techniques. But I was not an assiduous trainee. I missed many training sessions to the point where the top management of the company decided to warn me that my behaviour was not appropriate, taking

into account the grave circumstances of the country. The warning made me feel like I was not a real patriot.

As a member of the "commandos," my duties were to guard the main entrance of the SKD building, in rotation with other colleagues, for a few hours a day. At night, we would be sent to guard the residence of the big boss, the company's CEO. On duty, we were armed with a rifle, a French A1 carbine. Later on, with US military assistance, some commandos would be equipped with M16 rifles. The boss was a generous man. Every night, he provided us with a proper dinner and iced tea. We never saw him or any member of his family at home, as we were posted on the rooftop of his villas. My CEO was an inspector of the customs department, a lucrative job in the Cambodian civil service. Mrs Chine Renne, his wife, was well known because she had served as the Secretary of State for Information under Prince Sihanouk from 1967 to 1969. She was a rare woman to hold a ministerial position. My boss had been appointed a few months earlier, after the dismissal of one of Prince Sihanouk's aides, who was accused of embezzlement and sentenced to many years in prison. While I

was fulfilling my duties on the rooftop of the villa, my thoughts went elsewhere: my future, which looked more and more uncertain with the military coup.

Many residents of Phnom Penh seemed to accommodate their daily lives with the new political reality in the most natural way. Military uniforms became the all-time fashion. Commando members wore uniforms but no military ranks. A commando officer would carry a pistol at his waist to differentiate himself from the ranks and file. At that time, carrying a pistol was a sign of commanding status, thus stylish and attractive.

In Lon Nol's Army, Any Rank Can Be Bought

Many civil servants rushed to buy pistols. Others simply changed their jobs to become army officers. But the army became so corrupt that military ranks could be bought. Little by little, month after month, in addition to its regular personnel, Lon Nol's army was inflating, populated with all sorts of people: civil servants,

schoolteachers, businessmen, carpenters, butchers, barbers, artists, and other job seekers who considered the army as the best place to earn their living and get rich in wartime. One of my friends, Muntha, joined the army as a second lieutenant in the first year of the war. He has disappeared since then.

A year later, after I had left SKD, I realised that the burden of the war had not been shared with all citizens, as in the private sector. Especially in my new companies, Sokilait and Comin Khmer, workers were not mobilised to serve in any commando unit. In those companies, I was released from the duties of guarding the office building and residence. I dedicated my energy fully to my professional activities, as my company had paid compensation to the army to free the staff from all obligations.

Lon Nol's Alliance Fell Apart

After one year of existence, Lon Nol's regime lost more and more support from the people, and its territory shrank. In March 1971, the Khmer Rouge-dominated front led by Prince Sihanouk claimed that four-fifths of Cambodia fell under their control. Conflicts between the partners within the coalition against Prince Sihanouk broke out openly. By October 1970, Lon Nol proclaimed the Khmer Republic in Phnom Penh. Prince Sirik Matak renounced his title and privileges as a prince to become a normal citizen. Later, he founded the Republican Party. In Tam, the acting President of the National Assembly, reunited the democrats and reactivated the Democrat Party, created in the 1940s by veteran politicians who produced Cambodia's first constitution in 1947.

In Tam was the governor of the southern province of Takeo, whom Prince Sihanouk promoted to Minister of the Interior in December 1964 after he arrested two Khmer Serei officials, agents of Son Ngoc Thanh. One of the two, named Preap In, was his relative. Preap In was brought to a special congress in Phnom

Penh and sentenced to death by a military court. He was executed by firing squad in a place along Road 4, called "Trapeang Kraloeng," in Kampong Speu province. The Ministry of Information filmed the execution and showed it to the public. In Tam was a beautiful talker with his populist style. Each time he spoke in public, he always referred to the good Cambodian way of life, his love for Khmer culture and civilisation, especially Khmer traditional music. Until the day Prince Sihanouk was deposed, he had always pledged his loyalty to the prince. At the time of the coup, In Tam was the Acting President of the National Assembly; as the holder of the position, Cheng Heng became Acting Chief of State in Prince Sihanouk's absence. Since the coup, In Tam had become one of the prince's uncompromising foes. He now made public statements that "for many years, he has admired, in secret, the "great leadership" of Lon Nol. But now, one year after the coup, Tam prepared to challenge this so-called "great leadership" as he became the leader of the rejuvenated Democrat Party, the legal opposition party.

Constitution of 1947 and the Democratic Party

The Democratic Party was created in 1946 by some eminent intellectuals whose main ideas were to bring democracy to Cambodia and to gain its independence from France. Many had studied in France. The leading figures among its founders were Prince Sisowath Youtevong, Ieu Koeus, Sim Var, Chhean Vam, and Thonn Ouk. Except for Prince Youtevong and Ieu Koeus, I had the chance to work with the other three veterans, namely Chhean Vam, Sim Var, and Thonn Ouk, when we were united in an anti-Vietnamese front in the late 1970s, under another veteran politician, Son Sann. Prince Youtevong was a rare Cambodian who held a PhD in mathematics. He was a prince of great culture. According to history books, still young, at the age of 34, he died in 1947 from complications arising from work overload, tuberculosis, and a malaria attack. Ieu Koeus was assassinated in January 1950. Prince Youtevong and Ieu Koeus were the main contributors to adopting the first Cambodian constitution, which recognised essential citizens' rights and laid the foundation for a

parliamentary monarchy. The National Assembly adopted the constitution, elected for the first time by universal male suffrage. At the time, women had no right to vote. The election was made possible under the French protectorate, as, according to the modus vivendi signed in January 1946, upon their return to Cambodia immediately after World War II, French authorities had acknowledged the King´s autonomy in internal administration, allowing the creation of political parties, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and other civil liberties.

The election took place in September 1946. The Democrat Party won the majority, gaining 50 of 69 seats. As a result, the Democrats formed a government led by Prince Youtevong. Their mandate also included drafting and adopting the new constitution, which was finally promulgated on May 16, 1947. However, this constitution contained some provisions that allowed the King to interfere in government business, as it stipulated that all executive, legislative, and judicial powers emanated from the King, who had the right to appoint and dismiss the government, as well as to dissolve the National Assembly that was elected by the people.

Since 1946, the Democrat Party had won every election, but the Democrat legislature never completed its term, as King Sihanouk dissolved it when he needed to keep the political situation under his control. The Democrats had won all general elections until the King abdicated the throne in favour of his father and resolutely entered politics. He created his own political movement, the Sangkum, in 1955. From that date, Cambodia was placed under a one-party system, and the Democrat Party remained in limbo until 1971.

In addition to the military front, Lon Nol conducted the war on other fronts as well: the purification of the Khmer race called "Khmer-Mon," using Buddhism against communism, and the modern republican revolution against the archaic monarchy, hoping to create and maintain the momentum for the people's support of his regime. Political parties were allowed to form. His younger brother, Lon Non, created and led a party named the "Socio-Republican Party," regrouping Lon Nol supporters and opponents of ex-Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak's Republican Party. The Democrat Party reappeared in the new political arena with the

same logo: an elephant head holding three lotus flowers. The party first attracted support from the youth and intellectuals. Among its leaders, in addition to In Tam, who still enjoyed some popularity, I found two other leaders, Douc Rasy and Chau Sau.

Douc Rasy was known as a "rightist" politician, or one of the "Blue Khmer," who had served as Under-Secretary of State for Justice in July 1958 for six months and as Secretary of State for Planning in October 1966 for another six months. He was also known as a longtime Member of the National Assembly. He had run a French edition of a newspaper called "Phnom Penh Press" in the 1950s and 1960s. By the time the Democrat Party was reactivated, he was teaching at the Phnom Penh Law School (Faculty of Law). Chau Sau, another lecturer at the same Law School, was the opposite of Douc Rasy.

Chau Sau was politically inclined toward socialism; that is why Prince Sihanouk painted his group "Pink," or "See Chumpoo" in Khmer. He was highly respected for his integrity. He also served as Under-Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Finance, and Secretary of State for Planning from October 1962 to October 1966

in the most stable government of the time under Prime Minister Prince Norodom Kantol. Chau Sau was a rare Cambodian politician who, in private, wore simple sandals, drove his car himself, especially his Citroën 2CV, and sat down with street people, eating Chinese noodles on the sidewalk. When asked why, he replied, "This is the best way to know the real living conditions of the ordinary people." Many Cambodians criticised our political leaders for not knowing the reality of ordinary people's world, the daily price of rice, and especially that of Chinese noodles, for example. Chau Sau wanted to make a difference. He was born in Kampuchea Krom, a southern part of the Cambodian territory annexed by Vietnam. We recognised our compatriots born in that part as Kampuchea Krom or Khmer Krom by their name and their accent. In Kampuchea Krom, the same family name was given to all residents of the same village, even though they originated from different families. By their name, we recognised not their individual family but their village. The most used family names are: Chau, Son, Truong, Thach, Danh, and Kim. The Khmer Krom formed a strong community in Cambodia. Known as victims of Vietnamese persecution, especially in South Vietnam, in the recent past, many

Khmer Krom in Cambodia have dearly upheld patriotic values and engaged easily in politics.

Soon after, my brother, Sinoeun, joined the Democratic Party, as did many of his fellow law students. And quickly, he rose through the hierarchy of the party. He had a very good relationship with its leadership. Sinoeun finally lured me into the party as well. At the time, I did not know much about the party's history or its political essence. Sinoeun handed me a copy of the party′s manifesto, which was written in French by Chau Sau. The manifesto analysed the country's socio-economic and political situation and recalled the party's success stories in the 1940s and 1950s. I was very much impressed by the analysis, as it went into detail. I noted with particular interest the tone the party had set to fight, for example, against dictatorship, corruption, and, in particular, the Lon Nol regime. I was also excited to see in person In Tam, Douc Rasy, Chau Sau, and other party leaders whom I had known only by name through the media. From then on, I could participate in meetings with them and eventually speak with

them. In general, our politicians who formed our national elite lived mostly distant from ordinary people. They were not always visible.

I volunteered to help Sinoeun update his party's bookkeeping. It was just a junior role and a part-time job. I did not know how the party could generate income. I only knew that another party leader, Chan Kim Cheang, provided money as often as needed. But, like in military training, I was not a regular party worker. I was supposed to come to work once a week; I came once a month. However, I managed to be free for a weekly breakfast with Chau Sau, Sinoeun, and others. We often went to the "Thmor Da" restaurant, where Chau Sau did not waste his time doing political propaganda. Even in the restaurant, he talked to everyone he met to introduce or advertise the Democrat Party, its objectives, its ideology, and its organisation.

The party held its weekly meeting regularly. Whenever I could, I joined, not to share any views or opinions, but just to listen to the comments the party leaders made on the military and political situation of the country. Usually, In Tam made his comments on the military and political situation, while Chau Sau

made his on the country's economy. During these weekly meetings, I noticed some intellectuals who had spent time in the party and then secretly joined the maquis, giving their valuable support to the Khmer Rouge. Those intellectuals used the Democratic Party as a transit point.

Election Under Lon Nol Regime

In April 1972, Lon Nol organised a referendum in the area under his control to adopt a new constitution of the Khmer Republic. Until 1993, it was the first and the last time I had participated in an election in Cambodia. To tell the truth, I did not vote for this constitution. I was strongly opposed to the regime, so none of their political actions got my support. After the proclamation of the new constitution, Lon Nol proposed holding the Presidential election. This time, I did not go to vote either, as I was disappointed with the regime. The Democratic Party nominated In Tam as its candidate. Another presidential candidate was Keo An, the Dean of the Law School. The Democratic Party

conducted a successful campaign. With widespread support from the people, especially the youth, and under the party's popular leadership, every Democrat firmly believed that In Tam would win the election. But finally, the official result gave the victory to Lon Nol, even though vote counting in Phnom Penh had indicated a clear success for the Democratic Party´s candidate. That evening, Sinoeun and I went to In Tam´s house. We were planning to celebrate the election victory. But ballots from most provinces, all under tight military control, favoured Lon Nol, whose title was now Mr Marshal. Lon Nol had been promoted to marshal by In Tam and his fellow parliamentarians in 1971.

Ex-Lon Nol´s Allies Attempted to Re-Unite

Marshal Lon Nol was proclaimed President of the Khmer Republic in June 1972. But his Khmer Republic had been very much weakened, facing increasing Khmer Rouge military pressure on the ground. Probably with US advice, Lon Nol tried to reunite

his ex-partners in the coalition against Prince Sihanouk and to lure the opposition leadership, especially the Democrat Party, into his camp. Douc Rasy was finally given an ambassadorship to London. Many Democrats criticised him for always siding with the people in power, even when he had to fight them. They said his theory was to fight from the inside. But, in general, once one is installed in power, he/she becomes comfortable with power.

In the end, In Tam ultimately agreed to become Prime Minister of the Lon Nol government. He decided to join Lon Nol without the approval of his colleagues on the party board, which ultimately cost him his expulsion from the Democrat Party. Since that day, Chau Sau had taken complete control over the party. In the 1940s, one of its founders, former Prime Minister Sim Var, was also expelled from the presidency.

The Democrats Wanted to Build

A Bridge Between Warring Parties

A few months before I left Cambodia for France, Chau Sau used to drive his Citroen 2CW, carrying us, Sinoeun and me, as well as his other colleagues, to tour the city of Phnom Penh. It was the occasion for us to exchange views on how we would govern the country if the Democrat Party were to rise to power. At one time, we raised the issue of corruption, as it had gnawed at our society and seriously menaced our future. The solution was not easy. One of us jokingly opined that capital punishment for the culprits was the sole answer. But inside our minds, we never thought of killing anyone for corruption. On the contrary, the Khmer Rouge was using killing as a method of governing. Most of the population of the Lon Nol regime had been killed by the Khmer Rouge since the first day they took power.

The Democrats also tried to build a bridge between the Khmer Republic of Lon Nol and the other side led by Prince

Sihanouk. At the time, many people in Phnom Penh, as well as somewhere else, perhaps including Prince Sihanouk, believed that the real leader of the Khmer Rouge was Khieu Samphan. At first, I believed the same. I also wanted to join his front. Revealing my plan to leave Cambodia, I asked Chau Sau for his advice on what he would think if, from Paris, I were to join Prince Sihanouk's front. Chau Sau advised me not to take such a foolish decision, as he knew that Prince Sihanouk or Khieu Samphan did not really lead the Khmer Rouge organisation. He also did not tell me about Saloth Sar, alias Pol Pot. Chau Sau gave me a brief account of the Indochinese communist movement's history. He said, "Many real leaders of the communist movement had always stayed in the dark until the day they took power. He also gave me some examples of how communist chiefs eliminated each other through different methods of assassination. Chau Sau strongly recommended that I remain neutral and make every effort to build up a broad public relations network.

Sinoeun tried his best to keep in touch with my uncle, who was serving as a district chief of the People Revolutionary

Committee, "Kanak Srok" in the Khmer Rouge organisation of my native district." I did not know whether he had a mandate from the Democratic Party to bridge the two sides of the war. But it seemed to be party policy to end the conflict through negotiation. He sent a short message to my uncle twice, but received no answer. To Sinoeun's third message, my uncle replied with the following words: "Don't take any action and be quiet." In 1977, my uncle was arrested and assassinated by the Khmer Rouge.

Son Sann, the man who was appointed Minister of Finance in the first democratic government in December 1946, just a few years before I was born, and who became my boss during our struggle against the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in the 1980s, also tried to play a bridging role. With many years of loyal service to Prince Sihanouk and a personal, good relationship with Lon Nol, he might have thought his peace initiative could work. At the beginning of the conflict, he attempted to negotiate with Lon Nol for Prince Sihanouk's return to Phnom Penh. Lon Nol, still a strongman, refused to deal with him. Later, as the situation worsened, Lon Nol agreed to negotiate, but Prince Sihanouk, from

Beijing, refused. It was Cambodia's inescapable fate. As many Cambodians believed, our history might be written by a mighty power, and the country might pass through decades of darkness. They believed it was out of reach for our fellow human beings. But I realised that this was due to the particular character of the Cambodian leaders. When one felt strong, he/she did not need to make a compromise. I saw the same behaviour of our leaders when it was time to negotiate the peace settlement in the 1980s. Without pressure from their backers, the Cambodian antagonists would continue to fight to their mutual death.

The Failure of the Lon Nol Regime

The victory of the Khmer Rouge over the regime of Lon Nol in April 1975 was an event that announced the disastrous affliction which the Cambodian people and nation had to endure for three years, eight months, and twenty days before the invasion of the Vietnamese troops. This victory resulted from several factors. On one hand, the regime was decayed and incapable of surviving

without external aid. This proved to be true to such an extent that the US disengagement from Vietnam could only precipitate the fall of Lon Nol´s regime or the Khmer Republic.

On the other hand, the Khmer Rouge benefited from a strong international socialist solidarity in the Cold War, and they proved their capacity for organisation and internal control of the country. In addition, Prince Sihanouk's contribution to the Khmer Rouge was considerable.

The Khmer Republic was in a state of extreme political weakness, and later a military one. Immediately after Prince Sihanouk was removed from power, and as the country entered a war that became increasingly destructive, the regime lacked manoeuvring room and could not mobilise the necessary resources. On the contrary, political games only increased national discord rather than strengthening and consolidating unity, which the regime greatly needed during the crisis. Hence, it faced opposition from royalists, communists, and even its own people. Anarchy emerged and was joined by corruption, which became the major cause of its fall.

In the military, the republican army was grouped into large units and stationed in barracks to defend the principal cities and the capital, Phnom Penh. The units used movement tactics during the day and rested at night. The Khmer Rouge did the contrary. They controlled the villages, which served as administrative units in Cambodia, and carried out their military operations at night. They overran the barracks, cut the supply lines, and liberated the countryside to finally surround the cities. While the military chiefs of the Lon Nol Army, who very often did not take part personally in the battles, passed their time enriching themselves through corruption, the common soldiers became demoralised. They brought their wives and children with them to the battle lines. For their part, the Khmer Rouge never concealed their efforts to overthrow the Lon Nol regime and to exercise their power in the liberated zones.

Khmer Rouge's Ruse to Win the War

In areas where their authority was not yet very strong, the Khmer Rouge used a policy of charm and the name of Prince Sihanouk when dealing with the population. That is why they did not hesitate to offer their services to the villagers – to help the peasants cultivate the land, tend the animals, find water for the household, clean the house, and take care of sick people, for example.

And if one of their soldiers took an object or ate some fruit or vegetables from the property of one of the villagers without being able to ask his permission, the Khmer Rouge did not forget to leave a little note with a friendly word or some money for the owner. Through such small acts, they won the war. In other villages, the Khmer Rouge used force and terror to impose their authority, combined with psychological warfare, broadly supported by communist propaganda.

In addition, the propaganda focused on a war of national liberation against the "US imperialists" and their "lackeys," led by a

traditionally legitimate chief, Prince Sihanouk. The prince was still considered the natural and legitimate chief of the Cambodians, following Cambodia's monarchist tradition, and he knew the feelings of the Cambodian peasants, whom he called "le Petit Peuple" or "the Little People," and how to win their support in his speeches.

In playing those games, the prince could not have been ignorant of the fact that one day the Khmer Rouge might throw him away like a "cherry kernel," according to his own words; he used to characterise his collaboration with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. Yet perhaps his personal hatred of the Lon Nol regime and the republicans drove him to collaborate with the Khmer Rouge, or maybe the prince saw no other way to play a predominant political role in Cambodian affairs than by standing by the communists. And the Khmer Rouge finally acted. They did not allow the prince, as the Chief of State, to return immediately to Cambodia after their joint victory. He had to wait until September 1975 to be able to make a brief visit to Phnom Penh before delivering a speech, on behalf of the Khmer Rouge, at the United Nations. He definitively

returned to Cambodia in December 1975 to serve as an honorific Chief of State until he resigned on April 2, 1976.

By the sheer originality of their brutality, the Khmer Rouge made their regime one of the bloodiest in the world. The genocide, or even more appropriately the auto-genocide, they committed in Cambodia, raised as much indignation as condemnation across the world. Apart from their special methods of physical elimination of their opponents, many points reflect the characteristics of the communist totalitarian system: education in hatred, the destruction of the family, the destruction of traditional society and old civilisation, the mock enemy, the new man of the new society, the omnipotent party and its nomenclature, etc.

During their rule, the Khmer Rouge not only decimated millions of Cambodian lives, but they also killed the Cambodian soul. Much literature has described, with telling details, the methodical and systematic destruction of Cambodian culture, tradition, civilisation, and way of life, not to mention the suppression of the most elementary human rights and dignity. I was probably one of a few whose destiny was preserved by living

outside the Khmer Rouge's control. But like almost every Cambodian family, I did suffer the loss of many of my loved ones at the hands of the Khmer Rouge's regime. My father died in December 1975 from starvation. My elder brothers, Chhoeun, Sinoeun, and two younger brothers, Naroeun and Vuthean, were sent to "training camps" and were reported killed by the Khmer Rouge in 1977.

This Cambodian Tragedy Must Be Remembered Forever As One Lesson of History

This section of our modern history is dominated by unspeakable suffering, wars, and destruction. However, future generations of Cambodians should draw lessons from those unfortunate events. The first lesson Cambodians must learn is how to reconcile, to coexist, and to respect adversity. In the past, Cambodian leaders inherited a culture of absolute power. They did not know how to balance or share power.

When Cambodia fell into internal conflict, Cambodian brother-enemies were rarely able to reconcile. The winner never agreed to coexist with the loser, so the loser, if not dead, had no other choice but to wait for the right time to seek revenge. The winner usually believed that his/her victory was irreversible. Consequently, he/she was not prepared to make a compromise or to forgive. Similarly, the loser never recognised his/her defeat once he/she found a safe haven. In revenge, the loser always asked foreigners to get involved in internal disputes, especially between the two neighbours, Thailand or Vietnam, depending on the circumstances. The neighbours were repeatedly asked to help reconquer the power he/she had lost. Each time, they were so generous and ready to help the Cambodians fight each other to death. They eventually profited from the Cambodian infighting and weakness.

According to the teachings of Lord Buddha, nothing is fixed and permanent in this changing world. Victory or defeat, success or failure, is subject to change. So, winners and losers should make a compromise and reconcile.

Another important lesson Cambodians must learn is to take full responsibility for their actions. In the events of the collapse of Cambodia in the 1970s, or the fall of Lon Nol's regime and the rise of the Khmer Rouge to power in 1975, not many Cambodian leaders accepted their responsibility. They just put the blame for the Cambodian tragedy on others. Prince Sihanouk blamed Lon Nol for the March 1970 coup against him, which plunged the country into decades of war and destruction. Lon Nol, in turn, was blamed by his supporters for the fall of the Khmer Republic. Many of his former generals I met in the 1980s did not concede or accept their own failure, except to blame their chief, Lon Nol. For their part, the Khmer Rouge leaders rejected their responsibility for the mass murder of the Cambodian people. They just accused the secret Vietnamese agents of sabotage.

One important point we must not forget: no government can survive without the people's support. The Khmer Rouge just ignored this basic law. They did not care about the well-being of their citizens. They not only disregarded human rights but also violated them. They practically employed lying and mass-murder

methods to govern. In their rhetoric, the Khmer Rouge painted themselves as patriotic, genuinely nationalist, making every sacrifice for the nation and for the people. Behind this curtain of beautiful words, they killed or starved their own people to death. Without the support of the people, the Khmer Rouge´s regime did not last long. They were removed from power after three years, eight months, and twenty days of absolute totalitarian rule.

Last but not least, the lesson to be learned is to give historians the task, the freedom, and the right to write our history independently. In the past, our leaders made many attempts to rewrite history so that their person, their actions, or their regime could be glorified to the point where they altered the truth and destroyed the tracks that marked their predecessors, adversaries, or enemies.

In drawing lessons from the past, it is useful to face the future with a sense of reality. I write this chapter to underline the enormity of the devastation, hoping that the deadly price the Cambodian people paid during those events will help transform loss into an asset in philosophy, conceptual thinking, moral

principles, and behaviour so that past misfortune will not be repeated. I also hope that the high cost of our mistakes, failure, or weakness will help form a new consciousness that will guarantee a promising future for Cambodian generations to come. By writing this chapter, I am fully aware of the insignificant contribution I can make to the process. But I am proud to do my part, as a Cambodian worthy of its name, who has witnessed the resurrection of peace and the rebirth of a nation.

Chapter Four

My Parisian Life

(The 1970s and 1980s)

My First Time on the Plane

From the doorstep of the aircraft, I waved goodbye a hundred times to bid farewell to my well-wishers. Once I stepped inside, I did not realise that this moment was the last time that I saw my father and my four brothers, who would later die under the Khmer Rouge's regime. I also did not realise that it would take me more than 20 years to see my mother and my country again. A young and pretty French woman showed me to my seat. She was one of the two hostesses who were standing at the entrance gate to welcome passengers. To my surprise, I was told to sit next to one of the sons of the former chief of my native district. As it was my first trip by plane, I did not know how to fasten the seat belt.

Haughtily, I did not dare ask my neighbour how to do it, but my neighbour was friendly, knew how to fasten the belt, and fastened it for me. I was among a group of passengers who were supposed to take a UTA flight from Phnom Penh to Paris the day before. But for an unknown reason, the UTA flight was postponed. So, the new schedule required us to fly from Phnom Penh to Bangkok, where we had to spend a night in transit, before catching the UTA regular flight the next day. Ultimately, an Air France Boeing 707 brought us to Bangkok. My neighbour was among the other passengers flying straight to Paris.

When we arrived in the Thai capital, it was already late in the afternoon. After clearing immigration and travel procedures, we were transferred by minibus from the airport to a hotel in the city. At the time, Bangkok airport was still small, not yet sophisticated or modernised like it is now. The journey from the airport to the city seemed long, as the road was not so good and there were not many big buildings along the way yet. Along the way, we could notice some wooden houses and pagodas. For me, there was not much change of scenery, compared with Cambodia.

We were provided with food and accommodation at a hotel named Mandarin, located not far from Chulalongkorn University. Staying in this hotel, I discovered for the first time what is called a luxurious way of living. Before, I had never had a real bedroom or a real bathroom. After dinner, many of my traveller-mates went out for sightseeing or dancing in some nearby nightclubs. In contrast, I went straight to my room. I wanted to fully enjoy the comfort of the hotel's furniture. To tell the truth, it was the first time I had taken off my clothes for a real bath, although the beginning was hesitant, as I was shy about my nudity. In Cambodia, we used to wear the "krama" when taking a bath. It was also the first time that I could lie my entire body on a real bed with a mattress, blanket, and sheet. I even used the bedspread as a blanket. At breakfast the next morning, I noticed that many other Cambodian travellers were experiencing the comfort of a luxury hotel for the first time, just like me.

Like me, they did not know how to sleep properly in a bed with a mattress and a blanket. Others didn't know how to use the air conditioner and complained that the room was too cool, etc.

But they all joked about these first experiences and missteps. So, breakfast time became a joyous moment. In fact, most of our group was made up of middle-class students, not to mention working-class families. A lady with two small children, probably married to a Cambodian diplomat, seemed familiar with that way of living. She also seemed to enjoy our company, laughing at us all the time when jokes were made.

When we got back to the airport for our longer flight to Paris, the lady advised us on how to check in and clear immigration. Normally, a Thai hostess, a well-dressed and made-up woman, accompanied us. She explained every detail of the process, but we did not understand it well. In addition, passengers had to pay the airport tax. I did not have the correct currency to pay the tax. So, the Cambodian lady paid for me with her own money. I owed her a debt of gratitude not only for the money she gave me for the airport tax but also for her generosity and friendship. To my great regret, however, I failed to ask her name and address. She has remained unknown to me until now. She might have died or survived under Pol Pot as well.

On the plane, I enjoyed the air service, food, drinks, and many stopovers in different countries before we arrived in Paris. Happy with the comforts of air travel, I had no idea this flight would bring me to a new, far-away world. My real adventure began when a hostess announced the next landing in France. Through the microphone, she said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, now we are flying over Zurich. In about two hours, we will be landing in Paris." It was at that moment only that I was genuinely concerned about my final destination. In fact, I did not know where to go from the airport. It was August 8, 1973 (8/8/1973), a date easy to remember, when we arrived in France. We landed at Paris-Orly airport, as Charles de Gaulle did not exist yet.

My Adventure in Paris

At the immigration desk, I just filled in the form, copying the same information as one of the Cambodian traveller-mates. After all procedures were cleared and the luggage was collected, I moved toward the airport exit, following every step of a Cambodian

student my age. The student seemed to be a regular traveller and to know Paris well. He told me that this was not his first trip. His brother, two or three cousins, and friends greeted him. While he was waiting for his brother's car to take him to the city, I asked him for help. Despite some hesitation and shyness, I decided to ask him for an address on a list. I showed him the address of one of my neighbours in Phnom Penh, Dr Sou Nem, a medical doctor who had obtained a grant from the French government two years ago to further his specialised studies in medicine. The address read: 2, Villa du Bel Air, 75012 Paris. I asked the student whether he knew this address or could explain how to get there.

The young man and his relatives not only knew it well, but they kindly offered to take me straight to Dr Sou Nem's home. I was so happy with the offer that I hurried up to jump in their car. The group was nice to me. They tried to make me feel comfortable while I worried about how to introduce myself to Dr Sou Nem, as I had never met him in person or spoken to him. The group rendered me a great service. They brought me to the doorstep of my host's apartment. Once again, to my great regret, I failed to

ask for their individual names and addresses. They have also remained unknown to me until now.

When he opened his door, Dr Sou Nem did not expect my coming. Luckily, his wife recalled a conversation she had had with my father just before she left Cambodia three months earlier, when he said I was planning a trip to France. It was a surprise for him. Pleasant or unpleasant, I was not so sure. But Mrs Sou Nem was very friendly. She came along with her husband. Smiling, she called me by name and made me feel at home, even though we had never met before. She invited me to come in.

Dr Sou Nem's apartment had a living room, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a small kitchen. In the living room, five or six men in their thirties were playing cards. They were fortunate trainees who benefited from the French government's grant to further their studies in France. They were mainly Cambodian medical doctors, like Dr Sou Nem, who needed to specialise in different medical skills. Mrs Sou Nem introduced me to the group, who paid little attention to my presence, as the game greatly enthralled them. After having a short chat with me, Dr Sou Nem

rejoined the group, leaving his wife to take care of me. I went straight to the kitchen, where I dropped off my luggage, including 15 kg of rice and some dried and salted beef. I spent a few moments with Mrs Sou Nem, telling her the latest news from Cambodia. As it was lunchtime, I helped my host to prepare the table. In fact, there was no table. Because the apartment was crowded with guests, we took our lunch in the living room, on the floor. I helped her cover the floor with used newspapers, on which we put the dishes. The entire group stayed for lunch. I joined them too. After lunch, some stayed to play cards, some took a siesta, and others left. As a newcomer and the most junior, I helped Mrs Sou Nem do the washing up.

Dr Sou Nem was in his late thirties. With his dark skin, like Lon Nol, he was taller than the Cambodian average. He was healthily corpulent but not really fat. He was a popular figure among the Khmer republican community in France. He had a very useful connection with the Cambodian government. He was one of the Cambodian elites loyal to Phnom Penh and fiercely anti-royalist. I did not know exactly what his specialised training was,

but I could tell his seriousness when he did his homework. When not studying, he spent his spare time alone consulting cards or playing them with his friends. He also liked gambling with the "Tierce," the French horse-racing game. For this, he studied carefully many specialised sports newspapers. He knew from memory every name of the best horses. In addition to his training work, Dr Sou Nem was very busy with other businesses. His telephone rang continuously for many reasons: friends arriving in France, the venue of the next card party, a social function at the Cambodian embassy, help with paperwork for newcomers, etc... His friends visited him many times a day, from the early morning to the late evening. He had a very good relationship with his neighbours, as there were no complaints about any disturbance.

Mrs Sou Nem was in her early thirties and was smaller than her husband. She was not of a prime beauty, but she had a real Cambodian look, with her smile and charm. She was a real housewife, doing nothing else but taking care of her family. As a good talker, Mrs Sou Nem had many stories to tell. She also spent a lot of time talking on the phone. She quickly took me in, and we

became friends and close associates in our joint household work. She had come to France three months earlier to join her husband. Dr and Mrs Sou Nem had two young children, one boy and one girl. The girl remained in Cambodia, while the boy, the elder child, lived with them in France at age 5.

In the kitchen, I spent my spare time on my first day in France learning how to take the "metro," the Paris subway, studying the metro map carefully so I could get around the city right away. In Cambodia, I had planned to go to the "Préfecture de Police de Paris," the Paris immigration office, the day after my arrival to apply for the resident permit. But in reality, the immigration process was complicated. Not only did I need to know how to travel within Paris, but I also needed many supporting documents, such as proof of financial resources, accommodation, and school certificates, before I could apply for the permit. So, my plan, outlined in Cambodia with a detailed schedule, could not be implemented immediately.

Another major issue remained: my permanent accommodation, or a place to stay for a longer period. Dr Sou Nem

and his wife were kind enough to welcome me, but there were no rooms or beds available in their house. However, one two-bedroom was not fully occupied, and one might be available in the next three days. In fact, one of its occupants, a Cambodian computer science student, was leaving. The other occupant was a high-ranking official. The student would move to a city north of Paris. When I arrived, he was enjoying his vacation. He would return the next day to pack up his belongings and move out definitively. So, exceptionally, I could spend my first night in France, in his bed, and afterwards I should find another place to sleep, at least, for the next three days. Finally, it was arranged that I would stay with the Sou Nem´s family for the first day and night; I would move to a hotel for three days, and then I would come back to re-occupy the place for a longer period of time.

On the afternoon of that first day, Dr Sou Nem helped me deliver mail and gifts I had brought from our family´s friends in Cambodia to their relatives in different places in Paris and its suburbs. Dr Sou Nem knew most of the recipients. He drove me in his second-hand car to several destinations. We spent several

hours in the car, crossing or zigzagging through the busy streets of Paris, which ultimately made me sick. Because of the sickness, I could not enjoy the sightseeing of the beautiful capital of France that my host was offering. Dr Sou Nem seemed happy to provide such a kind of service. To me, he acted like a big brother. When we got back home, the dinner was already ready. Like a good trainee, I helped Mrs Sou Nem again until we finished the household work. Because of the time difference and jet lag, I could not open my eyes. I fell fast asleep. I was peacefully and totally dead to the world.

The next morning, I woke up early, at around 6 a.m., while the other occupants of the house were still deeply asleep. After a hot shower, I decided to go outside alone. I wanted to tour the area, which was so quiet at this early hour, except for the occasional sound of cars passing by. I walked down a little bit of Villa du Bel Air and immediately turned left to finally reach Boulevard des Vincennes. I didn't dare go far, fearing I would get lost. I noticed very few activities, as the real and busy life of Paris would begin a few hours later.

A bakery had just opened 20 m from the house. Some people, not many yet, were coming to buy bread and croissants. Other shops along the boulevard were still closed. The streets were busy, but not much traffic yet. I was surprised to see water coming from the sidewalks, as that was how the streets in Paris were cleaned. I was really feeling like a stranger in the city. Of course, I was a foreigner coming to a foreign country. Everything was different from Cambodia, even the smell of the garbage and the kitchens, which took me two or three days to get used to. At first, I was very impressed by the immense socio-economic infrastructure I had not had the chance to see before: streets, avenues, boulevards, highways, bridges, subways, other communication networks, electricity and water supply systems, etc. The contrast was extreme, as I came from a poor country currently at war and from a city with no security, where power supplies were interrupted every hour. I quickly concluded that those infrastructures were fundamental to development. They were nonexistent in many developing countries like Cambodia.

When I got back home, Dr Sou Nem and his wife were eating their breakfast. I joined them by bringing some bread I had bought from the bakery. The French bread was so tasty that I could eat the whole stick. After breakfast, my hosts suggested taking me to visit some of their friends and some open-air markets in Paris. So, I went out again until we returned home at lunchtime.

In the afternoon, the computer science student who was supposed to leave me his bed came back from vacation. His first name was Bell. He came to pack his luggage so he could move to a city named Compiegne. Bell was older than me. He was kind enough to train me right away on how to travel on the metro. We bought some tickets and a city map, especially the metro line map. We travelled underground until I could recognise the different lines of the train system and know how to catch the connecting trains. In the end, I took advantage of the free movement to look for a hotel room so I could stay for the next three days. We found a single room available in a hotel named Terminus de la Porte d´Orléans. The room was small. It had a single bed and a "toilet," a place to sleep and to take a shower, nothing else. I finally spent

my second night in France in this hotel. I did not bring my belongings with me, as I would continue to come to Dr Sou Nem´s house for lunch and for dinner. From the day we first met, I had not heard from Bell anymore.

I finally settled my accommodation problem by living with Dr Sou Nem´s family. I still needed to resolve the issue of a residence permit and find appropriate ways to support myself in France. In Cambodia, I got a French visa with only a three-month limit. I believed that if I had a job, I would earn some money and I would be – I was quite sure – allowed to stay for a longer period. I needed to find a job quickly. I needed to justify my income when applying for the residence permit. In addition, my finances were running short. A week after I arrived, I had already spent half of what I had. Not only did I spend most of the money on hotel accommodation, but I also bought many items and services, including transportation tickets, stationery, clothes, and cooking utensils.

For most items, I didn't buy them for myself; I bought them for my family in Cambodia. As gifts, I packed and mailed them to

my parents, sisters, and brothers, along with my letters. To tell the truth, I could not resist the appeal of shopping. I found everything new and useful, which made me think about the shortage of goods in Cambodia. Thinking about the shortage, I became homesick. I wanted to send them everything I had found in abundance. I was right with my love for my folks, but I was wrong with my pocket.

At First, I Must Find a Job

Decisively, I had to seek a job. The first step to follow was to contact my professional association, the French Accounting Society, or SCF. I had written to the SCF, asking for help, when I was in Cambodia. They advised me to come in person so that employers could interview me. So I did. I went to its headquarters, hoping to get assistance. But the association could not do much for me at the time, as I was searching for a job in August, the month of vacation. I forgot that most French people were on

annual leave. Offices were rarely open. The advice I got then was to wait until September to get in touch again. Consequently, I had no other choice, even though my need for money was increasingly pressing. While waiting for the SCF to find me a job, I ventured to knock at the door of any CPA office I found on my way. I decided to go door-to-door. I began in the area near my home. Many employers replied, "We don't need any additional staff." Some said, "You should ask your embassy for a job."

In mid-September, I went back to the SCF. This time I was luckier. A lady in her late fifties, Mrs Charlot, head of the association's employment section, received me. She quickly found the letter I had sent from Cambodia asking for a job, and my personal file. She looked at the job offer list, and she said, "You should work in Paris." To get a job immediately, I told the lady I was ready to accept any position, even a demoted one. I had been a confirmed accountant in Cambodia, but now I was willing to accept any position, including the lowest one, aide-accountant or an aide-bookkeeper. Mrs Charlot made three phone calls to arrange three appointments for me. She was so kind as to explain

carefully where to go, how to take the metro, from which station to which station, whom I should meet, and what time I should arrive at the meeting place. She was acting like a real mother. She called me "mon petit" or "my little boy." At the time, there was no unemployment problem in the accounting profession. Besides, I did not place any conditions on my employment.

My first appointment was for a position as an aide-accountant in a CPA office. After the interview, I was told to wait for a decision, which would be communicated in the next few days. The second appointment was also for a position as an aide-accountant in a travel agency near the "Palais Royal" in the first district of Paris. The address indicated that it was not far from the Louvre Museum and the Tuileries Garden. Travelling on the metro, I got off at the Palais Royal station. From the station, I walked down the sidewalk along Louvre Street. After crossing the first street, I continued until I reached the street I was looking for, rue de l' Echelle. At the corner, there was a bank with its yellow sign, "Change." On the right, immediately after the bank, I found the travel agency at 2, rue de l'Echelle, with a sign, "Pharos France." Apparently, number

2 seemed to be my predestination; for example, I was born on November 2, as stated in my official birth certificate. I was living at 2, Villa du Bel Air; I was looking for a job at 2, rue de l'Echelle; and the interview I was seeking was the second one.

The travel agency was family-run. It was small, with fewer than ten workers, but quite busy. Through the glass front door, I could see two young ladies talking to their customers, while a young man spoke on the phone nearby. At the back of the room, seated at his desk with the desk lamp on, a middle-aged man was reading his files. When I introduced myself to one of the two young ladies, the one wearing glasses, she first recommended that I take the stairs on the right-hand side to the accounting section on the first floor. But, acknowledging my timid movement, she asked her client to interrupt the discussion just for a moment so that she could accompany me upstairs. I learned a few minutes later that the young woman's name was Antoinette. She was one of the big boss's two daughters; the young man on the phone, Richard, was her husband, and the man at the back,

Melatos, her uncle-in-law. Melatos was a former Greek lawyer holding a doctorate in law.

Antoinette quickly introduced me to a group of three ladies; afterwards, she returned to her work. One was her mother, named Helene Amiel; the other was her aunt, Mrs Melatos. The third person, Mrs Debaize, the youngest of the three, a lady in her first forties, was the head of the accounting section. She was supposed to interview me. But instead, she briefed me on what my work would be if I accepted the offer. She also briefed me on the agency's activities. Mrs Debaize managed the accounting section, with two aides. One was Mrs Melatos, the boss's sister. Mrs Melatos handled general accounting and sales accounts. The other aide, Mr Jesua, was reaching retirement age in the next few months. Jesua worked as a cashier and handled relations with the banks. He was absent when I was interviewed. Mrs Amiel, the spouse of the big boss, a Greek-born woman, came from time to time to lend a hand to the section, especially to follow up on money collection. When necessary, Mrs Amiel could speak with Mrs Melatos in Greek, as both women spoke it fluently. Mrs

Melatos and Mrs Amiel´s families had lived in Greece for many years before they moved to France.

My job would be to assist the head of the section in all of her work, from recording business transactions, account reconciliation, tax and social declarations, and money collection to producing the yearly balance sheet. In brief, I should do what the head was doing. Of course, my work would be under her supervision. I could perform all those tasks, except for tax and social declarations, as I needed to study French tax and social legislation first. For this, Mrs Debaize suggested that I learn the work on the job. The travel company was offering me a salary of FFR 1,400 per month. It was the lowest salary in the accounting profession. For me, it was enough to begin my new life in France. So, I did not hesitate to accept the offer. At the end of the talk, I was asked if I could start immediately. I asked to report to work the next morning so I could prepare properly.

To close the deal, I was finally introduced to Georges Amiel, the company's CEO. He was in his mid-fifties and of a Mediterranean type, wearing glasses and speaking two or three

more languages in addition to French and Greek. The CEO just shook my hand and congratulated Mrs Debaize and me for the quick conclusion of the deal. He warmly welcomed me to join his staff.

Mon Petit

I left Pharos France, the travel agency, full of hope and happiness. On my way to the metro station, I bought a new tie on the spot for almost FFR 10, as the one I brought from Cambodia was awfully out of fashion. I did not rush to get back home or to continue to the third interview. I had decided to work for the travel agency; I must not change my mind. So, I entered a brasserie, ordering a shandy and a French ham sandwich. It was the best lunch I had had since arriving in France, not to mention the daily Cambodian dishes of the Sou Nem family.

When I arrived home late in the afternoon, not many people were there yet. Mrs Sou Nem was, as usual, in the kitchen

preparing some dishes for dinner. She did not know what I was doing every day outside the home. She never asked or investigated my activities. She did not expect me to find a job so quickly, especially an office job. To support themselves, most Cambodian students who came to France on their own, without any government grants, usually worked in Chinese restaurants as waiters, cleaners, or dishwashers. Normally, as non-immigrants, those students had no right to work. When I told her that I had just got a job as an aide-accountant in a travel agency in the first district of Paris, Mrs Sou Nem was so excited. She jumped up. She was full of joy. She said, "Mouly, you are great. If I were your mother, I would put you on my head and carry you." To share the burden of the household expenses, I pledged to pay FFR 200 per month, which she accepted straight away.

The next morning, to the big surprise of the other occupants of the house, I went to work wearing a tie and suit, in sharp contrast to what they were used to seeing: me washing up dishes. Many of Dr Sou Nem's friends, born with a silver spoon in their mouths, did not believe their eyes, as they used to regard me as a

poor guy, good only for being a cleaner. Now, they were beginning to realise that I was one of the resourceful people.

In my workplace, I was rapidly adopted by the ladies of the accounting section, who, like Mrs Charlot of SCF, called me "Mon petit" or "My little boy." I worked, once again, very hard to earn my living and to gain the trust and confidence of my superiors. I performed all tasks assigned to me by Mrs Debaize. From time to time, I replaced Jesua to do some work, such as going to the banks, especially to the one next to the Opera Theatre. I built a strong relationship with the team in the accounting section. During lunch, the ladies prepared their meals in a small kitchen next to the office. I preferred to walk several streets, enter a brasserie in the area, and have a sandwich and a beer for lunch. Since I started my job, I had spent my money carefully, as I did not have much left for the remaining month of September. I spent most of it on necessary or unavoidable items such as metro tickets and food. In addition, just before I began my work, I had bought an overcoat in anticipation of the forthcoming winter. Two days before the end of the month, I was running short of money. That day was not like

my ordinary day, as I did not go to the brasserie for my usual lunch. Instead, I bought a single sandwich, with no drink, from a street vendor on the sidewalk, outside a mall named "Magasin du Louvre." I smiled at the vendor when I opened my purse and gave him the last coin of Francs. I only had FFR 5. The man responded with a reciprocal smile, understanding that this was my last penny. In the afternoon, before I left the office, I asked Mrs Debaize for an advance of FFR 200. My team leader did not understand why I needed money just two days before my first pay arrived. Finally, to my great relief and pleasure, she gave me the advance as requested.

French Authorities Said I Was an Illegal Worker

I really enjoyed working at Pharos France. But my happiness in my work was short-lived. It wasn't because I had problems with my boss or co-workers, or because of my working conditions. I had a big problem because of my legal status. As a non-immigrant, I had no right to work in France. I had no social security card, no work or residence permit. Mrs Debaize realised I was an irregular worker, as she couldn't compile my personal file, which should be based on those administrative documents. In principle, French labour law punished heavily any employer who recruited and employed an illegal worker. But my employer took a risk. They were so generous as to keep me working and help me regularise my situation. Luckily, I was allowed to continue my work as a non-declared staff member, moonlighting, until I got proper authorisation to become a regular worker. During this period, I was paid cash, with no records. At one time, they told me to hide in the kitchen and shut up all day while French controllers inspected the company and searched for social security verification. To help me

obtain my work permit, my boss, especially the ladies in the accounts section, prepared a signed contract for me, which I would use to support my application. I was assigned to take steps to regularise my situation in accordance with immigration regulations. The task was not simple.

Under French law, a foreigner wishing to work in France must obtain a signed contract with an employer and an immigrant visa from a French embassy before entering French territory. Once they arrive in France, they should apply for both permits: a work permit and a residence permit, which the immigration office and the Ministry of Labour would issue. My case was quite the opposite. I had entered French territory with no signed contract and with a non-immigrant visa. In addition, my job was classified as a protected profession that cannot be offered to foreigners. At that point, my chances of success were slim. Now, I understood why many of my fellow compatriots had ventured to work in hiding as dishwashers in some Chinese restaurants. I also understood that, because of the difficulty of getting a work permit, many Cambodian nationals, who had no financial resources, agreed to

be repatriated rather than face jail or starvation. A closed circle of procedures existed. The immigration office would not issue a residence permit to me if I could not justify my resources. I could not justify my resources if I were not allowed to work. I could not work if the French immigration office did not authorise me to stay in France.

For me, it was clear. I needed to stay in France; there was no question of returning to Cambodia while the war was going on. The work permit was a life-or-death issue. I decided, with determination, to get it.

Seeking Political Asylum

The Prefecture of Police, the French immigration office, had scrutinised my case since I applied for a permanent resident permit. In the past, I had only been given a provisional permit, pending a final decision. No permanent resident permit meant no work permit, no resources, and certain repatriation. I could not

wait any longer. This time, I went to the Prefecture of Police, with my heart in my mouth. When I arrived, I was given a waiting-call number. Unlike other applicants, I sat nervously while I waited. In the end, as expected, a French lady, the official in charge of my case, told me that I had no right to work in France. Instinctively, I showed her a handwritten note I had just prepared while waiting for my turn in the waiting room. I was asking for political asylum in France, strongly believing that only with refugee status could I break the procedural deadlock. I raised a few but reasonable motivations for my claims, based on the fact that I belonged to an opposition party in Cambodia.

In a few lines, I told the French authorities that I disregarded the Lon Nol government as my legitimate government, and that I did not recognise the Khmer Rouge-dominated royal government of Prince Sihanouk in Beijing. The lady left me for a while and came back, after consulting her superior, giving me another provisional permit while my request for refugee status was under consideration.

I endured my difficulty alone. I did not tell anybody about my trouble or my claim for political asylum in France. No one around me, including my hosts, Dr Sou Nem and his wife, knew about my approach or my decision. They continued to believe I was the best and rarest young Cambodian who had succeeded in getting a regular job, working comfortably in an office. However, I did write to my family in Cambodia about my problem with the French authorities, regarding my work and residence permits. But I did not mention asylum. I wrote many letters to my father and my two older brothers.

In my first letter, just after I arrived in France, I told them about my first flight and how the Sou Nem family received me. It took five days to send a letter from France to Cambodia and one week to send one back. So, we exchanged our correspondence practically every two weeks, telling our respective stories. Through the exchange, I knew that every time my letter arrived whether the letter was sent to my father or to either of the two older brothers, it would end up at our "Kapok Tree Market" house for the whole family's gathering, where someone among the children, my

younger brothers, would read the letter they took as a precious message from a loved one thousand of kilometers away. When I told them that I had gotten a job, they were full of joy and happiness. Generally, they were convinced that I was really their only hope. I began sending them some money since I had the chance to work. When I told them about my difficulty, the whole family was completely depressed. I knew that they were living in a harder condition, in a country at war, where life and death were daily concerns. So, I should not bombard them with bad news.

I spared no effort to claim refugee status. I visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Office for Refugees (OFPRA) several times, where I made my official deposition. I explained in more detail the main political reason that supported my claim for refugee status. I based my claim on the fact that I belonged to Chau Sau's group, which had expelled In Tam from the Democrat Party. Now, In Tam had become Prime Minister of Lon Nol's regime. He might use his power to put our lives in danger. Consequently, I chose to oppose the two enemy governments, the Lon Nol government and the Khmer Rouge-dominated government

of Prince Sihanouk. I wrote to Madame Nicole de Hauteclocque, the widow of the late Marshal Leclerc of France, to ask her for help in settling my case. Mme de Hauteclocque was a deputy, a congresswoman from Paris. During this time, I was very often absent from work, but my supervisor, Mrs Debaize, and other colleagues understood my situation very well. They always supported and encouraged me.

My New Lifestyle as a Parisian

With tireless efforts and tremendous support, I made progress. Finally, I was notified to be present at the Prefecture of Police again. This time, the French official was a man. He asked me for my passport. To my great surprise, he kept it and quickly put it in the drawer of his desk. I had submitted a new application form for my residence permit. He read it carefully and, with a simple stroke of his pen, crossed out the words "Cambodian nationality" I had written on the form, replacing it with the new status "Cambodian refugee." I was shocked to see the very quick

removal of my nationality, as I did not expect to witness the sudden loss of this important identity. In fact, the French authorities had granted me refugee status before I was formally informed. I was probably one of the early Cambodian refugees in France in 1974, while the war was still going on in Cambodia. After nearly one year, I obtained everything: my refugee status, my work permit, and my permanent resident permit.

By May 1974, I moved out of Sou Nem's apartment to live in a student room in the 14th district of Paris, in an area called "Alesia," the name of a metro station, at 20, rue du Moulin Vert. The building there was quite clean and had many apartments. But there were no apartments on the ground floor, except for the student rooms. The rooms were hidden behind a corridor wall. My room was at the end of the corridor leading to the back of the building. It was a furnished single room with a bed and a small refrigerator. The shower room and the WC were outside, shared with the occupants of other rooms. For the first time, I found a place to live. I enjoyed my freedom, especially the chance to further my studies. I paid a monthly rent of FFR 399, almost

double what I had paid to Sou Nem´s family. But my new home had an inconvenience because there was no kitchen. So, I bought a small electric stove, a kind of hotplate, to boil water or milk for breakfast. In principle, I was not allowed to prepare meals inside the rooms.

Alesia was a place full of activities. I found everything I needed: public gardens, an open market, shopping, cinema, cafés, restaurants, drug stores, banks, barber shops, book shops, etc. In one direction, it was not so far from La Porte d´Orléans and in the other, not so far from Montparnasse. So, it was an easy place to spend money. I enjoyed living there, although I kept visiting Sou Nems regularly. Finally, I missed Mrs Sou Nem's Cambodian food. Now, I eat French food at lunchtime and make dinner myself with pre-cooked food. At first, I did not know much about French food and drinks. Since I got my regular worker and Parisian resident status, I no longer eat sandwiches. For one year now, during lunch breaks, I have eaten only "steak, frites," steak and French fries in a self-service restaurant in front of my office. I stuck to my choice so regularly that, in the end, the employee serving hot

meals could anticipate my order and serve me "steak, frites" automatically, without asking me. For drinks, I began with milk, as I hadn't had the chance to drink it in Cambodia. I tried to replace water with milk. Later on, I tried beer, then sparkling wine, and finally red wine.

My first year in Paris was marred by a long period of uncertainty about my legal status. It was also dominated by severe nostalgia and homesickness. In one of my letters to my parents, I wrote, "I'm waiting for your reply like a child expecting his mother to come back from the market." I mentioned this feeling because, in general, every morning in Cambodia, many mothers went to the market and came back a few hours later with sweets or food in hand, to the great happiness of their children. It was a real joy for me each time I received mail from Cambodia, even though the news was not always good. The situation in Cambodia was deteriorating day after day. But I was really happy to get news from my parents.

My employer was satisfied with my job performance, and my salary rose regularly, from FFR 1,400 to FFR 1,600, from FFR

1,600 to FFR 1,800, to FFR 2,000 per month at the beginning of 1975. My position was also promoted. I became a full accountant. I enjoyed a very good relationship with Mrs Debaize, my supervisor, whom I would later call by her first name, Christiane, and who became one of my rare and closest friends for many decades to come.

While working, I enrolled in a distance-learning accounting program at the French "Institut National des Techniques Economiques et Comptables," where I met another friend, Christian Leday. Christian was an accountant working in a factory in Normandy, where he was living with his wife and two children. He came to Paris once a week for group work, where the students met their specialised professors. I was in his group, and we became friends at our first meeting. For a while, I kept visiting him in his small village outside of a town named L'Aigle. In the village, there were only a few dozen houses. We exchanged gifts at every Christmas and New Year. Sometimes, Christian and his wife invited me to spend holidays with them in Brittany, under a tent.

To me, Christian used to say, "Mouly, you are good to be a minister of foreign affairs."

My studies were not conclusive, as it was very difficult for me to study while my head was in the clouds. My living conditions disturbed me, as did my constant concerns for my family in Cambodia. At the end of 1974, I failed the annual examination. At the same time, many Cambodian students were obliged to return to Cambodia, either because they had finished their studies, their grants had arrived at term, or because they had no rights to work to earn a living in France. Most of those returnees died during the Khmer Rouge reign of terror. On the contrary, many other Cambodians succeeded in fleeing the country and took refuge safely in France, just a few months before the fall of the Khmer Republic. Phansoriyasi, my former colleague at Comin Khmer, was among those lucky people. He came to France with his wife and two children. Later, the children were sent back to Cambodia with their grandfather, who had spent a very short visit in France just before the Khmer Rouge's victory. Phansoriyasi became a close

friend with whom I would later spend many weekends and holidays in France.

Joy and Tears on April 17, 1975

By early 1975, the Sou Nems returned to Cambodia. I didn't have time to see them off at the airport. But I had met Mrs Sou Nem just a few days before their departure to give her my letter and some money I sent to my parents in Phnom Penh. Since they left Paris, I had lost contact with them. Dr Sou Nem was among the elite of the Khmer Republic. He certainly perished during Khmer Rouge rule.

On April 17, 1975, as usual, during the lunch break, I went to the bank near the Opera Theatre to deposit the company's checks. After finishing my work at the bank, I normally returned to Rue de l'Echelle to have lunch at the self-service restaurant in front of my office. But this time, I walked down several streets to eat in a Café near the Saint-Roch Church on Faubourg Saint-Honoré Street.

After lunch, instead of rushing straight to work, I continued walking along Des Pyramides Street until I reached De l'Opéra Avenue. At the corner, at the gate of the metro station named Les Pyramides, there was a kiosk where I bought a copy of "Le Monde," a French afternoon-edition newspaper. From the front page, I read, "Phnom Penh Fell." The news did not surprise me, as I had expected the fall of the Khmer Republic of Lon Nol to come within months.

My first, spontaneous, and instinctive reaction was an explosion of joy. For many years I had been strong. I never cried. But this time, my emotion was so intense that I could not control myself. Lifting my head, looking at the sky of Paris, exceptionally tearful, I said, "God, finally the war is over." Imagining the end of the cruel war as the end of the suffering of my people, my joy was immense, and my happiness was unspeakable. With "Le Monde" in my hands, instead of walking as usual, I just ran as fast as I could to bring the fresh news to my colleagues at the office. We discussed the situation in Cambodia for the rest of the day. Many shared my joy. But little by little, this joy was fading as we

gradually discovered the Khmer Rouge´s brutality. Soon, I became perplexed by the Khmer Rouge victory. The world was surprised by the shutdown of daily life in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, and by the mass evacuation of the population from the cities. Finally, I received the news with mixed feelings: joy at the end of a destructive war mixed with uncertainty about the nation's future. Suddenly, I began to worry seriously about the fate of my loved ones in Cambodia.

From that day onward, I received more and more bad news about the influx of refugees at the French embassy in Phnom Penh, the summary executions of opponents, the unthinkable exodus, the strange closure of foreign embassies, etc., not to mention the absence of correspondence with our parents and relatives. Later on, only the news about the refugees seeking asylum in the French embassy and the negotiations to liberate them could reach us, as the Khmer Rouge succeeded in completely cutting off all links with the rest of the world. No reporters were allowed to travel inside. But the Khmer Rouge propaganda machinery was still working well. They denied the

news as a pure campaign of "US imperialism" against the Cambodian people.

A few months before the victory of the Khmer Rouge, the majority of the Cambodian students in Paris had pledged their support to the Khmer Rouge-dominated front led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the FUNK. The students' move was finally gratified by the French government's decision, under President Giscard d'Estaing, to recognise the Khmer Rouge-dominated front and the exiled government of Prince Sihanouk in April 1975, just one week before the fall of the Lon Nol regime. It was recognition at the eleventh hour. In the past, I had been invited three or four times to join the Khmer Rouge public meetings. I did not attend all the meetings, as I was embarrassed that I did not know how to sing the "Red Flag" song the Khmer Rouge performed at the end of each meeting, with the right hands rising. The song began with words such as "the red blood dispersed on the earth, the blood that was sacrificed, the blood of the masses, the peasants, the workers, the intellectuals that rose and became the red flag, etc." This time, the Khmer Rouge organised a big meeting to celebrate

their victory. I thought it was an occasion to get fresh news from Cambodia. I decided to join the celebration. At the big gathering, to my surprise, I noticed many former strong and close supporters of Lon Nol who had suddenly shifted their stance. For me, I was disappointed because there was no news at all, except for propaganda and praise for what the Khmer Rouge called "Angkar" or "the organisation," and for the Khmer Rouge leadership.

Not Joining the Revolution Because of My Capitalist Nature

For many months, the Khmer Rouge had continued to persuade Cambodian students or residents to abandon their lives in France and return to Cambodia. They dispatched a group of three or four cadres and militants to visit them at home, door to door. A group led by a woman named Mrs Hing Un came to my house, knocking at my door regularly in the evening and attempting to win my allegiance to their organisation and then my return to Cambodia. They tried to describe a new Cambodia as a place of new order, a new system of social justice, and a new way

of life. When asked why citizens of the new Cambodia could not exchange correspondence with parents or relatives living abroad, they answered that people were too busy with the work of national reconstruction; they had no time to write letters. To definitely break off our relation, I told the group that I was still deeply attached to capitalism, so I was not ready to join the new regime. I said, "I'm still covered with reactionary sins; thus, not ready to serve the revolution." Even though immediately after the Khmer Rouge victory I had requested the Khmer Rouge to accept my Cambodian citizenship instead of my refugee status, I never received their answer. I was finally lucky to cut off my relationship with them in time. Some compatriots chose to return to Cambodia and disappeared upon arrival. Many of those who chose to live in France suffered from separation from their families and relatives in Cambodia. They struggled to make a living, especially while seeking refugee status and jobs. Among them, I felt the most advantaged, as those fellow Cambodians were struggling for what I had already obtained.

The Situation of Khmer Refugees in Paris

Before the fall of Phnom Penh, my former colleagues at Comin Khmer sent me regular letters to keep me informed about events in Cambodia. One of them was a lady named Mary Hum, who announced that one of her nieces and her niece′s husband were living in France. She alerted me that the couple might seek my assistance if needed. They had been living on their own means, with some support from the Lon Nol government, up to April 17, 1975. During that period, the niece and her husband had no contact with me. With the fall of Phnom Penh under Khmer Rouge control, they had no income, and they needed to find jobs. Now they sought my assistance. The niece, named Sony, and her husband, Khim Khankeo, were both from high-class families in Cambodia. Sony′s father, Sarath Hum, was a secretary of state in the Lon Nol government. Khim Khankeo was a grandson of former Prime Minister Khim Tith. He was close to Lon Non, Lon Nol's brother. Since the victory of the Khmer Rouge, they had been searching for jobs for quite some time. One day, Khim Khankeo

asked to see me. He was typically Cambodian, with his dark skin and wavy hair. He liked talking and was a beautiful talker. He was older than me, but he called me "Big brother." He praised me for settling in France successfully. Immediately, I accepted his friendship. He was lucky, as he was showing up at the right moment. My travel agency was looking for an aide-accountant. In fact, since July, I had been promoted to replace Mrs Debaize as the head of the accounting section, leaving one position available. The next day, Khim Khankeo was recruited as my aide in the travel agency.

In France, I did not have many friends. I only had a few, but loyal, trusted, and sure ones. Christiane Debaize and her husband, Roland Rousseau, were among them. When we first met, they were living separately. Christiane had her own apartment in Montreuil, and Roland in Pierrefitte, in the northern suburbs of Paris. Their love for each other was so deep and strong that it could stand the many squabbles that were emerging all too often. Many times, when they went out to dine in town or spend a weekend in the countryside, they brought me with them. Roland

was an inspector at a large French insurance company, selling mostly life insurance contracts. Many friends called him jokingly "the man who sells the wind" because of his insurance services. He worked closely with lawyers and accounting firms. He had an important network of friends and contacts. One day, Christiane decided to leave her job as chief of the accounting section of Pharos France, the travel agency, to work as an accountant in diamond jewellery. But before she left the travel agency, she arranged for me to be promoted to take her place. And the company's owner agreed. That is why I took over the new position in July 1975, with a salary increase to FFR 2,300 per month. In the new job, I obtained a professional qualification as "Comptable du 2me Échelon," or "Full Accountant," which was professionally correct, but I was not paid accordingly. My employer knew I was qualified for the job and that my promotion could save him money, as I was much underpaid compared to others with the same qualification. Roland was satisfied with my promotion, but not with my salary.

Despite having left the travel agency, Christiane kept visiting Pharos France regularly. For my part, I grew closer to her and her husband, Roland. We continued to go out and exchange phone calls very often, to the point where I became as close to them as a relative. One evening in September 1975, Roland and Christiane brought me in their car for dinner in Paris. At dinner, Roland told me he had found me a new, better job in Pierrefitte, a town where he was living. He had arranged an appointment for me to meet the CEO of the new company the next day afternoon. Roland did not tell me much about the new company or my prospective job.

Being Unexpectedly Promoted

The next afternoon, as planned, Roland came to pick me up at Pharos France. He drove me to Pierrefitte, a small municipality of working-class people. It was the first time I had passed through the northern part of the Parisian suburbs. In the car, Roland tried to teach me the area's geography, telling me the names and

activities of the many towns we were passing through. But I did not remember all of them on the spot. I was busy and nervous about my next meeting with the new employer. Finally, Roland briefed me on the new company. In fact, there were two small companies run by the same family: one named Motton S.A., the other TPP S.A. I was supposed to organise myself to work for both sister companies, which were next door to each other on the same street. Roland gave me one important piece of advice: not to tell the truth about the salary I was earning at Pharos France.

Roland parked his car at number 58 in a small street named Rue de Paris, just in front of the company´s building under a sign, "Andre Motton S.A." We went up to the first floor, where the boss, Andre Motton, his wife, Annie Motton, and the outgoing accountant, Daniel Lazard, received us. Roland knew them well and seemed to be friends with everybody. He introduced me to them after exchanging a few jokes, then left to chat with colleagues at the other sister company, TPP S.A. We were meeting in Motton´s office. The office was in a medium-sized room, located between the secretary´s and the accountant´s offices. There was neither a

waiting room nor a sofa. I sat in an extra chair Mrs Motton provided beside the CEO′s desk.

Motton explained that he was looking for someone to replace his accountant, Lazard, who had decided to move to the South of France. He briefed me on the activities of his firms, which were rapidly expanding. The two firms had a combined workforce of almost 200 workers. In turn, the outgoing accountant, Lazard, presented his work and asked me two or three questions about tax, social, and labour legislation. At the conclusion of our discussion, Motton offered me a position of "comptable principal" or "principal accountant" for a three-month probation period, with a monthly salary of FFR 4,500, twice my salary in Pharos France. He proposed that after the probation period, I would become the "chief accountant" of both companies with a pay of FFR 5,000 per month. It was a superb offer that I did not expect. To tell the truth, I did not waste a second to accept it. We agreed that I would take office on November 3, 1975, so that I could properly notify my former employer, Pharos France.

After the meeting, we toured the buildings and offices, visiting workers in the back of the courtyard, where a huge hall served as storage and a workers´ shelter, and where a garage and workshop repaired the company´s cars and equipment. Facing the street, the ground floor, with its glass showroom, was arranged to display various home equipment, ranging from bath products to kitchen gear. Finally, we ended up in a café on the corner of Rue de Paris, run by a father named MeMe and his son, Ali, from a Tunisian or Algerian family. Ultimately, Roland joined us in the café to celebrate our successful deal.

Andre Motton was a self-made man. The first time we met, he was in his mid-thirties. He was married at 18, while his wife was 16. The couple had two daughters. Mrs Motton was always at her husband´s side, working as his secretary or assistant. Motton left secondary school at a young age and began his job as a plumber. He started his career as a salaried worker before becoming independent and working on his own. Two years ago, he met two associates: Michel Camus, an engineer in public works, and Jacques Fontaine, a land surveyor. They agreed to form a

company named Travaux Publiques Pierrefittois, or TPP.SA. The Motton family held the majority of the shares, contributing 80% of the capital, in real assets and cash combined. The two associates, Camus and Fontaine, managed the company´s day-to-day core activities, bringing their know-how and their first clientele from their former positions. The two close friends had been employed for many years by a public works company that was in bankruptcy. At the same time, Motton transformed his own firm into a commercial company and named it Motton S.A., with his wife and relatives as associates. The two sister companies worked mostly for the same big customer, a French nationalised real estate company named SCIC. Motton S.A. dealt with plumbing, roofing, tiling, and heating, while TPP S.A. operated in public works, specially building small roads and parking grounds.

My former boss, Amiel, was angry with me for my decision to leave his company, Pharos France. But it was my right, as we lived in a free world and a market economy. I was acting under market forces. I owed Pharos France, however, a debt of gratitude, as the travel agency had recruited me in the first place when I did

not have my work permit. Finally, my departure was agreed upon amicably. I had no trouble, as I had notified them well in advance.

On November 3, 1975, I began my new job at Motton S.A. in Pierrefitte. I took the metro from Alesia to La Gare du Nord early in the morning and boarded a suburban train to Pierrefitte. Not to mention the waiting time at Paris Gare du Nord, it took me about 15 minutes to arrive at my destination. From the train station, I walked down a main street for about ten minutes more to reach my new workplace. When I arrived, the boss and his wife were already at work. They supervised the distribution of tasks and duties to the workers and inspected their departure to work sites in different places in the town and its surroundings. To begin the day's work, the first thing they did was bring me to the café.

My first day at Motton S.A. was facilitated by the outgoing accountant, Daniel Lazard, who needed to hand over all responsibilities to me quickly before he left. I spent the whole day with him. Lazard was older than I was and was still a bachelor. I didn't know much about his educational background, but he seemed to know many tricky ways to handle tax arrangements.

After work, we went out to dine, drink, and listen to music in different places in Pierrefitte and Paris. Lazard drank a lot of Ricard, the popular French aniseed liquor, beer, wine, and cognac. He was so strong that he could drink all night. I tried to imitate him, but I did not have such experience. Consequently, I was as drunk as a lord; I could not return home. After that day, Daniel Lazard disappeared, and I never heard from him again.

As the company's accountant, and beyond routine accounting tasks, my responsibility was also to advise the boss on how to perform his duties in accordance with laws and regulations, especially French commercial and labour laws. Motton and his wife regarded me as their personal legal and tax advisor. I was probably the only "intellectual" in the firm, so my position was highly respected, and my responsibilities typically increased. To help the accountant fulfil his responsibilities, the company hired a lawyer and a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) who worked on a consulting basis. In addition, the CPA checked the annual accounts and certified their accuracy before submitting them to the authorities. At the same time, the lawyer helped update the

record book for both ordinary and extraordinary board meetings. When I completed the three months of probation, Motton made me one of the company's shareholders, although I gave him only my name, not any money. For this, I signed a blank paper that he carefully kept in his safe. Thanks to our working relationship and frequent contacts, I became good friends with both the lawyer, Delman, and the CPA, Hollander. I quickly became a trusted partner to them, as the Mottons gave me full powers to deal with legal, regulatory, and accounting and taxation issues.

At Motton, he was surrounded by his people. He employed his father-in-law, whom he called by his nickname, NoNo, as a driver, and his brother-in-law, Jean Paul, as a storeman. Daniel, another brother-in-law, the husband of his younger sister, a mechanic, was in charge of the company garage. In addition, after work hours, Daniel organised workers´ gatherings almost every afternoon for a "Ricard" drink, as he found every reason to celebrate. Those people quickly became my friends. They were nice to me. Even though I found them heavily drunk many times a week, especially Daniel, the garage man, Motton treated them

more harshly than any ordinary worker. Very often, I heard the boss shouting at them from a hundred metres away for any wrongdoing they were committing. His people called him by his nickname, "Deh-Deh".

After three weeks of work at his company, Motton found me a studio flat for a lower rent than my student room in Paris. The studio flat was located in the neighbouring town of Stains, at 6, Allee Paul Langevin. This location is on the border of the three towns: Sarcelles, Stains, and Pierrefitte. The studio was on the third floor, the highest floor of the building, in a quiet and restful part of Stains. It was an unfurnished flat, but I paid only FFR 300 per month. Motton ordered his staff to repaint the studio for me, as he had arranged with the landlord, SCIC, the real estate company, to cover the painting costs. He also ordered NoNo, his father-in-law, to take one of the company's pick-up trucks to help me move my belongings from Paris to the new studio flat.

When he arrived at my student room, NoNo was surprised and disappointed to see that I didn't have much to move. In the end, he drove a half-empty truck from Paris to Stains, as I could

not take anything from the furnished student room other than some clothes, books, and household equipment. That day, Motton gave me one day off so I could go shopping to fully furnish my studio. He also sent me one of his salespeople, who knew his network of suppliers, so I could get advantageous conditions. We went to Saint-Denis, a bigger neighbouring city. I bought various furniture items, including a bed, bath products and related items, a work desk, chairs, a cabinet, a dining table, and kitchen gear. The boss also sent his brother-in-law, Daniel, the mechanic, and his teammates to help install the fitted carpet. Finally, very quickly, I had a fully furnished studio.

After three months of probation, I was confirmed as chief accountant of the two sister companies, Motton S.A. and TPP S.A., and my monthly wage rose to FFR 5,000. I advanced from an ordinary worker to an executive position, which was exceptional for a young refugee like me. I quickly earned my boss's trust and confidence and the friendship of the two associates at TPP S.A. In management, I became an indispensable part of the company. The boss consulted me before recruiting, dismissing, demoting, or

promoting staff. I advised him on when and by how much workers′ pay should rise. I signed many documents on behalf of the employer for any worker or staff member who needed the employer′s certificates to claim social-security benefits, work-related accident compensation, retirement benefits, or annual leave compensation (In the public works profession, private companies do not pay annual leave compensation directly to their workers; instead, they pay regular contributions to collective funds, which, in turn, pay the compensation annually to the workers). As the chief accountant, I participated in talks with bank representatives to negotiate the best terms for loans or bank overdrafts. I also visited the company work sites from time to time and had drinks with the workers. I often joined the boss and his associates for business lunches or dinners with their customers.

In addition to my accounting studies, I also spent my spare time attending driving lessons. After a few weeks of learning (theory and driving), I passed my driving test on the first attempt, which was unusual for many learners. With my driver′s license in hand, my boss authorised me to use one of the company′s cars,

with its paint and logo, while I waited for my own, which I would be purchasing soon. For this, he sent me to Daniel, the garage´s man, who knew practical ways to get a good second-hand car at a good price. When I saw him, Daniel proposed that if I agreed to pay FFR 2,500, he would deliver a good one within two weeks, a proposal I accepted without delay. The next morning, Daniel came to my office and asked me to go to Saint-Denis with him, telling me especially not to forget my chequebook. He drove me in his towing truck. We went straight to visit a garage where I could see many new and second-hand cars for sale. In the back of the garage, he showed me a dusty car, blackened with thick dirt. It was a Peugeot 204 family car. Daniel said, "This is your car." I was disappointed by the car's condition and hesitant to pay the FFR 2,500. In addition, the car engine was in trouble, and its battery was empty. But finally, with Daniel´s assurance that it would be the interesting one, I agreed to write my check. In the end, instead of driving the newly purchased car, we towed it to Daniel´s garage for the next round of intensive repairs and embellishing work.

Daniel was a busy man. He had two or three cars parked inside the garage, waiting for repairs. The cars belonged to the "company's good friends." In fact, in addition to its usual work, the garage was a kind of public relations place where Motton entertained his important clients, especially by providing free services to those who could reward him with good contracts. Some people from the "maintenance and repair department" of SCIC came very often with their cars to see Daniel for various car work, from painting, decorating, and furnishing to engine work. My car was not a high priority, so it was on Daniel's waiting list. Finally, Daniel took one month instead of the two weeks he had promised to complete the work, which included painting and refurbishing. As a result of his skilful and artful work, I got a beautiful car that looked no different from a brand-new one. I was in seventh heaven, as it was the first one I had had. The car was so perfect that a co-worker was willing to exchange it for his new Citroën 2CV. But I loved my Peugeot 204 so much that I refused the exchange offer. When I came to work, I parked my car in a good place where I could easily look at it from my first-floor office through a glass window.

During my years of service to the Motton family, I enjoyed an excellent relationship with everyone, including my boss, his two associates, and my colleagues in the two sister companies. Regularly, after my breakfast consisting of hot instant coffee and black coffee, sometimes with cakes or fruit, I drove quietly to my office. I arrived between 8h30 and 8h45 a.m. Most often, Motton was already either in his office or in the backyard. His wife came a few minutes later. When she arrived, they both invited me to MeMe Café for morning coffee. From time to time, the two associates, Camus and Fontaine, joined us, or occasionally, I went to the Café with them without the boss. The morning coffee was a time to talk about business or non-business issues. I took many cups of coffee per day as one of my diplomatic ways to respond to the many invitations I received. Going to MeMe´s place, arriving at the office, and having coffee in the morning before starting work had become my daily ritual for many years.

Clear Separation of Work from Sentiments

At lunchtime, I went either with the Motton family to a nearby restaurant or with the two associates, Camus and Fontaine, to a self-service cafeteria in the neighbouring town of Sarcelles. The Mottons ate around 1 p.m., as they had to wait for their two daughters, Patricia and Celine, to finish their classes first. Most of the time, I joined them at their table and ordered the same meal. In the restaurant, I bought my lunch by signing the bill on an account, which I settled with my own money at the end of every month. In the self-service restaurant, I paid cash. But we were enjoying a more popular atmosphere and a special hot meal service of Mrs Goujon, a long-serving and well-known waitress of the place.

Little by little, because of my growing friendship with them, I had to face a tough decision: where and with whose company should I go for my lunch? Should I join the Mouton family at the regular restaurant, or join the two associates at the self-service cafeteria? Almost every day, at noon, one of the two associates,

either Camus or Fontaine, came into the courtyard and called to me, who was still working in my office, at the top of their voice, saying, "Mouly, it's time for lunch." In addition, every Saturday, when all offices were closed, the associates invited me for a weekly worksite visit. We always began the visit by touring the important sites and ended up at a good restaurant, where we spent no less than three hours eating, drinking, joking, and talking. From that time, I fell deeply in love with French cuisine and French red wines. For me, sharing my lunchtime was a pleasant exercise for a while, but later it became seriously disturbing, as I needed to preserve my neutrality facing growing rivalry between the two parties in the business- the boss and his associates. The rivalry arose within the management of their joint venture. They did not compete for the simple pleasure of having my company at lunchtime.

The dispute surfaced over the spending power within the company that Motton was holding alone, in his capacity as CEO. The associates believed that they did most of the important work, such as public relations, marketing, technical operations, and

resources management. In contrast, Motton did nothing but take advantage of their hard work. They thought they deserved more power than ordinary company executives. In fact, from the beginning of their association, Camus was appointed technical director and Fontaine director of operations. Even though Motton was the only check-holder and the only top company official with exclusive rights to decide what to pay or not to pay, I got more and more headaches maintaining vigilant, fragile neutrality so I wouldn't be seen as taking sides with either the Motton family or the two associates.

The more time I spent working for the Motton family, the closer my relationship with them grew, beyond the work-to-work or business-to-business framework. It became more personal. The Mottons invited me frequently to dine at their apartment in Sarcelles and later at their new house in Pierrefitte. I joined them many times for family gatherings at Christmas and New Year'sD. Mrs Motton often talked to me about her daughter, Patricia, who was 10 years younger than me. At the time, she was studying accounting. Every time we met at MeMe café, Mrs Motton told me

about Patricia's activities and her studies. In addition, Mrs Motton asked me to help Patricia do her homework, a request that I dared not refuse. For this, Patricia came to see me most often in my office with her exercise book. Sometimes, I visited her in their house. One weekend, I drove Patricia to see her grandparents, NoNo and his wife, in Sedan, at the border with Belgium, as after my first year working for his son-in-law, NoNo had retired and had returned to his native town.

On another occasion in the summer, Mrs Motton called me from their summer apartment in Saint-Raphaël, in the South of France, not far from the famous city of Nice, asking me to join them for some holidays. That day, after she had talked, Mrs Motton gave the phone to Patricia so that she could convince me to spend days with them. Finally, I agreed to go along for the drive. I drove my Peugeot 204 alone for almost 1000 km, taking the opportunity to visit the Melatos, my former colleagues at Pharos France, who were retiring to a small village in a beautiful region of France, Provence. My relationship with the Motton family was so

close that I called Mrs Motton, half-jokingly, my mother-in-law when I talked about her among my circle of Cambodian friends.

Without interruption and despite the failure of 1974, I continued my studies at the "Institut National des Techniques Economiques et Comptables." In 1976, I passed the first examination, which gave me access to the preparation of "higher degrees in accounting." Since I worked with the Motton family, my standard of living improved greatly. I hired a part-time cleaning lady who spent one to two hours per day taking care of my studio flat and my clothes. In sum, I had an interesting job, a loving car, a well-maintained studio; I took most of my meals in restaurants and slept in my own furniture, surrounded by many good friends. Thinking of my refugee status, I felt exceptionally privileged to have such material advantages that many of my fellow citizens, at that time, could not dare to dream of. But the more I acquired these material comforts, the more I suffered morally from losing contact with my parents, my brothers, and my sisters, as I was eager to share with them the benefits of my efforts, knowing well their poor living conditions in Cambodia. My moral suffering grew

considerably when the mass media around the world discovered and made public more detailed atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge against the Cambodian people. The more I was integrated into French society and accepted by my French friends and entourage, the more I felt the need to preserve my roots. I could not cut off all ties to my origins. To maintain my equilibrium, I decided to get in touch again with the Cambodian community in France.

Getting in Touch Again

With the Cambodian Community in France

To tell the truth, since the Khmer Rouge victory, except for a few friends, I had avoided any contact with the community, as I was deeply frustrated by the behaviour of some Cambodian leaders. To re-establish my contact with the Cambodian world, I turned to Phansoriyasi, Khankeo, and his wife, Sony, who had become my assistant for a while at TPP S.A. before she found a

job closer to their home. Later, Khankeo introduced me to his friend, Ung You Tecklin, whom I finally added to an inseparable group of Cambodian friends. When Sony left, I recruited one of her friends, Om Vathana, who quickly became my trusted and reliable assistant for many years in France.

My Parisian life was dominated by my struggle for a decent living and smooth integration into Western society, which contributed tremendously to shaping my personality and consolidating my character as a free man. On the other hand, my life was burdened by the dramatic events in Cambodia that tied me firmly to the Cambodian people. As one of the sons of Cambodia, I could not live peacefully my life alone, in a manner indifferent or insensitive to what was happening to my country, my motherland, and my people. More and more, I was facing a delicate choice between two situations: either to continue to make my comfortable life in France, by getting married to a French girl and by founding my own family under my full responsibility, or to sacrifice that life by joining patriotic Cambodians on a long and difficult journey to rehabilitate the Cambodian nation. If I had married a French girl, I

would have devoted all my energy to my French family, certainly abandoning my roots and my origins. It would have meant goodbye to Cambodia. I knew I could not be responsible for a family and work for the Cambodian cause, fulfilling both missions at the same time. In any circumstance, if married, I could never leave my family behind. But finally, my choice was clear. I chose to keep my Cambodian identity and to shape my future with the fate of the Cambodian people. It was with this clear choice in mind that, little by little, I tried to convince my close French friends of my determination to return to Cambodia. Consequently, I decided to get involved in many social activities in the service of the Cambodian community in France, in particular, and in favour of Cambodia, in general.

In addition to the workload of my professional responsibilities, I engaged in voluntary actions that took up all my spare time, including my time for studies, and probably took up most of my youth. Finally, my Parisian life was not as pompous or extravagant as many of my fellow citizens might think.

Chapter Five

Cry for Freedom

(The 1980s)

A year after the victory of the Khmer Rouge over Lon Nol's regime, the Cambodian community in France gained a clearer picture of the situation in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge had turned into a dictatorial regime, committing the cruellest acts, unprecedented in world history.

Cambodian refugees, fleeing Cambodia one after the other, provided clear substantiation of the Khmer Rouge regime's savagery. They described in detail the great hardship and food deprivation they had endured, as well as the slaughter of the innocent that the Khmer Rouge had committed most cruelly.

Cambodian watchers of the situation in Cambodia clearly comprehended that they could never hope that the Khmer Rouge leaders would be able to bestow freedom, rights, and human

dignity on the Cambodian people. In particular, those compatriots never hoped those leaders would open the country to relations with the world. Traditionally, Cambodian people, as Buddhist devotees, whenever they experience suffering, take refuge in Buddhism and nurture the tiny hope that their lives will be better and their future brighter one day.

In France, those compatriots went to pagodas to reestablish a system of social contacts at first, and later a network of political contacts. Due to the Khmer Rouge clique´s weird rule of the country, the Cambodians at all social strata in France, like the majority of Cambodian citizens in Cambodia, lost everything, specifically the land they love, which turned them into a group of countryless people.

Refugees Are Neither Small nor Big Shots

High-ranking officials, including former government ministers, diplomats, and army generals, as well as ordinary employees and

privates, all became refugees with the same rights. In France, people generally felt that, since they were in the same situation, they had equal rights and that there was neither a small nor a big shot, nor those with high nor low status, as in the previous era.

To offer their views on Cambodia′s future or put forward their opinions about national reconstruction, some veteran politicians used religious ceremonial forums to present them to the public. Among those veteran politicians was Son Sann,[14] former prime minister of Prince Sihanouk in the 1960s, who had tried unsuccessfully to act as a mediator in the search for peaceful solutions to the Cambodian crisis in the 1970s. At a Buddhist ceremony, Son Sann said that the Khmer Rouge regime was a regime that would hit the wall, and he called on the Cambodians in France to ready themselves to replace the Khmer Rouge, which would definitely collapse one day. Some Cambodians′ brains were imbued with the words that the Khmer Rouge would hit the wall, while the others countered Son Sann, saying that not only would

[14] In general, many Cambodians called him Lokta, meaning "Grandfather," because of his age.

the Khmer Rouge hit the wall, but they would also break through that wall.

At that time, I did not seem too interested in Buddhist ceremonies. However, it was mostly Khim Khankeo and Ung You Tecklin who told me about what had happened and about social events organized by the Cambodian community in France. They also told me about Son Sann's views on preserving Cambodian identity and rebuilding Cambodia. I was strongly impressed by their nationalist views and their focus on rebuilding the country and our society. Anyway, I wanted to know what activities overseas Cambodians could do to help our Cambodia return to the right path. Therefore, I asked Khim Khankeo and Tecklin to take me to see Son Sann spontaneously. One day, we went to Son Sann's house at 45bis, Acacia Street, 17th Quarter, Paris, an orderly, elite area not too far from Charles de Gaulle Place. We knocked on the door and asked to meet Son Sann, but someone inside said, "He is not home." At that time, I seemed very keen to meet Son Sann. However, it was not that easy to meet him like that, for he was an important person, a VIP, a big shot.

Who Is Son Sann?

Son Sann was born into an old family in Khmer Kampuchea Krom (Cambodia in Cochin-China, the southern part of Vietnam). According to his official biography, Son Sann was born on October 5, 1911, in Phnom Penh, not in Vietnam, as some people believe. He spoke Cambodian without a Khmer Krom accent, like a Vietnamese-speaking Cambodian, because he had lived with a Vietnamese nanny.[15] His father was Oknha [honorary title] Son Sach, who left Kampuchea Krom to live in Phnom Penh to further his studies under the auspices of Prince Sisowath Sophanuvong. Afterwards, Oknha Son Sach worked directly with Prince Norodom Suramarit, when the latter was the minister of agriculture, before he was crowned king.

His Majesty King Norodom Suramarit was Prince Sihanouk's father. The Son's family was known to almost all Khmer Krom

[15] I was told this story by a close female aide to Grandfather Son Sann, when we were together in France before the end of the 1970s.

people, as it was the family of a hero named Chauvay Kuy, or Governor Kuy. Chauvay Kuy, the chief of Preah Trapeang District (now Tra Vinh Province in Vietnam), sacrificed his life to preserve Theravada Buddhism for Cambodian nationals in Kampuchea Kraom.

In his childhood, Son Sann was a young Cambodian graduate of a famous French school known as the Superior Trade School (H.E.C., or Hautes Études Commerciales) in 1933. After returning to Cambodia in 1934, Son Sann was appointed deputy governor of Battambang Province[16]. From 1937 to 1939, he was transferred to serve as deputy governor of Prey Veng Province, where I was born.

With the intention of applying the knowledge of trade he had learned, Son Sann resigned from public service and worked in his father-in-law's Le Petit Paris Company. In 1940, when Japan negotiated with France to purchase Cambodia's milled rice, the French authorities included him in the French delegation to Tokyo.

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[16] In that era, a deputy governor was called Phou Chhuoy Khet in Khmer (ភូឈ្ួយខេត្ត).

In 1946, under the leadership of Prince Yutevong, a Democrat Party government was formed, and subsequently, Son Sann served as finance minister. Between 1946 and 1968, he held ministerial posts many times, including Economy and Finance Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Prime Minister.

During the National Assembly term of the Democratic Party from 1951 to 1952, Son Sann was elected Phnom Penh Constituency MP and appointed President of the National Assembly. He founded the National Bank of Cambodia in 1955 and served as bank governor until 1968. Son Sann was a close associate of Prince Sihanouk and served as the prince′s economic and finance adviser during the Sangkum Reas Niyum era. Another trusted person of the prince was Samdech Penn Nouth, who accompanied Prince Sihanouk when the latter fled to live in China and later escorted the royal to live in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime. Son Sann was a Buddhist devotee. His children and grandchildren said that he had prayed to Lord Buddha

regularly since one of his sons died in a traffic accident in Cambodia and since he resigned from public service in 1968.

In France in the 1970s, many people said that Son Sann prayed to Lord Buddha twice a day and gave up consuming alcohol despite being used to drinking good wine. At that time, in France, Son Sann was still respected and befriended by some Cambodian nationals who were former public servants. In June 1976, Son Sann set up an association called the General Association of Overseas Cambodians, or AGKE (Association Générale des Khmers à l'étranger) for short.

General Association of Overseas Cambodians, or AGKE

The association statute underlined the following objectives: "To safeguard Buddhism, culture, and Cambodian civilisation; support and strengthen national solidarity and fraternity among all Cambodians, and provide each other with spiritual, moral, physical, and material relief."

Among the association founders, I noticed many dignitaries; some held posts as prime minister or were high-ranking officials in the Lon Nol and Sihanouk regimes. They included Tep Phan, Sim Va, Nong Kimny, Yem Sambaur, Chai Thoul, In Tam, Son Veunsai, Thonn Ouk, Sok Chhong, and Koun Wick, General Kong Thuch, General Srei Saman, Thiuonn In, Ker Nol, Net Kuon, Say Bory, Say Boran, Neang Phang, Troeung Mealy, Dr Sep Hieng, Mrs Then Tioeun, Mrs Suon Kaset, and so forth. This impressive membership showed that the association had regrouped several non-communist high-ranking officials, politicians, and intellectuals. At that time, the AGKE, the only reliable Cambodian association in France, was joined by all the Cambodian nationalists, including the royalists, democrats, and pro-republicans. Because Prince Sihanouk was not yet in sight, Son Sann was seen as a hard-sought overseas dignitary who could muster support from Cambodian refugees.

Khmer Rouge Amasses 17 April Victory Alone

Following their victory in April 1975, the Khmer Rouge was not in haste to invite Prince Sihanouk and Penn Nouth, respectively their Head of State and Prime Minister, to return to Cambodia immediately. They waited until one of their leaders, Khieu Samphan, visited China in August 1975, allowing the two important figures to return to Cambodia. According to an official statement issued on August 18, 1975, Khieu Samphan had met with Chinese leaders Deng Xiaoping and Hua Kuo-feng.

Members of the Khmer Rouge delegation [17] at the time consisted mainly of Ieng Sary, Deputy Prime Minister; Sarin Chhak, Foreign Minister; Ieng Sary′s wife, Ieng Thirith, Minister of Social Affairs; Keat Chhon and Thiuonn Prasith, alternate members of the Politburo of the Cambodian National United Front′s Central Committee.

[17]This was reported by the international press, especially the Chinese News Agency, or Xinhua.

I believe Deng Xiaoping's recommendations may have finally led the Khmer Rouge to agree to set a month and a time for Prince Sihanouk and Penn Nouth to return to Cambodia. They set September 9, 1975, as the date to invite the two leaders to return, although their special congress, held in the wake of their Phnom Penh victory on April 25, 26, and 27, unanimously recognized "Prince Sihanouk as the Head of State and president of the Cambodian National United Front and a great patriotic dignitary having taken part in making their revolution a success in the struggle to liberate the whole Cambodia."

Prince Sihanouk Travels to New York

In September 1975, after staying for one week in Cambodia, Prince Sihanouk was assigned to travel to New York to deliver a speech at the United Nations in his capacity as Head of State. On his trip to New York, the Prince, accompanied by Khmer Rouge officials, passed through France. In France, French television

reporters interviewed him, for they wanted to know the concrete situation concerning the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. At that time, Prince Sihanouk, still defending the Khmer Rouge regime, described Phnom Penh as a place where livelihood was full of peace and organisation was good, safety was real, and so forth. He said his role as Head of State was better than that of Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, because he could carry out his mission abroad as Cambodia's roving ambassador.

At the time, because I had already waited so long for news from Cambodia, I prepared a 16 mm film camera to record the prince´s interview on French television Antenne 2, as we still did not have a VCR.

However, in October 1975, French newspapers, Le Figaro and La Croix, published two articles: one on October 15, 1975, written by Jean Boudaria, and another on October 24, by Francois Ponchaud, who had lived in Cambodia for a long time and was an expert on the Khmer Rouge issue. The two articles recounted the destruction of Cambodia and the massacre and forced labour inflicted on the Cambodian people by the Khmer Rouge. The news

caused growing panic and turmoil throughout the whole world, specifically in overseas Cambodian communities. In October 1975, an estimated 400,000 refugees arrived in Thailand.

Sihanouk Asks for Resignation

From the Khmer Rouge regime's post of Head of State

Following his trip to the United Nations, Prince Sihanouk returned quietly to Phnom Penh. Since then, the world received no news from him until April 1976. At that time, the prince announced on the national radio station his resignation from the post of Head of State of the Khmer Rouge regime. In 1976, the Khmer Rouge adopted a new constitution, changing Cambodia to "Democratic Kampuchea," with Pol Pot as premier and Khieu Samphan chosen as President of the Praesidium, meaning head of state, to replace Prince Sihanouk.

The Khmer Rouge promised the prince a pension of USD 8,000 a year. However, in truth, the Khmer Rouge did not pay him

even a dollar as promised. According to news leaked from the West a few weeks before his resignation, Head of State Prince Sihanouk received the Swedish ambassador, who described the meeting to the international press.[18]

Since then, we, from the outside, have very seldom received news about him or his colleagues; at that time, the Khmer Rouge was carrying out the genocide policy fully and energetically. The world waited until January 1979 to see Prince Sihanouk reemerge and play an important role on the Cambodian political stage anew.

AGKE Activities

AGKE's activities ranged from social affairs and religion to political activities. Among its efforts, the association´s first idea was to establish international relations, such as preparing a complaint dated September 27, 1976, and submitting it to the UN Secretary-

[18] A Correspondent, Waging War on the Land, Far Eastern Economic Review, March 26, 1976, pp. 24-25.

General, requesting an investigation into human rights abuses in Cambodia. The UN Secretary-General did not offer a positive answer, arguing that the United Nations could do nothing if there were neither consent nor cooperation from the Khmer Rouge. AGKE then raised this human rights abuse issue with Amnesty International, with the firm belief that at least the voices of innocent Cambodian citizens were heard. Other activities included recreating the royal ballet, with Princess Norodom Vicheahra as the star. Another activity was building a pagoda for Buddhist monks in Paris.

Afterwards, the royal ballet not only demonstrated AGKE's efforts to protect Cambodian culture and tradition, but also became a way for the association to raise funds to support military activities carried out by a group of combatants named Khmer Sereika along the Cambodian-Thai border.

Khim Khankeo and Tecklin joined this association from scratch. The two friends regularly attended the association′s weekly meetings and sometimes helped with office work. Khim Khankeo was talkative and knew how to get closer to Son Sann.

He convinced Son Sann to take notice of my work by praising my knowledge, quality, and high morals, which inspired the veteran politician to want me to work with him for national interests. Therefore, Khim Khankeo served as a spokesperson between Son Sann and me. He told me that he respected and loved Son Sann because the latter was brave, clean, and nationalist. At the same time, he informed Son Sann that he respected and loved me because I had achieved professional success and was endowed with strong patriotism. It was obvious that Khankeo had created conditions for Son Sann to intend to meet me and for me to want to see Son Sann. Finally, Son Sann asked Khankeo to convince me to join the AGKE. As Son Sann was ready to receive me at his residence at any time, Khankeo arranged for Son Sann and me to meet.

Meeting with Son Sann

I met Grandfather Son Sann at his house on Acacia Street on a Sunday afternoon in September 1976. Normally, when I was not working, I did not wear a suit and necktie as I did on working days. Therefore, I went to Son Sann, a former prime minister of Cambodia and a high-ranking official who held the post of foreign minister when I was born, wearing clothes that were not appropriate: a T-shirt and jeans. Actually, I didn't really care and wasn't knowledgeable about protocol, but I was punctual. I rang the bell of the exquisitely decorated elite-style shop house. After the door was opened, I was ushered into the sitting room where Son Sann, wearing a three-piece suit and necktie, stood to greet me. With him were Mrs Suon Kaset, a woman in her 30s wearing eyeglasses to take notes, and one of his sons, Monir, an architect, serving drinks.

In response to the greetings, I raised my hands to pay my respects, as is our tradition. The grandfather warmly shook my hands. I was strongly impressed by the character of the man

whom I had never met in person before. I felt he looked younger than his age. At that time, I was just 26 years old, while he was 65. Son Sann was tall, and his ears were long, which, according to our Cambodian belief, meant he would have a long life. Anyway, at the first ever meeting, Son Sann seemed weak. However, many years later, when we worked together, I noticed that he had the stamina and patience to carry out his strenuous jobs. Actually, I did not expect to be honoured by such a warm welcome from the former prime minister.

Son Sann gave a long account of the political situation in Cambodia under every regime. He stressed that whenever Cambodians were divided, the country always weakened and might face the danger of vanishing from the face of the earth. That said, a few years earlier, before the collapse of the republican regime, Son Sann had tried tirelessly to convince Prince Sihanouk, Lon Nol, and supporters on both sides, such as the United States and China, to hold peaceful negotiations. However, he failed because he lacked strong backing. Therefore, nobody either listened to or followed him. Eventually, the Khmer Rouge

ascended to power, creating a cruel state that massacred their compatriots and violated their human rights. In fact, at the first meeting, we talked more about political than social and cultural issues.

As for myself, I offered only a brief description of my political experiences within the Democratic Party, particularly my personal contact with Chau Sau. Son Sann was especially impressed by this point, for he knew Chau Sau very well, as the latter had worked under him. He had trusted Chau Sau and recognised that he was a high-calibre colleague. I informed Son Sann that I was not anti-monarchy, and that this was the contradiction between Chau Sau and me.

At the end of the meeting, I was resolved to support the former prime minister and join his association, AGKE. At that time, Son Sann told Mrs Suon Kaset to help me participate in publishing AGKE's monthly bulletin, called the Letter of Information. This letter was published for the Cambodian community and sent to the press in France.

Working Hard for the Cambodian Community

From that day on, I tried to perform my work as conscientiously as possible at the AGKE. I spent many hours each day, outside my working hours, serving this association. The AGKE, like the other Cambodian associations, had members and supporters. Still, only a small number of active members and volunteers came to help, because most people were busy earning their daily living.

At first, I was assigned to publish the bulletins alone. As the publication section leader, I had no partner or assistant. I had to collect information and write many articles myself. Not only that, but I also had to type, edit, and print articles, and mail those letters to all the members. Sometimes, I got help from friends in other sections, who were generally the same people: Son Sann's own children and grandchildren, since the association used his house as its head office.

At weekends, many members gathered to listen to reports on the association's activities or on political developments in Cambodia presented by Son Sann. After each meeting, I did not return home and continued the association's office work. Although I was responsible for the information letter section, I still had other work at this association. Aside from contributing, I also volunteered to carry out various activities in the association, such as doing trivial work at the office; driving other members, devoid of transportation means, home; paying visits to refugees, whose number in France was growing; travelling to provinces to set up the association´s branches; performing religious rites, or travelling with Son Sann, having programs to meet Cambodian citizens all over France.

At that time, the AGKE was an important association, joined by a great many big and small shots, but it was challenged by other associations whose numbers had mushroomed. Some associations had resolved to offer support to anti-Khmer Rouge combatants on the Cambodian-Thai border.

According to a documented history of the KPNLF (Khmer People's National Liberation Front), in the wake of the republican regime's collapse on April 17, 1975, several Khmer Republic soldiers refused to lay down their arms but formed armed groups in November 1975. These groups included those led by Keth Reth, a Republican Regime colonel; Sek Sam Iet, an army general of the Republican Regime; and Khuon Thay. In 1976, other groups also emerged, such as those led by Ear Nguon, Prum Vit, Yuok Man, Kan Vanna, Ly Thieng Chek, Kirirom, and Keo Chuon, respectively. Most of the groups were autonomous, trading in logs and mining precious gemstones to feed their movements by working closely with Thai army generals.

In Paris, a Cambodian association called Moul Khmer, created by two former republican military generals and a bank finance expert, also had contact with those combatants. In February 1977, the Moul Khmer Association tried to unite the Keth Reth and Ear Nguon groups. However, in early May 1977, the groups of Sek Sam Iet and Khuon Thai united, and later, in October 1977, the Keth Reth group was dissolved. In November of

the same year, a movement united the groups of Im Chhoodeth and Sek Sam Iet.

Khmer Sereika Resistance Movement

Im Chhoodeth was a former army colonel of the Khmer Republic regime. Before the country fell, he served as a military attaché at the Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok. In this position, he worked closely with the Thai Army High Command. He was close to the Thai Army′s Commander General Kriangsak Chomanan, who became Thai prime minister after the military coup in October 1977. Im Chhoodeth knew the Thai leader intimately, to the point that he could go in and out to meet Kriangsak at any time. Im Chhoodeth spoke Thai fluently, as he studied up to high school in Thailand. In addition, Im Chhoodeth was known to most Cambodians as a famous novelist. He wrote many novels, but the most well-known one was titled "Two Wives."

Following the fall of the Republican Regime, Im Chhoodeth did not leave the country. He continued to organise networks of combatants to carry out the struggle for freedom. After they made a clear decision to support a united movement of Cambodian combatants, Thai army generals launched a search for a Cambodian politician to lead the resistance movement opposing the Khmer Rouge. At that time, Im Chhoodeth suggested to Kriangsak that Son Sann should be invited to unite those combatants because, as he understood it, Son Sann was a highly capable and clean Cambodian dignitary. This is what Im Chhoodeth told me and other resistance fighters later. Nonetheless, according to Son Sann, the person who came into contact with him as a mediator between him and the Thai military authorities was Le Quoc Tuy,[19] a leader of the anti-Hanoi Free Vietnam group.

Finally, I later learned that a Thai colonel named Chavalit Yongchaiyudh had travelled to Paris, contacted Son Sann, and

[19] The Memoirs of Son Sann, Cambodia Daily Press, 2011, p.127

asked him to form a resistance movement on the Cambodian-Thai border. The colonel, who later became Thailand's prime minister, was an expert in Cambodian affairs. Chavalit was an influential Thai army officer who could reap enormous benefits for Thailand by meddling in the dispute in Cambodia.

At first, I was unaware that Chavalit had come into contact with the AGKE and that the association had secretly provided financial support to the border combatants, for it was what we call high politics; everything is secret, known only to a tiny group of people close to Son Sann. In fact, Son Sann carried out these high-politics activities only with a handful of confidants, almost all of whom were a few active members of the association, and some of his children. Among them, aside from Mrs Suon Kaset, Son Sann's son-in-law, Chhay Hancheng, held the post of health state secretary in the 1960s. Chhay Hancheng served Son Sann as his bodyguard, secretary, or office chief. At Son Sann's order, Chhay Hancheng did everything without exception.

One day, when Son Sann was unwell and unable to speak up at a meeting, he murmured into the ear of his son-in-law, who then conveyed his words loudly, as if speaking into a microphone.

Later, I saw another person, Neang Chin Han, a former high-ranking Cambodian public servant who was also close to Son Sann and a military general in the republican era, Dien Del, who was known to be a sufficiently capable officer in the Lon Nol army. After several meetings, I noted that the general had a strong political stance because he said the army had to serve democracy.

Neang Chin Han was a high-ranking public servant who graduated from the Royal Administration School and served as chief of Prince Sihanouk's secretariat in the 1960s. In France, he studied political science and business and graduated from both. Neang Chin Han had expertise in administration and could write political speeches in French well. He had close relations with Mrs Suon Kaset, who worked in Prince Sihanouk's office in the 1960s and was responsible for publishing the monthly bulletin "Kambuja." Mrs Suon Kaset, who received a French-style education, was born into the family of a Cambodian big shot who

had been a cabinet minister, an ambassador, and so forth. She spoke French fluently. She also spoke Cambodian quite well, but she could neither read nor write the language. Mrs Suon Kaset was married to a high-ranking Agriculture Ministry and had three children. She took them to live in France after the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh, leaving behind her husband. Since the Khmer Rouge took control of the country, she had never had any news from her husband at all.

Because Cambodian associations in France sprouted like mushrooms, some people took the initiative to coordinate their activities by, for instance, setting up a liaison committee called CDL (Comité de Liaison) or a neutral commission, and so forth.

However, until 1979, about 150 Cambodian associations were set up in France, half of which were in Paris and its outskirts. Those Cambodians forming the associations might perceive that their political activities could create obstacles to, or affect, the actions of the Khmer Rouge inside the country by holding discussions, disseminating publications, issuing statements, publishing bulletins, or giving news conferences, and so forth.

As for me, I already and unequivocally believed that to liberate Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge, there should be only concrete actions on the battlefield, meaning on Cambodian territory directly, not from afar, thousands of kilometres away from the country. Because of my clear-cut resolve, I decided to prepare myself to do something closer to Cambodia, or at least to work personally with the freedom-loving combatants on the battlefield. My first decision was to resign from the two Motton Companies.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

That day was a day full of anguish and depression for the family of my boss. When I presented my letter of resignation in October 1978, Mrs Motton was crying heartbreakingly. I told them that my future was in Cambodia, not in France. I could not afford to live safely alone while I was aware that my people and my country were encountering tragedy, unprecedented in the history of humankind. In reality, at that time, I still did not have clear ideas

about when or how to return to Cambodia and the border areas. After leaving Motton Company, I worked for another two companies: 1) La Triperie de la Villette and 2) Allen-Bradley, an American company, before leaving France forever. Anyway, I resigned from Motton Company reluctantly to sever my sentimental bond with that family. Otherwise, I might entangle myself in personal problems, preventing me from focusing my mind on what I perceived I must do in the future. Now, to me, everything should commence with a sentence: "Out of Sight, Out of Mind."

Khmer Rouge in Conflict with Neighbouring Countries

As in Cambodia, the cruel Khmer Rouge regime began to wreak devastation relentlessly. Through international newspapers, I learned from news reports that, up to 1977, some 1.2 million Cambodian citizens had lost their lives due to starvation, forced labour, or slaughter. Thousands of Cambodian refugees had fled to seek shelter on Thai and Vietnamese territory. Along with that,

however, the Khmer Rouge, however, encountered armed opposition within the country and armed confrontations with neighbouring countries, namely Thailand and Vietnam.

The root cause of the dispute with Thailand could be said to stem from the two countries′ ideologies, as they had different dogmas, in addition to a territorial dispute. Besides, at that time, Cambodia adhered to a hard-line communist regime, while Thailand was a liberal country and a close ally of the United States and used to fight the Communists in Vietnam as well. Moreover, since October 1976, thanks to a military coup, Thailand had been led by a right-wing government that was absolutely opposed to communism. As such, this new Thai government adopted a policy against communist Cambodia, called Democratic Kampuchea, as they believed that it might provide sanctuaries for Thai communists to attack and oppose their regime. Besides, the Thai government at that time also had tactics to back anti-Khmer Rouge Cambodian movements, especially the Khmer Serei (Free Khmer) group and Cambodian Sereika.

At the beginning, in the dispute between the Khmer Rouge and Thailand, Vietnam, which used to be a comrade-in-arms of the Khmer Rouge, lent support to the group unreservedly. In 1976, when the Khmer Rouge announced that US planes had bombarded Siem Reap Province, Hanoi and Beijing both echoed the accusation made by the Khmer Rouge.[20] However, Hanoi seemed to react more strongly to the bombardment than Beijing.

In March 1976, the international press reported that Vietnam severely condemned the bombing in one of its statements, which mainly stated, "The United States has continued to use Thai territory to oppose Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. They support the Khmer reactionaries on Thai territory and secretly infiltrate them into Cambodia to carry out sabotage and destructive activities against the Cambodian revolution."

In that era, the two Communist countries, Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea, stood shoulder to shoulder against their common enemy, even though they had begun to have a border

[20] Nayan Chanda, the Barbarous Raid Mystery, Far Eastern Economic Review, March 12, 1976, p. 14.

dispute gradually since May 1975. In August 1975, when Communist Vietnamese Leader Le Duan visited Phnom Penh, the two sides, Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge, agreed to settle the dispute peacefully. The international press reported that thousands of Cambodian refugees fleeing to seek shelter in various provinces in Vietnam were sent back to Democratic Kampuchea. Some others were arrested and handed over to the Khmer Rouge. Nonetheless, some refugees who had crossed into border provinces and gone deeper into Vietnam continued to live there. In Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), about 10,000 refugees lived, most of them in pagodas. The press pointed out that, of the refugees, only a few hundred were able to get permission to leave for France before Vietnam severed ties and relationships with Phnom Penh.

China's Strategy Leads Thailand and Khmer Rouge To Put Off Their Dispute

In August 1976, Thailand and the Khmer Rouge regime tried to improve their relations by agreeing to open border passes for trade, although the border dispute continued to take place. Nevertheless, in 1977, Thai-Khmer Rouge relations were damaged again due to military clashes provoked by the firing of artillery and air attacks launched by the Thai military. On January 28, 1977, 60 Thai villagers were killed by the Khmer Rouge. Since then, Thailand closed its border passes with Cambodia. In November, the Thai government sent an official letter of protest to the Khmer Rouge authority. The Khmer Rouge then issued an eight-page statement asserting that Thailand was the one responsible for this killing and that those events had taken place on Cambodian territory. Since then, the Khmer Rouge remained tight-lipped.

At first, Thai officials asserted that Khmer Rouge soldiers had crossed the border to slaughter Thai citizens and destroy their

property. Later, military situation analysts in Bangkok interpreted that the area of Aranhya Prathet where the massacre took place was the hideout of anti-Communist Cambodians called Khmer Serei,[21] who had been carrying out a struggle to liberate Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge. They wanted to interpret that, if there were clashes, they would have occurred because Khmer Serei opposed the Khmer Rouge and not because of the Thai government's forces.

It was estimated that there were some 2,000 Khmer Serei on the border, having contact with some Thai military officers and some Cambodian-Thai traders. The Khmer Serei fighters were operating in the area of Aranhya Prathet. This group used Thai territory to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Khmer Rouge to seek and attract additional aid, as well as to cause trouble for the Khmer Rouge army. The guerrilla warfare carried out by those Khmer Serei fighters made the Khmer Rouge furious, and then it launched counterattacks into Thai territory. Between March and

[21] Norman Peagam, Political Stability at Stake, Questions after the Massacre, Far Eastern Economic Review, February 11, 1977, pp 9-10.

October 1977, armed clashes intensified and spread to the Thai province of Trat.

To respond to the Khmer Rouge attacks, Thailand dispatched armed canoes and warplanes to the area. Thai Supreme Commander General Kriangsak declared that the Thai Army firmly adhered to the policy of retaliation against any violation of Thai territory to defend sovereignty as well as the rights of the Thai people.

The onslaught occurred right at the time when Pol Pot concluded a five-day fraternal visit to North Korea and began an official visit to China, starting on September 28, 1977. Coincidentally, former Thai Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj also paid a private visit to Beijing, where he held an intimate discussion with President Hua Kua-feng. Maybe at that time China started intervening to end the Khmer Rouge-Thai dispute, with the implication of establishing a new alliance against the Soviet Union and Vietnam. On October 20, 1977, the Thai military clique that toppled the government of Seni Pramoj on October 6, 1976, returned to power by overthrowing the anti-communist right-wing

government of Thanin Kraivichien and installing General Kriangsak as prime minister. In his public statements, General Kriangsak repeatedly said he wanted to improve relations with the communist Indochina countries. Improving relations was the new prime minister's key task.

In November 1977, a day before General Kriangsak officially assumed power, the Khmer Rouge radio published a statement calling on Thailand to hold talks to ameliorate relations between the two countries. The statement insistently asked Thailand to meet with Khmer Rouge officials in Vientiane (Laos). The Khmer Rouge said that it had invited Thailand for the first time after Ieng Sary, the Khmer Rouge deputy prime minister and foreign minister, had met with the Thai Foreign Minister Uppadit Pachariyangkun at the United Nations on October 12, 1977. The Thais welcomed the appeal. Many political analysts understood that the sudden change in the Khmer Rouge strategy resulted from a Chinese policy that, since 1975, had tried to advance good relations between Thailand and the Khmer Rouge.

At the end of January 1978, the military-backed government sent a high-level Thai diplomatic delegation, led by Foreign Minister Uppadit Pachariyangkun, to Phnom Penh to improve Khmer Rouge-Thai relations and settle border disputes peacefully. In a speech at a reception welcoming the Thai delegation, Ieng Sary revealed the reason for the change in Khmer Rouge policy. He said that any governments in this region, whether communist or non-communist, had an interest in supporting the Khmer Rouge in the war against Vietnam′s aggressive troops, whom they called ever-ambitious expansionists. At that time, the troops of the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam were fighting each other so fiercely along the border. Ieng Sary said, "If our Democratic Kampuchea were not safe and peaceful due to aggression or interference in its internal affairs, then other countries in Southeast Asia would not have peace and safety either."

As regards bilateral relations, in his speech, Ieng Sary said, "We should not do anything to violate each other′s safety, such as all kinds of intelligence activities and sabotage." We should not permit anybody to use our territory directly or indirectly in any

case... against the Thai-Cambodian joint declaration issued in October 1975.″ Saying so, Ieng Sary wanted to refer to the secret activities carried out by the non-communist Khmer groups, or Khmer Serei, initiated and supported by some Thai army generals. Those anti-Khmer Rouge fighters were selected from among the Cambodian refugees living in Thai refugee camps along the border. In his reply to Ieng Sary′s speech, the Thai foreign minister said, "It is extremely regrettable that we misunderstood each other in the past, and that there were some actions taking place through the hands of a third party.″

Who Was the Third Hand?

In Bangkok, Prime Minister General Kriangsak told reporters about the role of the "third party hands,″ and he seemed to recognize that the Khmer Rouge was not responsible for the border clashes. Nevertheless, the Thai Government did not reveal who was behind the "third-party hands.″ The weird story about the

third-party hands was disclosed by the Thai press two months later, after the Thai authorities seized some weapons in Aranya Prathet district.

In the afternoon of December 20, 1977,[22] along a road in Aranya Prathet district, boy scouts, deployed to work with the police, found weapons consisting of AK-47 and M16 rifles, hand grenades, and some supplies on a bus with 30 Cambodians and four Buddhist monks. The police seized the bus, mistaking it for an arms-trafficking vehicle, and detained all the passengers. In the end, those Cambodians identified themselves as members of an anti-communist resistance movement, supported by the Thai Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC). At that time, a police officer contacted the ISOC. The next morning, early in the morning, an ISOC colonel came and arranged for the release of the 30 Cambodian fighters.

Those Cambodians, members of a Cambodian resistance movement, received strong support from a Thai Buddhist monk

[22] Richard Nations, Busload of Trouble, Far Estern Economic Review, March 10, 1978, p. 10.

named Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho, chief abbot of Chittabhawan Pagoda near the seaside in the Thai town of Pattaya. This Buddhist monk was well known for presenting himself as an anti-communist, right-wing political figure. In his preaching, he used to tell male and female Buddhist devotees that "killing the Communists is not a sin." He used to express the view that he did not fear giving up his robe to take up arms fighting against the communists to defend the nation, religion, and throne. He played a key role in the strategy against Thailand's communists. That was why Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho carried out activities to support the Khmer Serei Resistance Movement, or Khmer Sereika, unreservedly.

Im Chhoodeth, a leader of the Khmer Sereika Movement, revered Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho as his own mentor. A large number of Im Chhoodeth's subordinates, known as members of the Reachchaksei Movement, used to stay in the Chittabhawan Pagoda, where they always received food and money from the chief abbot, Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho.

Normally, the chief abbot had his own network of Thai intelligence agents planted along the Cambodian-Thai border. This

network was tasked with selecting refugees crossing into Thailand, in or out of the camps, and wanting to join anti-communist resistance movements. After conducting screening through repeated interviews and knowing unambiguously that those Cambodian refugees definitely had the intention to join anti-communist movements, the network then took them to stay temporarily in the Chittabhawan Pagoda, pending a meeting with those responsible for Khmer Serei or Khmer Sereika. Usually, newcomers still could not meet the chief abbot straightaway after arriving in the pagoda, but the abbot had already arranged a plentiful supply of food for them. Important people could stroll along the seaside and receive some cash for expenses during the waiting period.

Only after several days did those Cambodian representatives come to the Chittabhawan Pagoda, and once they accepted the new arrivals as their members, they took them to pay respect to the chief abbot, arrange a ceremony for them to swear not to betray each other, and request the abbot's best wishes.

What was impressive was that Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho organised a ceremony for the newcomers to drink holy water and swear they would take part in the struggle to liberate the nation and build Cambodia as a republic with complete freedom and genuine democracy. At that time, nobody thought that our country would return to a monarchy, specifically a constitutional monarchy. Besides, everyone knew that during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era of Prince Sihanouk in the 1950s and 1960s, Thailand sheltered the Khmer Serei group led by Son Ngoc Thanh, whom Prince Sihanouk accused of belonging to the republican clique against the Cambodian throne. Therefore, support for Cambodian republicans may have been a pattern among Thai politicians opposed to the Cambodian monarchy.

In his anti-communist activities, Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho definitely cooperated closely with the Thai Army. Absolutely, he was a key member of the so-called "third party hands" or "third forces" that used the armed forces of the Khmer Serei or Khmer Sereika to launch armed clashes frequently with the Khmer Rouge, prompting the latter to take retaliatory actions against Thai locals

in various villages along the Cambodian-Thai border. As such, General Kriangsak absolutely knew who the "third party hands," or "third forces", were.

Since mid-June 1976 in France, I saw articles in some French newspapers reporting the armed struggle against the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; for instance, an article on a group of clandestine fighters conducting patrols and keeping watch in Cambodia's jungles. The group leaders were all former military officers of the Khmer Republic, carrying out the struggle to liberate Cambodia and restore freedom and democracy.

If we had conducted a deeply rooted study of Thailand's anti-communist strategy, the "third party hands" or "third forces" would have been the forces created by the ISOC to resist the advance of the three Indochina countries: Laos, Vietnam, and Democratic Kampuchea. The ISOC definitely implemented the Thai National Security Council's policy, authorising the feeding of the forces previously known as Khmer Serei and Sereika, later, as well as the Free Vietnam and Free Laos forces.

Overall, the activities of the Thai Army′s special unit and Preah Kru Kitti Vuttho were to feed all the forces called "Sereika." Some members of the resistance movement, the Khmer People′s National Liberation Front (KPNLF), told me about the Thai authorities′ involvement in their struggle.

Thai Soldiers Help Sereika Fighters

A member named Leng recounted the background of his life to me as follows:

In April 1975, at the time when the Khmer Rouge broke into the town of Battambang Province, all the residents were evacuated to live in the countryside. At that time, Leng, a Year 12 high school student, was assigned by the Khmer Rouge to work with a mobile land survey team that was relocated incessantly from one district to another. In July 1977, Leng was ordered to survey land at the Kamping Puoy dam in Western Cambodia. There, four or five Sereika fighters, dressed in black like the Khmer Rouge, were

often seen at night conducting propaganda and fomenting opposition against the Khmer Rouge. The whereabouts of their secret base were completely unknown. As he could no longer endure the torture inflicted on him by the Khmer Rouge and, due to food shortages and his craving for freedom, Leng and one of his coworkers, Chea, decided to escape from Khmer Rouge control in search of the secret base of the resistance fighters along the Cambodian-Thai border.

To prepare for their trip, they started stealing milled rice and hiding it in the jungle. After saving half a kilogram of rice, they quietly cooked it for the day they would flee the village. After walking barefoot across stretching rice fields and deep, thick jungles for a week, the two brave young men reached the border, as they knew that the area was Bantoat Hill. They were completely in the dark about where the Sereika group's base was. Anyway, they were resolved that they must join those resistance fighters to oppose the Khmer Rouge of Pol Pot. For several days, they saw neither a house nor a village. They were completely exhausted when they reached a remote village.

At that time, they did not realise that they had entered Thai territory, and that morning, when they spotted the first house, they jumped into it. Inside the house, a man was having his breakfast. He was a Thai border police officer. After seeing the two Cambodian young men enter abruptly, the Thai police officer was horrified because they had already reached the rifle cupboard. He suspected that the Khmer Rouge might trespass across the border, because clashes with them had often taken place in this area. Anyway, the two Cambodian young men did not have any malicious intention toward the Thai police officer and were unaware that they were standing near the weapon cupboard. Besides, they did not realise they were stepping onto Thai territory. Anyway, after trying to make the trip for several days, they were exhausted and unable to speak or gesture easily.

The Thai police officer then called in his Cambodian assistant to help with the translation, as the two people could not speak Thai at all. Finally, the Thai police officer believed that the two Cambodian young men had no bad intentions and had not done anything unfriendly to harm him. After offering meals to the two,

he sent them to the police station for questioning, because he still suspected that the two young men might be disguised Khmer Rouge soldiers coming to gather intelligence.

At the Thai police station, Leng and Chea were handcuffed and blindfolded. Another Thai police officer, the interrogator, sometimes pointed his pistol at them, according to interrogation techniques, to make sure that they were definitely the runaways from the Khmer Rouge regime and, unequivocally, not Khmer Rouge soldiers.

The questions were mainly: Are you Khmer Rouge soldiers? Where is the location of your unit? What are your names? Anyway, the answers from the two were still the same; nothing had changed: We are not Khmer Rouge soldiers, and we do not know any Khmer Rouge commanders at all. We are looking for Cambodian anti-Khmer Rouge groups because we want to join the Sereika fighters.

Following the long interrogation, the two young Cambodian men were sent by car to the police station in Pong Nam Ron district, where they arrived at noon. There, they were neither

handcuffed nor blindfolded as before, but were provided with a meal again. Despite not knowing about their future and having been hungry for several days, they tried to eat as much as they could. Under the Khmer Rouge, they had to work extremely hard, but they had only rice congee. The Thai police kept asking them the same questions, and their answers remained unchanged.

When the police no longer had any suspicions about the two young Cambodian men and were certain that they wanted to join the anti-Khmer Rouge resistance movement, those police officers then informed a Thai military officer and asked him to carry on the investigation. At that time, the two men were whisked off to the compound of a Thai Special Forces command whose exact whereabouts were unknown, because it appeared to be the housing of ordinary locals. The special military unit had a team of two officers, headed by a leader. Those officers wore no military uniform and showed no signs of being military men.

There, Leng and Chea were locked up by Thai soldiers in a large vehicle container for about a week. At that time, the two noticed two other Cambodians helping with cooking, boiling tea

water, and cleaning. In the compound of the special military team′s office, Leng and his friend were no longer handcuffed. Later, they were allowed to stay in a nearby room, and then, like the other two Cambodians, they helped with cooking and cleaning. Later, the military men interviewed the two men again, asking questions similar to the police, but some others were clearer, such as: What do you both know how to do? What languages do you know how to speak? A month later, after living under strict control, the Thai military men asked Leng and Chea whether they really wanted to join the Sereika group, go to refugee camps, or return to Cambodia.

Once the Thai military men were sure Leng and Chea wanted to join the Sereika group, they took them to another military area in Trat province. Afterwards, they were sent by car from Trat to Borai, where gemstones are dug, in Chanthaburi province. In Borai, the Thais took them to a remote area. There, they saw a large warehouse where hundreds of sacks of supplies were stored. About 10 Cambodian-speaking workers in the depot were busy carrying sacks of milled rice, dried fish, cooking oil, and many

other items. A few minutes later, they took all the supplies into the jungle. Half an hour later, another group arrived. Among them, Leng noticed that one of his old friends, Pheap, was likely the supply chief of the two groups. Only when they spoke to Pheap in Cambodian could Leng realise he had finally met the Cambodian resistance fighters.

However, Leng and Chea could not meet those Cambodians straight away, because they needed to wait for another Thai military team in civilian clothes, riding Japanese-made motorbikes, from the jungle. The Thais told the two young men to walk with the Cambodian resistance fighters to their base, a few kilometres away. When they arrived at the foot of Bantoat Hill, Leng saw a five-by-five-metre plastic-covered hut equipped with a scant number of medical tools, which was the resistance fighters′ hospital. A Cambodian medical officer managed this hospital. They were busy giving treatment to five or six Cambodian patients infected with malaria. After travelling another two hours, crossing streams and walking up and down many high grounds, all reached the hilltop at last.

Arriving at the entrance of the military command on the hill, Leng noticed Cambodian soldiers holding rifles standing under big trees in the dense jungle, impenetrable by sunlight. In the camp, Leng saw four bamboo huts. One hut was occupied by the Cambodian commander, and another by the Thai military stationed there to collect information and coordinate support and supplies for the rebel fighters. Finally, Leng was led to meet the Cambodian commander, Colonel Prum Vit, who welcomed him cordially and warmly. His subordinates called him "grandfather." The colonel, whose character was impressive, had dark skin but was solid and strong, wearing shorts and a krama (Cambodian scarf).

His subordinates respected the grandfather because he was a commander with clear principles and a disciplined resistance fighter. At that time, members of the movement recognised that the commander sacrificed his life to serve the common interests and liberate Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge dictatorship. This demonstrated that, at that time, there were definitely troops of the Khmer Serei, or Sereika, supported by the Thai military.

In fact, in that era, the anti-Khmer Rouge resistance movements, no matter how much they resented and hated the Khmer Rouge, were unable to carry out sizeable activities that could jolt this genocide clique or cause anxiety to it. On the one hand, the tight control of the Khmer Rouge state authority over the citizens,[23] living in a strict cooperative style, undertaking hard labour, and eating together, was a considerable obstacle to any attempts to free oneself or to revolt by any opposition movements or groups having shelters along the border, specifically along the Cambodian-Thai border. Moreover, the aid that Thailand provided to the anti-Khmer Rouge resistance movements was minimal. Thailand should be highly careful about its anti-Khmer Rouge activities, because behind the Khmer Rouge was the giant China, wielding enormous influence on Thailand's own security.

In that era, Thailand, in a regional context, required good cooperation from China rather than conducting activities against such a big country in Asia. Therefore, at that time, Thailand could

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[23] Prime Minister Hun Sen very accurately assessed the obstacles to the wriggling out in the book entitled "13 Decades of Cambodia's Journey", published by Pracheachon newspaper in 1996, pp. 234-237.

not act as a strong backing for the overthrow of the genocidal Democratic Kampuchea regime. Thailand stealthily fed the Khmer Serei or Khmer Sereika forces as tools only to bargain for its own security with the Khmer Rouge and China. The only resistance forces able to topple Pol Pot's regime were the forces of the Cambodian resistance fighters in the interior, supported by the country's daring step forward to unleash an onslaught on this regime. The subsequent events proved this tendency.

Dispute between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam

If the dispute between the Khmer Rouge and Thailand stemmed from communist ideology against capitalism, then the dispute between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam, who were comrades-in-arms, stemmed from several other reasons. On the one hand, the big communist China and the Soviet Union,[24]

[24] The Soviet Union, whose capital city was Moscow, was a gathering of 15 coomunist countries under the authority of the Communist Party. After the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and

wielding influence on the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam respectively, also had conflict with each other. The dispute between the two giant communist states was affecting their subservient countries.

The differences between China and the Soviet Union had existed for years, since the 1960s. At first, the differences were ideological, starting in the 1950s when the Soviet Union moved away from Stalinism after Marshall Stalin passed away. China accused the Soviet Union of being revisionist and blamed it for what was called hegemony in the world. China opposed the Soviet Union´s policy in Eastern Europe, specifically toward the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968. It regarded the Soviet Union as a social imperialist and said that the Soviet Union´s foreign policy proved expansionist or hegemonic.

The outbreak of the border conflict between the two big countries in 1969 led China to realise more clearly that the Soviet

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the 15 republics declared themselves independent states. They are: Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belorussia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Ubekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Estonia, and Lithuania. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the leader of the Communist bloc against thed Capitalist bloc led by the United States.

Union strongly threatened its security. China believed it had a strong interest in acting, in cooperation with the United States and the West, to counter the Soviet Union's hegemony. Moreover, Chinese leaders saw that cooperation would lead China toward modernisation, a key step in developing the country and making it prosperous.

Deng Xiaoping,[25] who escaped the purges during the Cultural Revolution, was the architect of this modernisation. This Chinese leader crafted the saying, "It doesn't matter what colour a cat has, provided that it catches mice." The four modernisations of China were the modernisation of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence. The four modernisations conformed to China's theory called "Three Worlds Theory," with which China regarded the United States and the Soviet Union as the First World; the developed countries of the West, including France, Great Britain, Germany, Australia, and Canada, as the Second World; and the developing countries as the Third World.

[25] Teng Xiao Ping or Deng Xiaoping

Using the tactic of surrounding the countryside to move toward attacking and capturing cities, Chinese leaders cajoled and induced the Second and Third Worlds to join forces to contain the influence of the First World. Nonetheless, in that era, China analysed that in the First World there were differences between the Soviet Union and the United States. At that time, China noticed that the Soviet Union was an offensive power while the United States was only a defensive power. Therefore, cooperating with the United States would pose no danger to China, especially since the United States pulled troops out of Vietnam. So, China had a strong interest in contacting and enticing the United States and Western countries to be close to it to resist the expansionism of the Soviet Union.˝

Since the three communist Indochina countries (Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia) scored victories in 1975, China, which used to say that relations between Vietnam and China were close like teeth and lips, saw that Vietnam was siding with the Soviet

Union, not with it.[26] Political analysts in the West asserted that Vietnam received a huge quantity of aid and close cooperation from China for years. However, Vietnam still could not forget the bitter memory of China's control over the country over the past 1,000 years. The analysts added that when Vietnamese leader Le Duan visited China in September 1975, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly appealed to Vietnam to distance itself from Soviet control. The analysts also said that when he paid another visit to China in September 1977, Le Duan noticed that China's modernisation policy was biased toward, or favourable to, the West. At that time, Le Duan let China know that Hanoi was not yet prepared to distance itself from Soviet control. Political analysts underlined that Vietnamese leaders did not beam with satisfaction, because since 1975, while it had never provided Vietnam with any military aid, China had given a huge quantity of it to the Khmer Rouge. In addition, when the Khmer Rouge was in a border dispute with Vietnam in December 1977, China backed the Khmer Rouge,

[26] All the points I have written were political analyses published by Western press I read.

repeating after the latter that Vietnam was the aggressor against Cambodia. China supported the Khmer Rouge and commended it for its efforts in the defence of territorial integrity.

On December 30, 1977, the Khmer Rouge announced that it was temporarily severing diplomatic ties with Vietnam while fierce fighting was taking place along the border. The Khmer Rouge accused Vietnam of attempting to set up a new communist party among the traitors. In an interview by a Yugoslav journalist in Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge Prime Minister Pol Pot disclosed that Vietnam had the intention of incorporating Cambodia into the Indochinese Federation, where millions of Vietnamese could come and live on Cambodian territory[27]. Pol Pot perceived that within 30 years, Cambodian people might be turned into ethnic minorities. As usual, Vietnam rejected the accusation, explaining that the Khmer Rouge had created its internal problems itself.

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[27] Nayan Chanda, Vietnam Prepares for a Long War, Far Eastern Economic Review, April 21, 1978, pp. 17--22.

An expert on communist Indochina explained that the Cambodian Communist Party had two lines[28]. The first line was those close to Vietnam and supporting the Anti-Imperialist United Front. This line adopted the position on revolutionary solidarity among Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. As for the second line, it regarded Prince Sihanouk as a feudal lord, a target that must be destroyed and toppled. This group embraced a communist policy called independence, not submission to the outside party, specifically Vietnam. Vietnam backed the first line all along. The expert asserted that Vietnamese leaders constantly recalled that, when the Khmer Rouge was still weak and asked Vietnam to make war in its place, Vietnam acquiesced. After Vietnam destroyed the military operation of Lon Nol called Chenla 2, it agreed to withdraw at the Khmer Rouge´s request. However, because Pol Pot never recognised that it had helped him at the beginning of the war against Lon Nol, Vietnam was furious with him, since Vietnamese leaders discerned that Cambodians were

[28] Asiaweek, Where Does It Leave Sihanouk, April 21, 1978, p.15.

ungrateful. The expert saw that Vietnamese leaders wanted special relations between Vietnam and Cambodia, like those between Vietnam and Laos, since they had helped the Khmer Rouge achieve a permanent victory over the troops of Lon Nol′s Republic.

The expert analysed that, considering previous experiences, the Cambodians constantly feared that Vietnam′s 70 million people might flood into Cambodia. Most Cambodian nationalist leaders recalled that present-day South Vietnam had been Cambodian territory. The territory was lost to Vietnam due to Vietnamese emigrants crossing into Cambodia. The Indochinese Communist Party, consisting of Vietnamese, Khmer, and Lao communists, stated its intention to create a federation of the three countries after liberating them from France′s control. Nevertheless, since the Indochinese Communist Party's dissolution in 1951, the idea of establishing the federation has been abandoned. Analysts asserted that, based on comrade-in-arms and combative solidarity, Vietnamese leaders insisted on maintaining a special relationship with Laos and Cambodia. The analysts said that, however, the

Khmer Rouge replied to Vietnam that it did not want any special relationship; normal relations were more than enough.

If the analysts of the Indochinese Communist Party's remarks that the Khmer Communist Party had two lines are true, Pol Pot's party was definitely not the first line with good relations with Vietnam. Pol Pot implacably detested his comrade-in-arms and classmate in Hanoi. The first-line communist group also used to provide tactical support to Prince Sihanouk because of his neutrality policy. On the contrary, the second-line group, including Pol Pot, showed a nationalist policy for the Khmer Communist Party to be independent from Vietnam and adopted a policy opposing the regime of the prince.

Analysts assessed thousands of communist revolutionaries who had pursued their studies and stayed in North Vietnam since 1954 as the first-line group, with a conciliatory stance and cooperation with Prince Sihanouk. Shortly after the events of 18 March 1970, those people actively joined the Cambodian National United Front chaired by Prince Sihanouk. Since 1971, those revolutionaries had returned to Cambodia. Immediately, Pol Pot

warned them that they should be under the control of the Central Committee, commanded directly by Pol Pot. That being the case, those revolutionaries were regarded by Pol Pot as targets to be destroyed successively, according to the party's purification policy. Because of the general killing committed by Pol Pot to seize power, combined with the slaughter of the Khmer Communist Party's high-ranking officials, internal opposition movements had emerged under various small and large guises, but most of them were clandestine resistance.

Internal Resistance Movements Against Pol Pot

Since the end of 1974, a group of rebel fighters in Koh Kong province, led by Say Phuthang, Tea Banh, and Rong Phlamkesorn, with about two battalions of troops and some followers, broke away from the Pol Pot-controlled group and fled to Thailand.[29] In

[29] A group of researchers, in the book entitled "Samdech Akka Moha Senapadei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister Born from a Peasant Family," Ponlleu Pich Printing House, Phnom Penh, 2007, p. 79.

the Northeast, in Ratanakiri province, by the end of 1975, an anti-Pol Pot movement led by Boun My, Bou Thang, and Soey Keo had also emerged, with several followers and about two battalions of forces. Those opposition movements made Pol Pot more furious and then intensified the internal purge more savagely and extensively. Moreover, armed clashes with Vietnam occurred more frequently as well.[30]

Within the resistance movements to free themselves from the Pol Pot regime, the background of a regimental chief of staff, still young at that time, showed his pertinacious resolve and unflinching courage, unprecedented in Cambodia´s history, to carry out the struggle until victory was achieved by completely toppling Pol Pot´s regime of genocide. The background of the struggle is Hun Sen, the incumbent prime minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia and a later-generation leader from a peasant family, whom almost all his political opponents miscalculated in terms of leadership capability.

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[30] Group of researchers, ibid.

Hun Sen Emerges to Oppose Pol Pot

In the wake of the 18 March 1970 event, young man Hun Bun Nal, 18 at the time, volunteered to join the Cambodia National United Front chaired by Prince Norodom Sihanouk on the royal's appeal broadcast on Beijing Radio, calling the people to run into the marquis to rise and take arms to oppose the Lon Nol-Sirimatak clique, which had staged the military coup to oust the Princeas the Head of State. When he joined that resistance movement, he changed his name to Hun Samrach. He was sent to train to become a combatant in the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces.[31]

Two weeks later, young Hun Samrach was appointed platoon commander with 36 soldiers under his command. By the end of 1974, his leadership achievements and battlefield successes

[31]This is the official name, in that epoch, of the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces commanded by Prince Norodom Sihanouk (Forces Armées Populaires de Libération du Kampuchea), which was later named the Cambodian Revolutionary Forces.

earned him a promotion to battalion commander, with 500 combatants under his command. It was in this new role that the commander changed his name again from Hun Samrach to Hun Sen. A day before the troops of the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces liberated Phnom Penh from Lon Nol's Khmer Republic regime on the morning of 16 April 1975, young commander Hun Sen was injured in his left eye on the battlefield in Kampong Cham Province and sent to the hospital for treatment. During his time with the Cambodia National United Front, Hun Sen saw through the true nature of this front, which had not been led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, but was under the complete control of the Khmer Rouge. Moreover, the massacre policy and serious human rights violations committed by the Khmer Rouge against innocent Cambodian people induced Commander Hun Sen to nurture an intense hatred of the savage auto-genocide regime and to have an idea to break away from it. In August 1975, Hun Sen was promoted to chief of staff of the regiment stationed in Region 21 in Kampong Cham province's Memot District with 2,000 soldiers under his command. His new role in the military ranks provided Hun Sen with more resources, meaning more forces to boost his

chances of carrying out a struggle against the Pol Pot genocidal regime.

In that era, Khmer Rouge control was split into two: the central organization under Pol Pot's direct control and several regions. Each region was divided into sectors, and each sector into districts. In 1970-1975, each region was autonomous and had its own forces. However, since the 17 April victory, the central organization has stepped up the selection of cadres within the Cambodian Communist Party ranks. It used its power to tighten control over all the regions. Pol Pot needed to purge the eastern region's cadres, most of whom had undertaken study in Vietnam many years ago or had good relations with Hanoi. The eastern region consists of some provinces bordering Vietnam, such as Prey Veng and Svay Rieng, as well as some parts of Kampong Cham and Kandal provinces. It had So Phim as party secretary, who had opposed French colonialism in the 1940s. Besides, since the proclamation of the Khmer Rouge's Democratic Kampuchea

Constitution in April 1976,[32] So Phim had been appointed vice president of the Praesidium, with Khieu Samphan as president. Also in April 1976, the chief of the eastern region's military division, named Chan Chakrey, was accused of attempting to stage a coup d'état and was arrested in May.[33] And due to intense torture, Chan Chakrey was forced to confess, in which he implicated some key cadres and Vietnam. In 1977, some 50 fellow combatants of Hun Sen were arrested one after the other.

At midnight on 20-21 July 1977, Hun Sen and four confidants decided to cross the border into Vietnam to ask for assistance from the army of the neighbouring country, currently in conflict with the Pol Pot regime, to liberate the Cambodian people from the Pol Pot genocide regime without delay. It should be pointed out that in that era, the Vietnamese authorities, despite Vietnam's frequent ongoing military clashes with Democratic Kampuchea, continued to forcibly send back to Cambodia the Cambodian

[32] The Khmer Rouge regime adopted a new constitution in January 1976, named Democratic Kampuchea.

[33] Chan Chakrey also held the position of party secretary for the Eastern Region's Sector 24, according to documents UN-Cambodia court.

refugees who had stealthily crossed over the border into Vietnamese territory, except for those who had already entered deep inside important provincial towns or cities, like Saigon, and so forth. As such, Hun Sen had already envisaged that if Vietnam refused to help and sent him back to Cambodia, he would commit suicide at once, preventing himself from falling into Pol Pot's hands. In addition to the fear that the Vietnamese authorities might forcibly send him to Pol Pot, another deadly danger was the landmines planted everywhere along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border that might unexpectedly cause injuries while crossing it.

At two o'clock at dawn on 21 July 1977, the team of Hun Sen safely crossed the border into Vietnamese territory, where they rested, awaiting the morning to continue their trip. In the morning, Hun Sen and his team were heading to a village called Ho Ly in Loc Ninh District. Those brave people arrived there at about half past two in the afternoon. In general, the fate of Cambodian nationals who illegally crossed the border into neighbouring countries was not much different. They were detained, interrogated, and jailed for a while before the neighbouring

countries′ authorities made final decisions on each case. In that period, Cambodians who crossed the border into Thai territory also had stories like those of those who crossed into Vietnam. At that time, what was different was that in Thailand the Thai authorities had secret organisations waiting to receive volunteers to serve in the anti-Pol Pot movements. At the same time, the Thai Government did not have any possibility to step forward and launch large-scale onslaughts directly to bring down the Khmer Rouge regime. As in Vietnam, it seemed that the time had not yet arrived for this country to introduce itself to help topple the Pol Pot regime. It needed to wait until after 1977, when Khmer Rouge leaders publicly declared that they were waging war against the Vietnamese aggressors and announced the severing of diplomatic ties between the two countries. Therefore, the case concerning Hun Sen was also within the context of relations between Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea during that era. As the Vietnamese authorities suspected his group of being soldiers coming to collect intelligence for Pol Pot, they interrogated them repeatedly, moving from one place to another, from the Ho Ly village office to the jail in Loc Ninh district. They were even incarcerated in Song Be

province's military prison for 22 days. Thanks to their repeated statements and Hun Sen's unequivocal understanding of problems and military geography, the Vietnamese authorities then began to believe that he was truly a senior army officer seeking assistance to wage a struggle against the Pol Pot genocidal regime.

On September 27, 1977, Hun Sen was permitted to meet with a high-ranking military officer, a general of the Vietnamese Army Headquarters, and a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Vietnam. At that meeting, Hun Sen asked Vietnam to stop handing over refugees crossing into Vietnamese territory to Pol Pot and to grant political asylum to any Khmer Rouge cadres intending to escape the genocidal regime and live in Vietnam. The Vietnamese authorities accepted the two-point request straightaway. Moreover, Hun Sen persistently asked Vietnam to provide sanctuaries and military aid, especially weapons and supplies, to a resistance movement or to new forces to be established to mount attacks to liberate Cambodian people from the Pol Pot regime. In fact, it was the last point that Hun Sen

wanted most, for this was the main purpose of his escape as a refugee to Vietnam at that time. Nonetheless, Vietnam refused because it wanted to avoid being accused of interfering in Cambodia′s internal affairs. This position disappointed Hun Sen deeply.

In 1977, the Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge troops repeatedly engaged in large-scale clashes with each other. In particular, in April, when the Khmer Rouge troops launched fierce onslaughts against the Vietnamese town of Tinh Bien and some villages in the Mekong Delta province of An Giang, killing many civilians, Vietnam retaliated with bombardment while trying to negotiate, but in vain. On September 24, 1977, the Khmer Rouge launched a second large-scale attack on Tay Ninh, causing many deaths among civilians. In October, the Vietnamese troops retaliated violently in Svay Rieng province. In December, the Vietnamese forces continued to conduct large-scale attacks along the borders of Kampong Cham, Kratie, and Takeo provinces, inflicting heavy defeats on the Khmer Rouge troops. In the counterattack, the Vietnamese troops occupied the Snuol District of Kratie Province

and Tramoung,[34] Ponhea Krek, Tbong Khmum, and Memot Districts of Kampong Cham Province. Taking advantage of this, Hun Sen personally inspected the situation in Cambodian territory. However, he was strongly disappointed because the Vietnamese troops withdrew without allowing the anti-Khmer Rouge movement to use the areas as sanctuaries to build troops or as their liberated zone. Anyway, the young commander was, all the same, partly happy because the Vietnamese forces allowed Cambodian refugees fleeing to Vietnam to live on their territory.

Khmer Rouge Sever Diplomatic Relations

On December 31, 1977, Khieu Samphan, president of the Democratic Kampuchea Praesidium, denounced Vietnam's aggression publicly, while the Khmer Rouge Foreign Minister Ieng Sary announced severing diplomatic relations with Vietnam. The

[34] At present, the Tramoung District is incorporated into the Memot district.

dispute between the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge regime and Vietnam reached a new stage that required the latter to adopt a policy of openly supporting the Cambodian resistance movements while vehemently opposing the genocidal regime.

According to publications of the Western press issued in that era, in January 1978, the Vietnamese forces attacked and pursued the Khmer Rouge troops 30-40 kilometres deep inside Cambodia. Cambodian refugees arriving at Ben Sang camp in Tay Ninh Province at the same time said that some 10,000 Cambodians had crossed the border into Vietnam. In that camp, Cambodian Communist Party members educated in Hanoi organised political meetings. Issues such as voluntary return to Cambodia to attack the Pol Pot regime, to take revenge for the killing of their parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren, or to change the Democratic Kampuchea Government were brought up for discussion. The camp was also the site for reeducation of Cambodian soldiers captured by Vietnam, who would be educated to amend themselves into good citizens, understand the true nature of Pol Pot, and become genuine Marxist-Leninist cadres.

Also in January, Pol Pot intensified the purging in the eastern region, while Hun Sen, in Vietnam, met with a high-ranking officer, the commander of the 7th Military Region, and a representative of the Vietnamese Party and State, who informed him that the Vietnamese government permitted Hun Sen to build troops to be recruited from among the Cambodian refugees. The Vietnamese side would provide military aid, including weapons, ammunition, supplies, training, and financial assistance. As regards political issues, Vietnam asked the Cambodian side to resolve them itself. With strong support, Hun Sen then began to accept renegade Khmer Rouge cadres and build forces successively.

On March 14, 1978, the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge troops mounted an attack on Moat Chruk or Chau Doc province, causing deaths and injuries among dozens of Vietnamese civilians. Along with this, the Democratic Kampuchea radio station made known the resolve of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge cadres to root out agents and servants of the expansionists and Vietnamese aggressors from all units and from Cambodian territory forever. While the cleansing in the eastern region became more savage, the wriggling out in the

interior became more active. General revolt movements occurred throughout the entire eastern region. Following the demise of So Phim, the anti-Pol Pot movements in this region were led by Heng Samrin and Chea Sim. In April 1978, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese troops reportedly massed along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. Vietnam appealed to the Khmer Rouge soldiers to rise and take up arms to oppose the Khmer Rouge genocidal leaders. Vietnam's new strategy was very fruitful because there were also widespread seething uprisings inside the Khmer Rouge regime.

Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation

In November 1978, while hundreds of thousands of Cambodian citizens fled to Vietnam, the anti-Pol Pot resistance forces met to discuss setting up a political organisation to lead the struggle to topple the Pol Pot regime. Four groups of rebel fighters then met. They included: 1) the group of uprising forces in the eastern region represented by Heng Samrin and Chea Sim; 2) the

group in the northeastern region led by Boun My and Bou Thang; 3) the group of new renegades led by Hun Sen; and 4) the group of cadres staying in Vietnam since the Geneva Conference of 1954, consisting of Pen Sovan, Ros Samay, and Mok Sakun. As for the fifth group, led by Say Phuthang, it agreed to join the struggle but had not yet revealed itself.

At that time, the new forces of Hun Sen, starting as a company, grew speedily into 28 battalions with some 10,000 troops. On December 2, 1978, the five groups of freedom fighters proclaimed the establishment of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation, with Heng Samrin as president. On December 25, 1978, 50,000 Vietnamese troops, together with some 20,000 forces of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation, called Heng Samrin troops, launched large-scale attacks into Cambodia and captured Phnom Penh completely on January 7, 1979. Pol Pot and his special Khmer Rouge troops fled to the border with Thailand, where they received support from China and Thailand to regroup their forces and continue to wage a war they called "national liberation war." On January 8, 1979, the

Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation formed a provisional government called the Cambodian People's Revolutionary Council, with Heng Samrin as chairman, Pen Sovan as vice chairman and defense minister, Hun Sen as member and foreign minister, Chea Sim as member and interior minister, and five other members holding key posts, such as the minister of information, news, and culture; the minister of education; the minister of social affairs and health; and the minister of economy and livelihood. On January 11, 1979, the leaders of the front and the Cambodian People's Revolutionary Council arrived in Phnom Penh.

Pol Pot Requests Prince Sihanouk's Help

After he resigned from the post of Head of State of Democratic Kampuchea in March 1976, the Khmer Rouge

discarded him.[35] The Pol Pot clique publicly attacked the Prince's Sangkum Reas Niyum regime, saying it was a despotic feudal regime, and purged and slaughtered almost all the pro-Sihanouk people. Aside from barring him from leaving his residence, the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge also murdered the royal family, including five of his children and 14 grandchildren.[36] When the Khmer Rouge needed him, they made sure to provide him with food. However, when they were no longer in need of the royal, they did not care about him in the least. Prince Sihanouk published a book entitled "Prisoners of the Khmer Rouge," which he wrote in 1986. In the book, he said that he had been aware of the dispute between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam because he had listened to news broadcasts from international radio stations, such as the British BBC, Beijing radio, France Inter, Australian radio, or German radio, and so forth, with a radio set that Khieu Samphan had given to him.

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[35] Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who had resigned from his post as Head of State in March 1976, was replaced by Khieu Samphan as Chairman of the Presidium of Democratic Kampuchea when the new constitution went into effect.

On January 1, 1978, after he unusually woke up late because he took sleeping pills in the evening, and after he listened to a radio, broadcasting that Democratic Kampuchea had broken diplomatic ties with Vietnam and pushed back the invading troops from Cambodian territory, the Prince hurriedly wrote a letter to the respected Khmer Rouge organization, in Khmer, "Angkar" extolling it for the success that the Cambodian Revolutionary Forces had achieved and saying that he had readied himself to serve the organization or Angkar in case the motherland needed him.[37] The next morning, the organization or Angkar, in a radio broadcast, praised the Prince but refrained from mentioning that he had volunteered to serve the Khmer Rouge anew. Prince Sihanouk noted that between January 1, 1978 and December 1 of the same year, Vietnam constantly made announcements on Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh radios, calling for settlement of problems through negotiations. In its response, the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge radio said there was no talk whatsoever because Vietnam encroached upon

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[36] Norodom Sihanouk, les Prisonniers des Khmer Rouge, Edition Cameron, 1986, p. 320.

[37] Norodom Sihanouk, les Prisonniers des Khmer Rouge, ibid, p. 248.

and invaded innocent, peace-loving Democratic Kampuchea. The Prince also noted that whenever the dispute grew bigger and bigger, his fridge would be filled up with fine foods because the Khmer Rouge paid more and more attention to him.

On the afternoon of January 5, 1979, Praesidium Head Khieu Samphan invited Prince Sihanouk from his residence behind Botum Vaddey Pagoda to meet Pol Pot at the Government House at Wat Phnom, which is now the office of the Cambodia Development Council (CDC). The prince met Pol Pot only once in 1973 when he visited a liberated zone during the war against the Lon Nol regime. Since then, he has never met the top leader of the genocidal regime again. Therefore, this was the second meeting. When he arrived, Pol Pot, who had been waiting for the prince at the large entrance with Ieng Sary and former Prime Minister Penn Nouth, who had arrived there first, greeted him with a broad smile. It surprised Prince Sihanouk that Pol Pot, before embracing him perfunctorily, clasped both hands and bent his knees slightly to

salute him.[38] As for Ieng Sary, he clasped his hands reluctantly, but not arrogantly, not bend at all to salute the prince, who was the former king. Pol Pot then invited the prince to sit on his right on a thick chair reserved for high-level guests, heads of state, or heads of government. A young Khmer Rouge staff member in elegant attire briskly served the guests with tea, sweets, and fresh orange juice. The prince described in his book that, as he had not had them for a long time, the sweets and orange juice were very delicious, tempting him to drink more than 10 glasses of juice repeatedly during the more than four hours of talks.[39]

In fact, the reason Pol Pot wanted to see him was to ask Prince Sihanouk, verbally, whether he agreed to go out to defend Democratic Kampuchea at the United Nations, as reported by Khieu Samphan, in the face of the vigorous attacks and speedy advance of the Vietnamese troops.

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid

According to what Pol Pot told him, the prince should go to the United Nations and return to Beijing no later than three months, the period of time during which Pol Pot guessed that the Khmer Rouge could attack to drive out all the Vietnamese troops from Cambodian soil. Therefore, in such an emergency, Pol Pot was still boastful and still thought that his soldiers could withstand the Vietnamese troops. Actually, Prince Sihanouk was very pleased with the idea of letting him go to the United Nations because it would be a possibility for the prince to seek freedom once again. After stepping down from the head of state post in 1976, he used to ask for permission to travel to Beijing for medical treatment, but the Khmer Rouge refused.

At the meeting, Pol Pot informed Prince Sihanouk that tomorrow afternoon a Chinese plane would come to fly the Prince, Princess Monique, his sons, and members of his royal family, as well as his entourage, to China. At that time, Ieng Sary said to Pol Pot that the Chinese plane did not have enough seats for everybody. It had seats for only the Prince and the Princess.

However, Pol Pot emphatically told Ieng Sary to ask the Chinese side to help find enough seats for everyone to leave.

Returning to his residence, Prince Sihanouk still felt afraid that Ieng Sary's remark that the plane did not have enough seats for everybody was the Khmer Rouge's trick to keep his sons and other royal family members as hostages, preventing him from having the freedom to act as he desired. The next morning, January 6, only after seeing Ieng Sary send a messenger to inform him that the plane had enough seats for all to leave, could the royal breathe a sigh of relief. In addition to this good news, Pol Pot also offered him USD 20,000 as a mission allowance. Prince Sihanouk, Princess Monique,[40] his two sons[41] and family members, and the entourage, arrived in China safely on the night of January 6.[42] On the night of January 7, China hosted a greeting banquet for

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[40] At that time, Princess Monique Sihanouk held the title of Neak Moneang (a prince's spouse), but had not yet been promoted to that of Samdech (the highest royal title).

[41] The Prince's sons were HM King Sihamoni and HRH Samdech Norindrapong, who died in France in 2003.

[42] Norodom Sihanouk, les Prisonniers des Khmer Rouge, ibid.

the prince, but the Chinese were instead concerned about the collapse of the Pol Pot regime.

On January 8, 1979, Prince Sihanouk held a six-hour news conference in Beijing in the presence of 200 international correspondents, primarily to defend the right cause of Democratic Kampuchea, the victim of aggression by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. However, in the end, the press conference then turned into a forum for the prince to denounce the Khmer Rouge genocidal regime vehemently by means of serious questions posed by those international journalists.

After that, Prince Sihanouk and his wife, as well as high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials, including Thiuonn Prasith and Keat Chhon, travelled to New York to attend the UN Security Council conference on the invasion of Democratic Kampuchea by the Vietnamese troops, as promised by Pol Pot.[43] On his trip to New York, Prince Sihanouk gauged the magnitude of the international public opinion's abhorrence of the Pol Pot regime. His acceptance

[43] Ibid

of the role of spokesperson or representative of the regime did not heighten his honour. The loss of his sons, daughters, grandchildren, and loved ones utterly demoralised him. Besides, albeit already being in a disastrously appalling situation, the Khmer Rouge still adopted an egotistic attitude toward the prince. This intensified his decision to break away from the Pol Pot clique to free himself and seek greater freedom.

Khmer Rouge's Arrogance Toward the Prince

In that book, Sihanouk wrote that the last two drops causing the water to spill from the glass were the unbearable reasons that led him to seek freedom from Khmer Rouge control and surveillance.[44] The first drop of water: Thieuon Prasith told the Prince that his duty and mission at the UN Security Council and later at the UN General Assembly must succeed, for since 1975,

[44] Ibid.

Comrade Ieng Sary had already mustered respect, regard, and great support from the majority of the members for Democratic Kampuchea. Hearing such a boastful remark, Prince Sihanouk thought that if the Pol Pot regime were truly popular on the international arena and if Pol Pot did not need him, Pol Pot would not have asked him to travel abroad, or he might also have killed him. The second drop of water: the prince received a message from Beijing informing him that after completing the debate at the UN Security Council, he was asked to continue to "temporarily" lead the Democratic Kampuchea delegation to the 34th UN General Assembly before the rightful head of delegation, meaning Ieng Sary, arrived in New York. This point was unacceptable to the former king and head of state. Definitely, he could no longer accompany the Khmer Rouge leaders, specifically Ieng Sary, an individual held in contempt by the whole world and most disgusted. The prince could not accept being just the deputy head under Ieng Sary. These two points were why Prince Sihanouk decided to break away from the Khmer Rouge.

FBI Helps Free the Prince

After completing his mission at the UN Security Council, at 2 o′clock in the early morning of January 14, 1979, with a prearranged rendezvous with the US FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), Prince Sihanouk secretly slipped out of the largest and most expensive hotel in New York with a small amount of luggage. He travelled by car to the office of the US permanent representative at the United Nations, headed by Ambassador Andrew Young.[45] On the morning of January 14, US authorities also helped take Princess Monique to join him safely. Before leaving the Khmer Rouge, the Princess returned the USD 20,000 mission allowance to the high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials. Actually, Ambassador Andrew Young also paid attention to freeing the Prince and the Princess from the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge authority by sending them to a large hospital in New York to have their health checked. After arriving at the hospital, Prince Sihanouk

[45] Ibid. P. 342.

and his wife continued to search for freedom. Suddenly, the royal wrote a letter to request asylum in the United States. However, after receiving no answer from the United States, he then asked France to grant them two French passports: one for himself and another for his consort, the Princess, as he no longer wanted to hold Khmer Rouge passports. Anyway, France replied that it would grant him asylum on the condition that he refrained from political activities and from talking to the press on French soil. He was not happy with the reply at all. Coincidentally, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, who was visiting the United States, asked Prince Sihanouk to return to China.

Finally, the Prince Agrees to Return to China

Prince Sihanouk wrote in his diary, translated into English by Julio A. Jeldres,[46] that on 31 January 1979, Deng Xiaoping invited the prince to dinner at the State Guesthouse, Blair House, in Washington. On that occasion, the Chinese leader asked the prince to act again as leader of the Great National United Front and head of state of Democratic Kampuchea. He told the royal that all Democratic Kampuchea leaders had now promised not to repeat those mistakes. Moreover, those Khmer Rouge leaders had acknowledged their mistakes because, following the 1975 victory, they had disbanded the Cambodian National United Front, reaping benefits only for their side, according to Deng Xiaoping. However, the Prince declined the proposal despite Deng Xiaoping's attempted explanation.

[46] Norodom Sihanouk, Shadow over Angkor, Memoirs of His Majesty the King of Cambodia, translated by Ambassador Julio A. Jeldres, Monument Books, Phnom Penh, 2005, pp. 205-206.

In the end, the Chinese leader gave up the idea of asking Prince Sihanouk to assume the post of head of state again and stopped involving him further with the Khmer Rouge. However, the only point that Deng Xiaoping insisted on was that the prince return and stay in China until he could go back to Cambodia. He also assured the prince that the Chinese Government would provide him with all manner of freedom in China and allow him to make visits outside China until he could return to Cambodia. That was the reason why Prince Sihanouk agreed to return to China, as, this time, a man free of the Khmer Rouge´s control forever.[47]

Both Happiness and Fear for 7 January Victory

The Cambodian community in France, like the entire Cambodian people, celebrated the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. However, the news that hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese

[47] Norodom Sihanouk, ibid.

troops, who had helped topple the Pol Pot regime, occupied Cambodian soil turned the celebration and delight of the Cambodian community into worry and fear over the loss of the entire territory. In fact, most overseas Cambodians seemed not to think of the devastation of Pol Pot′s return to power. The Cambodian overseas community acknowledged that the Khmer Rouge had certainly committed the crime of massacring the Cambodian people. Still, the Vietnamese troops′ occupation of Cambodia was a sign of the loss of the Cambodian soul. The repudiation of this foreign invasion brought into being the spirit of patriotism and nationalism among overseas Cambodians, who then gathered in groups and associations and were prompted to get involved in political activities anew. In that epoch, the general tendency abroad was that Vietnam encroached upon Cambodia, not came to help free the Cambodian people from the genocidal regime. The majority of overseas Cambodians, including myself, failed to conceive that, if there had been no genocide, there would have been no foreign aggression either. Besides, if we waited for groups of freedom fighters in the West, relying on Thailand, to come to rescue, we didn't know how many more years we'd have

to wait, since Thailand, at the time, leaned toward China, the staunchest backer of Pol Pot. At that time, Thailand did not have either the political will or the military means to launch an attack to liberate the Cambodian people from Pol Pot's genocidal regime. As such, how many more tens of thousands of innocent Cambodians could Pol Pot further slaughter if we waited for the resistance fighters on the Thai border to come to liberate the Cambodian people ?

Because of their perception of foreign occupation, many anti-Vietnamese occupation movements were self-proclaimed in France in early 1979. They held many meetings in many places at once. I too was invited to a meeting. The invitation I received through the mail at that time did not indicate the name of any organising entity. It mentioned only the date, venue, and subject matter of the meeting. The address of the meeting venue, a doubtful place, was on Faubourg Saint-Denis Street. After arriving at the place, I dared not enter straight away, because it was a sex shop selling books and gadgets, and inside there were only two or three people. I paced and hesitated because I thought the place

should not be where the country's political issues would be discussed. When I decided to enter, a Cambodian seller told me to go inside, where I saw four or five young Cambodians, never known to me before, probably my age, discussing Vietnam's aggression against Cambodia. I was terribly disappointed, because I neither heard anything of significance nor any well-defined strategies that might transform patriotic or nationalist words into concrete activities or actions in the struggle against the Vietnamese aggression troops. Besides, I could not focus on the discussion of national problems in the presence of obscene books piled up and pictures hung here and there. I perceived that between Cambodia and Vietnam, there certainly was bitter hostility, because even in such a sex shop, politics and the struggle against Vietnam were also discussed. At that time, most of our overseas Cambodians refused to accept the idea that the Vietnamese troops had come to help liberate Cambodia from the massacre committed by the Pol Pot genocidal regime.

Celebration of the Royal's Survival

A large number of Cambodians, including Son Sann, breathed a sigh of relief when they learned that Prince Sihanouk had survived and escaped from the Vietnamese troops. On January 8, Son Sann sent a message, on behalf of the elders in France, to the prince, saying, "Their Excellencies Nong Kimny, Nhiek Tioulong, Chai Thoul, Thonn Ouk, and I have learned with great satisfaction of Your Royal Highness's arrival in Beijing." Stop. The majority of overseas Cambodian compatriots, including high-ranking army officers, have faith in Samdech (Your Royal Highness) to urgently drive out the Pol Pot regime condemned by the entire world and to secure the withdrawal of all the North Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, moving toward achieving national unity within the framework of a genuinely impartial and independent Cambodia. Stop. With utmost respect, Stopend.

Signed: Son Sann.[48] Aware that Prince Sihanouk had gone to New York, Son Sann then travelled to the United States to meet him. However, when Son Sann arrived at the New York hotel, the secret US agents had already freed the prince and taken him to a hospital where he could not be met. Son Sann could only meet him by phone.

Son Sann's High Politics

After returning from New York at the end of January 1979, Son Sann sent General Dien Del to Thailand and then to the battlegrounds along the Cambodian-Thai border to regroup all the scattered resistance forces into a national united army with a view to liberating the nation. Son Sann later told us that he had informed Prince Sihanouk by phone of the decision to form resistance forces and asked him to lead the to-be-formed national

[48] Son Sann, Télégramme 00740 de, a S.A.R Norodom Sihanouk, c/o Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, le 8 Octobre 1979, RP Chine, Pékin.

liberation resistance movement. According to Son Sann, Prince Sihanouk declined to lead this movement because he had no intention of conducting any political activities at that time. However, Son Sann pointed out that the prince was not against creating this resistance movement, but only asked that his name not be used.

Through General Dien Del, Son Sann sent a letter to the leaders of all Sereika combatants, advising them that he had assigned Dien Del to form a national liberation army to regroup all fighters along the border before moving toward establishing a political organisation to lead the national liberation resistance. Son Sann indicated that if this were not heeded, all the combatants could not hope to receive aid from friendly countries. Therefore, aid was the key factor in attracting and marshalling forces, because without outside aid, those combatants would have no hope of carrying out any significant activities.

In reality, Son Sann convinced and appealed to the leaders of all the border resistance fighters to unite and create an army on an anti-Vietnamese front. General Dien Del, whose war name was Del Davy, travelled from Paris as Son Sann's emissary to present

the latter's message to the Sereika fighters on the battlefield. The general succeeded, as almost all Sereika combatant groups welcomed him.

On March 5, 1979, 16 Cambodian freedom fighters met on Cambodian territory.[49] All of them were resistance group leaders. They included: 1. Im Chhoodeth, 2. Keth Reth, 3. Sok Serey, 4. Kravanh Phal, 5. Moharay, 6. Luch Phay, 7. Tunn (Tuon) Chay, 8. Sen Sok Reaksmei, 9. Del Davy, 10. Sek Sam Iet, 11. Keo Saovuth, 12. Chhay Seila or Mau Ham, 13. Muon Sophorn, 14. Nhem Phuong, 15. Ben Vy, and 16. Siem Sam Onn. The 16 leaders agreed to form an army named the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces (KPNLAF). They all signed a statement establishing this army and outlined the reasons for its formation. They also appealed to Cambodians of all political leanings to join the Sereika freedom fighters to create a military and political front, later known as the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), to liberate Cambodia from foreign occupation and allow

[49] KPNLF Bulletin No. 4, March 12, 1983, p.1

the Cambodian people to choose a political regime to rule the country freely. Those Sereika fighters requested that Son Sann be their leader with the mission to unite Cambodian compatriots.[50] They gave him full power to fulfil this mission. However, in their statement, those Sereika combatants left the door open for Prince Sihanouk, who might, one day, want to join the resistance groups by offering him the possibility of leading any one of the resistance movements. In their statement, the groups of Sereika fighters mainly said, "The KPNLF will serve any Cambodian personality who adopts these principles and is susceptible to forming a union of all Cambodians to face the foreign invasion, and for the rational reconstruction of our Motherland, ravaged by years of raving madness, with a view to returning to peace, independence, well-being, and happiness for the Cambodian people who have so much suffered since 1970." At that time, the personality they aimed at was definitely Prince Sihanouk. After receiving the request of those Sereika fighters, Son Sann had not yet made a

[50] Ibid, Declaration of the KPNLAF, March 5, 1979, p. 3.

decision. He took about two months to consider whether he should lead those Sereika fighters. He also hesitated, for he was not yet sure of Prince Sihanouk's intentions: would he come to lead the resistance movement? Afterwards, on April 29, 1979, Son Sann, who was 68, agreed to the 16 resistance fighters' requests to lead the KPNLF.

Those decisions taken by Son Sann were all "high politics" that nobody was aware of, except for a handful of his confidants. Most association members were unaware of these secrets, including this issue and Son Sann's secret trip to New York to meet Prince Sihanouk. Son Sann convened a meeting of active members to share information only after he returned from New York. Actually, Son Sann and his confidants managed information very well, knowing what needed to be divulged and what needed to be kept confidential. They only let those who were genuinely loyal to them, specifically those who had gained the trust of Son Sann's family, know information openly or secretly. When Son Sann sent General Dien Del to the Cambodian-Thai border, he did not tell us. In reality, we young people who volunteered to work

with him never demanded to know anything confidential. However, sometimes we were taken aback when secrets that we received and that he had kept tightly were leaked outside of our association, making us feel terribly ashamed. We felt ashamed because, although we worked directly with him, we did not know about any major issues, while outsiders received confidential information in a timely fashion.

Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk Adopt Different Paths

On April 8, 1979, the AGKE Association held its first assembly, at which Son Sann was officially elected president of the association, with former cabinet minister Nong Kimny as vice president and Truong Mealy as secretary general. Former finance minister Chai Thoul and I (Ieng Mouly) had been appointed as auditors.[51] This association continued its activities as usual. That is,

[51] Net Kuon and Say Bory, minutes of the bureau organizing the election of the central committee for 1979-80 dated 8/4/79.

it heightened and protected national culture and Buddhism, sought aid from other Cambodian communities in France, and assisted Cambodian refugees who had just arrived. However, secretly, this association began recruiting volunteers to serve in the national liberation resistance movement.

As for Prince Sihanouk, he seemed hesitant at first about conducting any political activities, but he later changed his mind. Perhaps he perceived that the Khmer People′s National Liberation Armed Forces was a military group formed by republican army generals who had ousted him in 1970, whom he could not pardon. Perhaps, because he had seen that the Son Sann group consisted mostly of republicans, he had then refrained from responding to Son Sann′s proposal. At that time, the prince stayed in both Beijing and Pyongyang in North Korea, where his great friend, Marshal Kim Il-sung, offered him a sumptuous residence.

The prince′s decision to return to politics and his refusal to lead the resistance forces led by Son Sann forced some AGKE members, who were staunch Sihanoukists or from the royal family, such as Princess Norodom Vacheahra, to quit the association. As

a result, the royal ballet troupe in Paris split into two: one pro-Sihanouk and the other pro-Son Sann. The non-communist associations in France were also divided into two, like the royal ballet troupe.

In July 1979, Prince Sihanouk sent his first message to his overseas fellow compatriots, expressing his disappointment with the United Nations, which had refused to allow him to speak on the Cambodian refugees′ behalf and to present his plan for resolving Cambodian problems. In a message dated July 12, 1979, from Pyongyang, the Prince proposed the immediate creation of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation and the Provisional Government of an Independent and Neutral Cambodia, respectively called FUKSANA (Front Uni Khmer pour le Salut National) and GOUPECIN (Gouvernement Provisoire de l′Etat du Cambodge Indépendant) in French,[52] The Prince asked all overseas Cambodian associations to join FUKSANA and assign representatives to attend a national congress to be held in France

[52] Norodom Sihanouk, (Message du Prince), A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l′Etranger, Pyongyang, le 12 juillet 1979.

or the United States. At the congress, Prince Sihanouk would officially propose his candidacy as the front president and foreign minister of the GOUPECIN.

In his second message issued on the same day, the prince proposed that the new principle of Cambodia′s Constitution not opt for a monarchy or a republic, but that the short word "Cambodia" be used. The head of state should be called the head of state of Cambodia, who should be appointed officially after a general election to be held under the supervision of the United Nations and of the members of the National Assembly and the Senate. The national flag and anthem should be the same as the pre-1970 military coup ones, but only the second stanza of the anthem, from the sentence "the stone temple hidden in the middle of the jungle...," should be used. In the political platform of the front and government he proposed, the prince asked for mentions of respect for human rights and the UN Charter, Western-style 100 per cent respect for democratic rights, freedom of movement for national and international journalists, and so forth. As for foreign policy, Prince Sihanouk proposed using the principle of Pancasila and

maintaining good relations and cooperation with all countries of the world, except Israel and South Korea under Park Chung-hee.

Also in this second message, Prince Sihanouk asked that he be appointed prime minister and foreign minister, and he said that if he were appointed as proposed, he would take, as prime minister and foreign minister, diplomatic and friendly measures to try to get the Vietnamese troops to withdraw from Cambodia without the shedding of Cambodian blood.[53]

On the same day, July 12, 1979, the prince sent his third message appealing to the Cambodian parties in armed conflict to drop their weapons and stop their ideological struggle, inviting Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, and other people responsible for the genocidal regime to leave safely for China. He also invited the Heng Samrin-led group to return to Saigon and Hanoi.[54]

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[53] Norodom Sihanouk, (Deuxième Message du Prince) A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l'Etranger, Pyongyang, le 12 juillet 1979.

[54] Norodom Sihanouk, (Troisième Message du Prince) A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l'Etranger, Pyongyang, le 12 juillet 1979.

Many AGKE Association members were unhappy with Prince Sihanouk's new initiative, especially his plan to create a new front when they had already established the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces, which would be led politically by the Khmer People's National Liberation Front. Son Sann disclosed in the proclamation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces that this army was prepared to serve a strong personality, meaning to serve Prince Sihanouk. At that time, Son Sann, a former prime minister under Prince Sihanouk, convened a meeting of the members to discuss the prince´s proposal. The idea of taking diplomatic and friendly measures to try to get the Vietnamese troops to pull out of Cambodia without the shedding of Cambodian blood caused Son Sann´s family and the people around him to feel unhappy, because they believed that without strong military pressure, the Vietnamese troops would definitely not pull out of Cambodia.

Despite this, Prince Sihanouk continued to send messages to his compatriots one after another. In one message, he asked for the appointment of his former advisers, namely Nhiek Thioulong

and Son Sann, to prepare the political program and the declaration on the establishment of his national united front. Those drafts would be presented to the national congress for adoption. However, news about reactions and displeasure from Paris, which he received at that time, showing no support for his initiative, made him unhappy.

In his 8th message, the prince said, "In Paris, my enemies are slandering me to sabotage the plan to organise the national congress and the formation of a provisional government that I have proposed." "I do not have any personal ambition." "Thanks to the special great friendship that I have with the People's Republic of China and Marshal Kim Il-sung, my living, be it physical, morale, or material, is more bountiful and happier than in the 1950s and 1960s." "My palace in Pyongyang is five times bigger and more sumptuous than Khemarin Great Palace." The great palace of Khemarin was his residence in the Phnom Penh Royal Palace.[55]

[55] Norodom Sihanouk, (Huitième Message du Prince) A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l'Etranger, Pyongyang, undated.

In his 9th message, dated July 21, 1979, Prince Sihanouk made known the difference between his position and Son Sann′s. That is, he planned to form and lead a political party different from Son Sann′s in any future elections.[56] In the end, the AGKE decided to reply to the prince′s letter of invitation.

Son Sann did not want to get involved in verbal clashes with Prince Sihanouk. However, his wife, who strongly opposed Prince Sihanouk at that time, regarded him as completely responsible for Cambodia′s destiny, which faced a grave crisis. She blamed the prince for being influenced by people around him, including his wife, Princess Monique, and her mother, Mrs Pom, as the ringleader. In reality, Mrs Son Sann was devotedly loyal to Princess Norleak, another consort of Prince Sihanouk. Contrary to Princess Monique, who was born to a commoner′s family, Princess Norleak was born to a royal family. Moreover, Queen Kossomak, Prince Sihanouk's mother, cherished the princess. Prince Sihanouk sometimes lived at the Chamkar Mon residence

[56] Norodom Sihanouk, (Neuvième Message du Prince) A Tous Ses Compatriotes à l′Etranger, Pyongyang, le 21 juillet 1979.

with Princess Monique since the early 1960s. Therefore, within the association, some opposed, and others supported Prince Sihanouk´s proposal to convene the national congress. In the end, the association decided to assign young members to write reply letters to the prince. I (Ieng Mouly) was in charge of writing the letters in Cambodian.

The association fully approved my draft letter. In my reply letter to Prince Sihanouk, I expressed my gratitude for the attention he was paying to the nation's destiny despite countless obstacles. I affirmed the resolve of all of us in the liberation of Cambodia from Vietnam´s yoke of aggression. I also underlined the complete solidarity of all the patriotic forces, except for the Khmer Rouge. In the letter, I opined that the enemies were employing tricks to induce the Cambodians to engage in conflict with one another. The letter was dated August 8, 1979, and signed by Truong Mealy[57] as AGKE Association secretary general and representative of this association´s youth from Paris, Toulouse,

[57] Truong Mealy, secretary-general of AGKE (to Samdech Sihanouk), Paris. August 8, 1979.

Lille, Provence, Côte d´Azur, and the City of Tours. Truong Mealy would present the letter to Prince Sihanouk in Pyongyang and attend the national congress to be held there.

Finally, the congress took place in September 1979 in North Korea, not in France or the United States, as Prince Sihanouk had planned in his first message. Truong Mealy travelled to Pyongyang as the AGKE representative. However, after his return, Truong Mealy turned his back on the AGKE and has supported Prince Sihanouk since then. In Pyongyang, Prince Sihanouk failed to establish either the front or the provisional government as desired. The congress concluded by setting up a federation called the Nationalist Federation, chaired by Prince Sihanouk. From then on, Truong Mealy quit as AGKE secretary general to serve the pro-Sihanouk movement. Therefore, the AGKE Association elected Dr Chhay Hancheng, the son-in-law of Son Sann, secretary general, replacing Truong Mealy.

Son Sann Proclaims the KPNLF

During that time, Son Sann prepared to travel to Thailand. Accompanied by two or three of his confidants, he left Paris stealthily without notifying us. With support from the Thai military, Son Sann achieved, as desired, the official establishment of a front called the Khmer People's National Liberation Front "KPNLF."[58] This front was proclaimed on October 9, 1979, on Cambodian soil adjoining Thailand's Trat Province, on Bantoat Hill, in a village called Phunm Sok Sann, under the control of Colonel Prum Vit.

According to official documents, five nationalist movements joined the Khmer People's National Liberation Front.[59] They were: 1. The United Front for the Liberation of the Republic, known as the Reaksa Sambok movement, with Reaksa Sambok as its leader; 2. the Kok Sar Movement; 3. the Khleang Moeung Movement; 4.

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[58] Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/01/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 09 Octobre 1979.

[59] Proclamation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Khmer Territory, October 9, 1979.

the Nen Rong Movement; and 5. the Baksei Chamkrong Movement. The documents stated that people from 15 provinces had assigned representatives to join in the creation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front. Son Sann had been elected president, while Chhean Vam, a democrat and former prime minister, was vice president. Shortly after that, the front issued three proclamations, which the meeting participants supported.

The first proclamation was about the creation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces; the second was about the decision on the recognition of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces formed on March 5, 1979;[60] and the third was about the decision on the appointment of General Dien Del as its chief of staff. The organisational structure of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front consisted of an executive committee, a national council, a council of elders, and a political council.[61]

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[60] Son Sann, Frot National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/02/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 9 Octobre 1979.

[61] Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79//01FNL, ibid.

In his speech on the creation of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Son Sann stated that his willingness to accept the presidency of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front at this time was intended to get the front operating.[62] However, at a suitable time, he would propose appointing another personality to lead the front to achieve victory, because at the moment he was very old, already 68 years old. He proposed the main principles of the Front′s political program: nationalism, middle-way dharma Buddhist socialism, genuine neutrality, independence, popular sovereignty, territorial integrity, good neighbourliness, and peaceful coexistence.

In the end, Son Sann appealed to Cambodian compatriots inside and outside the country to unite and marshal all national forces to liberate the nation from its enemies, urging them to set aside personal problems as the main issue. As regards the United Nations, the superpowers, and Southeast Asian countries, Son Sann appealed to them to help the Cambodian people get rid of

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[62] Son Sann, President of the Khmer People′s National Liberation Front, Speech, Khmer Territory, October 9, 1979.

North Vietnam's colony in a timely fashion by convening an international conference requested by the ASEAN countries; that is, a conference aiming at finding the solution for immediate cesase fire to allow international humanitarian organizations to provide food and medicine to Cambodia and to current Cambodian victims. He also called on the Vietnamese troops to pull out of Cambodia and to be replaced by UN forces to allow the United Nations to organise a general election. Finally, Son Sann asked that Cambodia be allowed to become a neutral country. As for Vietnam and Laos, Son Sann stated, "The Vietnamese have shipped troops into Cambodia to help free the Cambodian people from the barbaric, cruel Khmer Rouge regime. Now, the Cambodian citizens ask Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia.[63] "With aid from the United Nations and from freedom-and human rights-loving countries, the Cambodian citizens will resolve the Khmer Rouge issue themselves. The Vietnamese and Cambodian people

[63] Son Sann, Speech, ibid.

should join hands to put out the fire of ill fortune (Karma) that has led us to hate each other for centuries.″

To publicise the proclamation on the creation of the KPNLF, Son Sann invited Bangkok-based international journalists to cover the event directly. A few days or weeks later, the news about the establishment of the Khmer People′s National Liberation Front was advertised worldwide.

In Paris on October 12, 1979, I also attended the front-proclamation ceremony organised by the AGKE. On that occasion, Thon Ouk, a former government minister, gave a press conference in his capacity as the representative of the Khmer People′s National Liberation Front at the Meridienne Hotel. Thon Ouk disseminated news about the genocidal acts committed by the Khmer Rouge against the Cambodian people and the invasion by North Vietnamese troops, with no other purpose than to swallow the entire Cambodian territory. Several French newspapers publicised that press conference. In sum, this press conference was a success for Son Sann and the KPNLF in public relations. At the time, the KPNLF appeared more trustworthy than the Khmer

Nationalist Federation of Prince Sihanouk, created in North Korea in September 1979.

Unlike Prince Sihanouk's federation, the KPNLF was established on Cambodian soil and regrouped genuine resistance fighters under the command of a military general well known under the republican regime. In addition, in that era, Son Sann was seen as having no involvement in staging the military coup that ousted Prince Sihanouk in 1970. He had also not been involved in helping the Khmer Rouge ascend to power in 1975. The first anniversary of the KPNLF was recognised, thanks to a gathering of supporters from overseas Cambodian communities worldwide.

Nonetheless, In Tam, one of the 1970 military coup leaders who toppled Prince Sihanouk and a founding member of the AGKE, broke away from this association to join Prince Sihanouk. In Tam was unhappy with the appointment of General Dien Del as chief of staff of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces. In Tam protested that Son Sann did not keep his promise to appoint him as the military commander when they first met to negotiate

the setting up of the AGKE. Son Sann acknowledged that he had made the promise to appoint In Tam as the commander-in-chief of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces. At that time, Son Sann appointed General Dien Del as the only chief of staff, not the commander-in-chief. Due to this misunderstanding, In Tam then left Son Sann and crossed over to serve Prince Sihanouk to organise a Sihanoukist army.

On October 15, 1979, Son Sann officially issued a decree setting up several institutions similar to a small government.[64] The first institution was an Executive Committee, abbreviated as COMEX in French. This committee handled key functions, including political, diplomatic, and administrative work. Each committee member had a particular area of responsibility within their function. At that time, the front established seven areas of responsibility for the Executive Committee, each with a responsible member. They included: 1. Interior affairs, 2. Foreign affairs, 3. Military affairs, 4. Culture and Religious affairs, 5. Finance and

[64] Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/04/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 15 Octobre 1979

Development, 6. Information and Propaganda, and 7. Justice. At that time, Son Sann had also appointed the members of the Executive Committee as follows: 1. Chhean Vam as vice president, 2. Neang Chin Han as secretary general, 3. Dien Del as member in charge of military affairs, 4. Im Chhoodeth, interior affairs, 5. Prum Vit, social, cultural, and religious affairs, and 6. Nguon Pytoureth, press, information, and war veterans.[65] Mrs Suon Kaset and Son Sann's sons, Son Soubert and Son Monir, were appointed to serve on special missions of the Executive Committee.

I Am a KPNLF Activist

With the creation of the KPNLF, AGKE became the front's second office in Paris, France, where Son Sann stayed from time to time between his stays on the Cambodian-Thai border and in

[65] Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/05/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 15 Octobre 1979.

Bangkok. In Paris, Son Sann could take diplomatic initiatives and conduct political activities. Therefore, AGKE became a branch of the KPNLF in Europe. Since then, I have not only worked for the association, but I have also had more work to do. I worked for the KPNLF as an active propagandist. I travelled indefatigably across France with Dr Chhay Hancheng to drum up support from Cambodian refugees in France for the KPNLF. Time and again, I used photos, slides, or films sent directly from Bangkok, most of them devoid of captions and explanations, to be incorporated with commentary, audio, and background music according to my knowledge. Sometimes, I also provided commentary on pictures I did not know exactly what they meant. No matter what, I tried to improve the quality of those films to make their showing or screening professional. The participants were always satisfied. I included my vocal track in a 16mm documentary film, accompanied by Cambodian traditional music, Pin Peat, and commentary of historic significance, with the sound of music rising and falling to keep viewers engaged. As for the Cambodian refugees in France, they always looked forward to news from Cambodia after watching that film.

My documentary films made older adults unable to help but shed tears and want to return to die in Cambodia. For those dreadfully missing the country, their patriotic sentiment grew even more. Through the pictures in my film, people could see the difficulties and suffering of the KPNLF combatants and the people living in areas controlled by the KPNLF. They could see pictures of Son Sann visiting those areas. The KPNLF president appeared thinner. This helped viewers understand that the older man had likely lived permanently in those areas. We all showed him respect; at this old age, he was still willing to lead the resistance movement. Actually, in that epoch, we never thought that President Son Sann had lived in Bangkok at any time. In fact, we received only scanty news from the front through Chhay Hancheng. Chhay Hancheng, chief of the information section, was the only person who scanned and selected news and decided who should or should not be told of news about the KPNLF activities.

In the AGKE or in the KPNLF in France, Dr Chhay Hancheng's role became more important because he was able to manage all the news in connection with the KPNLF. Some active

members blamed him for not telling the truth when Son Sann and his two sons, Son Soubert and Son Monir, Mrs Suon Kaset, and Neang Chin Han had travelled from Paris to Thailand. Some other members thought that the reason the important news had not been disseminated might be because Son Sann′s group distrusted them, no matter how they tried to serve the AGKE and the KPNLF. Those members understood that they should be aware of the news, because at least they had been able to take Son Sann and his children to the airport. They believed that, as those trips were patriotic missions, they should have the honour of seeing them off. As for me, at first, I too had the same feeling, because I had not known about any important decisions or work. However, gradually, I came to think that those issues concerning the security and safety of those going to carry out the struggle might affect their lives. That was why I calmed myself down and accepted the idea that it was only the leadership′s work arrangement. This showed the working style of Son Sann, who was an opinionated person, which was a factor leading to misunderstanding and mistrust within the pro-Son Sann movement all along.

Sihanouk Demands Direct Talks with Vietnam

In the meantime, I also received news from French newspapers that Prince Norodom Sihanouk, as president of the Khmer Nationalist Federation, had sent a message from his palace in Pyongyang, North Korea, to the North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, asking Vietnam to hold direct negotiations with him, in the sense of bringing back Cambodia's independence and neutrality. According to documents disseminated publicly in the 1990s, Prince Sihanouk sent three messages to Prime Minister Pham Van Dong: the first dated October 7, the second October 23, and the third November 11, 1979. In the message dated October 7, 1979, the Prince recalled to the Vietnamese leader many aspects of the aid he had provided to the struggle carried out by the Vietnamese people in the war against the U.S. imperialism at the time when he had been in power, such as providing shelters for respite and treatment for the injured and sick, and authorizing the use of the Sihanouk Ville seaport to ship armaments to Vietcong combatants, and so forth.

Those kinds of aid led Cambodia to be subject to the charge that it had given up its neutrality, as well as to land and air attacks from the forces of the United States and South Vietnam, to the point that the military coup was staged on 18 March 1970.

In his message, Prince Sihanouk asked the Vietnamese leader to hold talks with him to rebuild Cambodia′s independence and neutrality and to restore cordial and fruitful relations between Cambodia and Vietnam and between the two peoples. The prince added that he imposed no conditions whatsoever; that is, the talks could be held in Hanoi, Pyongyang, or Prague. Prince Sihanouk also pointed out that he was the only Cambodian leader recognised by the entire Cambodian people and representing all the patriotic Cambodians. The prince warned that there would be disastrous consequences if the Vietnamese leader refused to hold talks with him.

On October 23, Prince Sihanouk sent another message to Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. In this second message, he recalled the significance of the earlier message. Still, he complained that not only had he not received an answer from the

prime minister, but the Vietnamese ambassador had even stated, in the presence of American correspondents, at a news conference in Beijing that he was just a "private person" whom the Phnom Penh government also condemned as an "enemy of the Cambodian people." In the third message, dated November 11, 1979, the Prince asked whether this message would still not have an answer. Prince Sihanouk still insisted on talks between Vietnam and him, as a responsible statesman; otherwise, he warned, he would be forced to carry out the struggle to liberate the nation until the end. Neither his first nor his second message received any response from Prime Minister Pham Van Dong of Vietnam. As for the third message, it was sent back unopened. Therefore, Prince Sihanouk's attempt to negotiate did not achieve the success he sought. Perhaps because the Vietnamese leader paid him no attention, Prince Sihanouk finally decided to form his own armed forces and front before joining the Khmer Rouge again in the tripartite coalition government in 1982.

Prince Sihanouk Arrives in Paris

On November 25, 1979, Prince Sihanouk arrived in Paris, where he planned to stay for three months. The French Government greeted the prince as a friend of France. Upon arriving in Paris, the prince acted as Son Sann had by appealing to all Cambodian nationalists to do their utmost to have the Cambodian nationalists recognised as the most serious group. He stated, "We should work to get the world to trust the Cambodian nationalist group." "This is the purpose of my three-month stay in France." "I believe that I will achieve this goal."

In the appeal, Prince Sihanouk also said, "A great many compatriots have insistently asked me to give up my living abroad and join them in the operation to salvage our nation, which faced with disaster. However, I wish to assert clearly that I do not come to Paris to seize power from anyone. I am just a patriot who will try to make all kinds of efforts, with other patriots and the Cambodian people, to fulfil the duty that each Cambodian patriot should perform." The prince pointed out that his Khmer nationalist

federation was implementing the policy of good cooperation with any organisations that were not members of the federation (including Son Sann's KPNLF) as a sacred principle for national salvation.

Receiving News from My Mother

The visit by the former king and head of state strongly buoyed up the spirits of his supporters in France. Anyway, to me and to some of those backing Son Sann, the Prince's presence in France did not make us change our position, blow hot and cold, or make our minds vacillate. However, what pulled my mind, making me so excited, was a letter I received from Thailand. That letter arrived just as Prince Sihanouk was in France; it was from my sister-in-law, Tepthida, the wife of my second older brother, who had just arrived at a border camp on the Cambodian-Thai border. My sister-in-law, Tepthida, who did not have my new address in Stains Town, sent the letter, addressed to "Ieng Mouly, Moulin Vert Paris France," to my old address in Paris, with only the street

name but no house number. Luckily, thanks to France's good and highly efficient mail system, the letter was forwarded to my new address in Stains Town. Before moving to this town, I had registered my new address with the old post office in Paris. That was why they could redirect the letter to my new address.

The letter written by my sister-in-law, Tepthida, was so short because she might have been in a hurry. However, she narrated the sufferings of our people and the death of my father in December 1975 and of my four siblings in 1977. She also described the hardship encountered by my mother, who was still alive. The letter inspired me to resolve to make all manner of sacrifices for the sake of freedom. The key phrase in the letter said, "Every night since the collapse of Phnom Penh, although he had been forcibly evacuated to live in the countryside, Puk (my father) still prayed to Lord Buddha to protect and bless you, young brother (me), so that you could help free us from the Khmer Rouge's dictatorial power." The real significance of this letter was the appeal to save their lives and free them so they could regain their freedom.

The True Nature of 7 January Victory

Human beings cannot live without dignity, and dignity could not be bestowed upon them if they remained enslaved. These are the main factors that have inspired them to free themselves and regain freedom. Freedom and dignity are innate natural components of human beings; they possess them from their birth to the day they leave this world. Freedom and dignity cannot be seized, robbed, or confiscated by anyone, come hell or high water.

Not only did the Pol Pot regime enslave the Cambodian people in general, but it also massacred them as a means of protecting its power. Pol Pot's proclamation that it did politics to serve the interests of the Cambodian people and the nation turned into great devastation for the entire nation and motherland. The disaster caused by Pol Pot at that time could not have been brought to an end if this genocidal regime were not toppled in a timely fashion through all kinds of measures, including seeking help and support from foreign forces. The struggle against Pol Pot

took many forms, both clandestine and open. Some resistance forces fled to the west to seek assistance from Thailand, while others fled to the east to get help from Vietnam. The resistance forces fleeing to the west, on the Cambodian-Thai border, hoped that Thailand would be able to help them overthrow Pol Pot. Nonetheless, in the geopolitical context of that epoch, Thailand did not dare show its face to help attack and bring down the Khmer Rouge, because behind this genocidal regime was China, its staunch backer. On the contrary, the resistance fighters fleeing to Vietnam had more possibilities to overthrow the regime, because Pol Pot regarded Vietnam as a hereditary enemy and frequently provoked border conflicts to the point that large-scale war broke out between them.

Along with that, Vietnam also had bitter conflicts with China. In the end, Vietnam sent troops to help attack and topple the Pol Pot regime on January 7, 1979. However, due to the centuries-long hostility between Cambodia and Vietnam, some Cambodian people, including Cambodian refugees fleeing overseas, suspected the military intervention of the neighbouring country and alleged that it

was aggression against Cambodia. Nevertheless, events emerging successively demonstrated that if the cruellest genocidal regime of Pol Pot had not existed, what was accused of being Vietnam´s aggression against Cambodia would definitely not have happened.

In line with Cambodia's ups and downs, the search for genuine freedom did not retain any political colours. Both those fleeing to the west and those to the east all had the aspiration to help save the lives of all Cambodian citizens from the genocidal regime. However, the forces in the east had more possibilities and were more effective. We, the youth in that epoch, all had hearts inflamed with patriotism and hungry for freedom. Anyway, in the wake of the genocidal regime´s downfall, the political activities of each of us were within the context of both the Cold War and border disputes.

Chapter Six

Going to the War Zone

(The 1980s)

While the Vietnamese occupants and the communist regime they installed in Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979, believed that the situation in Cambodia was irreversible, dictating their rule over the Cambodian people, the anti-Vietnamese forces were receiving, step by step, international and national support. China, the USA, and ASEAN countries formed a new alliance to oppose Vietnamese and Soviet expansion into Southeast Asia. Cambodia quickly became a new theatre of battle that would test the strengths of all antagonists in the years to come. If the Vietnamese tried to consolidate their gains of influence within our country, however, their opponents would strengthen the Cambodian resistance more and more.

China and ASEAN Ready for Retaliation

This anti-Vietnamese resistance needed to build an army capable not necessarily of winning the war militarily but, at least, of creating enough difficulty for the occupants to ultimately come to the negotiating table. In addition, Cambodian leaders who were accepted by the Cambodian people and the international community must lead the resistance. Subsequently, the Khmer Rouge troops needed to be regrouped, refreshed, and re-equipped, as they were still disciplined combatants. The non-communist fighters should be united, recognised, and properly assisted so that they would become, for the Cambodian people, an alternative force to the two communist-brother enemies, the Khmer Rouge and the Heng Samrin regimes. Diplomatically, the resistance must represent Cambodia, especially by occupying her seat at the United Nations, as recognising the regime installed by the Vietnamese would reward them for the use of force and would encourage them to march into other nations in the region. Then the immediate task of the opponents to the Vietnamese invasion

was to help the Cambodian resistance to re-shape a new face acceptable to all, as the Khmer Rouge were losing credibility vis-à-vis the Cambodian people and the international community.

The KPNLF leadership, foreseeing the political trend toward a unifying non-communist force, tried to strengthen its movement to become a unique nationalist movement, replacing the Khmer Rouge. On November 23, 1979, Son Sann issued an appeal to all combatants in the conflict, including those who were with Hanoi troops, to meet as soon as possible. He proposed that the meeting would "survey measures to be taken by common agreement to put an end to the misfortune of the Cambodian people, to restore peace and to re-unite all Cambodians, and to rebuild the country as an independent, sovereign and neutral state," his appeal read. The meeting could take place in a neutral place, agreeable and reachable by everyone, and Son Sann offered to meet in Paris, at his residence on Accacias Street.

The KPNLF leader publicly supported the UN 14-point resolution of November 14, 1979. Here are the important points of the resolution: -Urging all parties to the conflict to cooperate, in every way possible, to facilitate the humanitarian relief efforts

(point 4), -Calling upon all parties to the conflict to cease all hostilities forthwith (point 6), -Calling for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodia and calling upon all states to refrain from all acts or threats of aggression and all forms of interference in the affairs of states in Southeast Asia (point 7), -Appealing to all states to refrain from any interference in the internal affairs of Cambodia (point 9), -Resolving that the people of Cambodia be enabled to choose democratically their own government, without outside interference (point 10), and requesting the secretary-general to explore the possibility of holding an international conference on Cambodia, as one of the means of implementing the present resolution (point 12).

In fact, Son Sann and his followers took the initiative to proclaim the creation of the KPNLF on October 9, 1979, knowing in advance that the international community, especially the UN, would adopt a resolution on Cambodia on November 14, 1979.

In those days, the nationalists needed to form a strong and united front to mobilise all resources to fight against the Vietnamese invaders and to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power. Ideally, it would have been much better if Son

Sann and Prince Sihanouk had taken the same approach and fought those enemies together. It would have been a great chance for the non-communists to achieve a sacred national union if Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann had agreed to reunite in a united front. But for several months, the two leaders had chosen their own paths to liberate Cambodia. Probably to respond to criticism about why the KPNLF went into the fight alone, Son Sann revealed at a press conference in Sok Sann village, inside Cambodia, that he had proposed several times that Prince Sihanouk lead the KPNLF. The last time the prince declined his offer was in March 1979.

The Two Nationalist Leaders at War of Words

A few months earlier, Prince Sihanouk had created his own movement in Pyongyang, regrouping mostly Cambodian associations abroad. In Paris, many French newspapers, including "Le Monde" in its issue of December 18, 1979, relayed Son Sann's appeal and declaration to the public. Prince

Sihanouk's refusal to lead the KPNLF on the pretext that it was not the right time, and his later policy shift to create his own group, the Confederation of Khmer Nationalists, led Son Sann to see the Prince´s tergiversation. As reported in Le Monde, he said, "While the prince was changing his mind, men and women died in Cambodia every day. Many resistance fighters who took up arms since 1975 and who were not ready to drop their arms, as the prince had wished, put their lives in danger to penetrate inside the country and deliver food supplies to the population. Did we have to wait, tergiversate, or flow into the water? I (Son Sann) have joined those fighters. I do not impose anything on them, as our decisions are taken collectively." Son Sann added, "We are pursuing the actions we have begun. If others want to help us, by one way or another, they are free to do so, even taking different actions, as theirs and ours are complementary." At the time, some political analysts believed that the support of ASEAN and especially that of Thai generals were indispensable for an effective and reliable non-communist resistance. Prince Sihanouk had not yet benefited from that support.

The Khmer Rouge Leadership´s New Look

For their part, the Khmer Rouge announced a series of government and military changes in an effort to give a new look to their regime. Khieu Samphan took over all major political roles: president and prime minister of Democratic Kampuchea. But Pol Pot retained the most powerful positions of chairman and commander-in-chief of the army. The other members of the new Khmer Rouge government were: [66] Ieng Sary, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs; Son Sen, deputy prime minister and minister of defence; Thioun Thioum, minister of economy; Ieng Thirith, minister of social affairs; Yun Yat, minister of education; Keat Chhon, minister of the premier´s office; Thioun Mum, minister of science; Thuch Rin, secretary of state for information; Sar Kim Lomuth, secretary of state for equipment and

[66] Alan Dawson, New Khmer Rouge Government Announced, Lineup, Bangkok Post, December 28, 1979.

transportation; and Chhorn Hay, secretary of state for telecommunications.

The new Khmer Rouge lineup attempted to offer the world and the Cambodian people a new perspective on the bloodshed perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge leadership. It is noteworthy to underline that two Khmer Rouge ministers, Thioun Thioum and Thioun Mom, and another high-ranking official, Thioun Prasith, are brothers, originating from an aristocratic family named Oknha Veang Thioun, a minister of the royal palace who had practically shared power with two Cambodian kings, King Sisowath and King Monivong, as the French protectorate held him during the two reigns. I learned later that Chhean Vam, the KPNLF vice president, was a brother-in-law of the three Thioun brothers.

Helping My Sister-in-law to Get Out of Camps

Out of many activities in support of KPNLF, I was now more concerned with the fate of Tepthida, who had just reached the border area, living desperately in a refugee camp. From the

moment I received her letter, I felt responsible for helping her leave the camp as soon as possible. I wanted her to come to France. Immediately, I obtained an accommodation certificate from the authorities in the city of Stains, the official document certifying my ability to accommodate her. In fact, my sister-in-law did not reach the refugee camp alone. She was accompanied by her new husband named Seng Leang Hak, 38 (at that time), an engineer whose parents were from my native village, Snay Pol. In a hurry, I sent my first letters to the French embassy in Bangkok and to the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), requesting that arrangements be made to help Tepthida join me in France, telling them that Seng Leang Hak was her cousin, as I did not know her new marital status before she left the village. But my letters remained unanswered.

Meanwhile, I continued writing to the French authorities in Paris and Bangkok to request a French visa for her and her new companion. I also sent her some money. Life in the camp, called Mean Chey camp or Victorious camp 007 at the time, was very troublesome, as there were many armed elements. Any single dispute could end up in a wild killing, not to mention other dangers

such as robbery and rape. The camp leaders did not join the KPNLF. In addition, innocent refugees and camp residents were worried not only about their safety and security but also about being sent by the Thai authorities to other areas such as Preah Vihear, where, in the past, many thousands of Cambodians died from a lack of food and medicine. In fact, the refugees were living with rumours of different threats. Luckily, Tepthida did not stay long in this camp.

After a few weeks, she and her new in-law family were transferred to another camp inside Thailand called Khao-I-Dang. But even inside the new camp, she was not freed from menace. In her letter dated February 1980, which she sent from the new camp, she told me she was frustrated by rumours that refugees would stay permanently in the camp, as there might be plans to build shelters in the woods for them, and that, on the other hand, wealthy people could make fast arrangements to be allowed to get out of the camps and settle in third countries. On the other hand, the location of the Khao-I-Dang camp was close to the border area where terrible noises of fighting between Cambodian warring factions and Vietnamese troops could be heard. Tepthida

suggested that I should get in touch with KPNLF officials in Thailand to help speed up the processing procedures so that she could be evacuated to France as soon as possible.

But at the time, I did not want to involve the KPNLF in my personal and private business, as my service to the resistance movement should be total. I was not seeking any advantage, privilege, or profit by joining the movement. In addition, I was not aware of any role that KPNLF officials could play to help refugees to be settled in third countries, as their mission was to fight for the liberation of Cambodia. However, I wrote to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, requesting that the French government issue a visa for her and her companion. Again, my letter remained unanswered. I was so disappointed that I could not help Tepthida get out of the camp as quickly as I had hoped. I understood her immense frustration at not being able to end her suffering when she found me alive. I was her only hope. In her many letters, she praised the many qualities of my family and recalled good moments she had been spending with Sinoeun, my brother, whom she considered the best person in her life.

She wrote, in one of the letters, that her family and my family, her parents and my parents, went all together to my native village after Phnom Penh was evacuated on April 17, 1975. After one day staying in the village, the Khmer Rouge invited her father and my uncle-in-law, the husband of my aunt, Samedy, to go for training. Since that day, they have disappeared. Tepthida and Sinoeun had a baby who was born just a few days before the fall of Phnom Penh. The baby died shortly thereafter due to a lack of milk and medical care. In 1977, the Khmer Rouge sent her husband, Sinoeun, to political training as well. He never returned. In fact, he was immediately executed by the Khmer Rouge. A few months later, they arrested her mother and her sister.

The two were cruelly murdered on the same day. According to Tepthida's account, the Khmer Rouge were implementing the same policy of auto-genocide everywhere in Cambodia. After the defeat of the Khmer Rouge in January 1979, she married Seng Leang Hak, who brought her to Phnom Penh, where they lived for a while. In the end, they decided to flee Cambodia and joined the border camp. Seng Leang Hak applied for settlement in the USA. He was a jealous man. He kept a close watch on all of Tepthida's

activities, and despite her hardship and terrible suffering, Tepthida still looked very pretty. He came to the border with his own relatives, who also helped him to control Tepthida's activities. Finally, Seng Leang Hak got approval to settle in the USA, and Tepthida followed him to make their new life in the new world.

Demonstration Against 7 January in Paris

In Paris, the majority of the Cambodian community set the date of January 7, 1979 as the date of foreign occupation of Cambodia. At each anniversary of the occupation, AGKE, in cooperation with other Cambodian associations, organised a demonstration, gathering hundreds of people to march into the Vietnamese embassy to protest the occupation and to request the withdrawal of Hanoi troops from Cambodia. For the first anniversary, the demonstration took place at the Eiffel Tower, where organisers gathered the first participants, displayed numerous banners in Khmer, French, and English, and chanted violent anti-Vietnamese slogans. They began by delivering

speeches attacking the Vietnamese government before all campaigners walked down the streets of Paris.

I was excited to join the demonstration with my friends, Soriasy, Tecklin, and Khankeo. Soriasy equipped his car with a loudspeaker and other adequate sound equipment. While Soriasy drove the car and the other friends marched or distributed leaflets behind or beside it, I sat next to him. I used the loudspeaker to chant different slogans for all marchers to repeat. The themes of slogans varied from patriotic appeals to the condemnation of the Vietnamese occupation, such as "Long Life Independent and Neutral Cambodia," "Long Life Freedom," "Free Cambodia," "Death to dictators," "North Vietnamese Out of Cambodia," "No more genocide in Cambodia," "Death to communism," "We support the UN resolution on Cambodia" etc… I shouted so loudly and repeatedly that I completely lost my voice. The demonstration ended in front of the Hanoi embassy, with representatives, including myself, delivering protest notes to Vietnamese officials.

During the demonstration, I met a new friend, Tep Darong, who had just moved from Toulouse, in the south of France, where AGKE/KPNLF found many active members and supporters. The

previous month, one of his friends, Boun Say, quit his job in Toulouse and left France to join the KPNLF in the field. Before Boun Say left for Thailand, I had organised a dinner for him in my apartment in Stains. It was the first time I cooked Western food properly. I was always excited to see new volunteers heading to the front lines.

Tep Darong is one of the sons of Tep Phan, a former minister of foreign affairs under Prince Sihanouk. Tep Phan was a well-known governor of Phnom Penh who took many initiatives to modernise the Cambodian capital in the early 1960s. He led the Cambodian delegation to the Geneva International Conference on Indochina in 1954. Tep Phan was a close friend of Penn Nouth and Son Sann. He was among the founding members of AGKE. In Cambodia before 1970, the Tep, Penn, and Son families were well respected because of their long careers and high-ranking positions in the Cambodian civil service, in close connection with the royal palace. They formed, with a few other families, the most prominent aristocratic families in Cambodia. After the demonstration, Tep Darong joined AGKE's meetings regularly and rendered many services to the association.

As activists for the freedom of the Cambodian people and the independence of Cambodia, many young members of AGKE/KPNLF like me greatly appreciated being involved in the struggle for our country's liberation. We were deeply motivated by the cause of serving the Cambodian nation and people.

My friends, especially Darong and I, committed more and more time to the work of AGKE/KPNLF, to the point where our professional activities became secondary.

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Our team in Paris

At the time, Darong was running a modelling shop. As an independent worker, he often closed his shop to attend meetings, conferences, or to accompany Dr Chhay Hancheng, the AGKE secretary-general and son-in-law of Son Sann, to visit different places, fulfilling the responsibilities of the association and the nationalist movement. Each evening after work, I used to call Darong, asking him to join the other friends and me at Son Sann's residence to accomplish some small and routine office work for

AGKE/KPNLF, varying from typing, photocopying, and mailing letters or documents to arranging meetings or making appointments with French or foreign officials.

After such extra work, we went to dine at a Cambodian restaurant named "Dragon du Nord" or "Dragon from the North," in an area called "La Gare du Nord" in Paris. The restaurant's owner, Sok Vanthy, became one of my close friends, too, because I frequented it regularly and spent a lot of time there with many friends. Sok Vanthy was a rare Cambodian national who ran his restaurant with basically no staff; he cooked himself and was only assisted by his wife in serving customers. Sok Vanthy was not a professional cook. Until the Khmer Rouge took complete control of Cambodia, he had worked as a building contractor, winning a contract to build an airfield on a remote oil-exploring island named Puolo Wai.

Sok Vanthy studied in the USA, where he earned a bachelor's degree in engineering. He first married an American woman, whom he divorced a few years after they arrived in Cambodia in the 1960s. Sok Vanthy escaped the Khmer Rouge rule and succeeded in settling as a refugee in France shortly after

the fall of the Khmer Republic. He lived with his second wife, who worked as a hostess at a Taiwanese travel agency in Phnom Penh. Sok Vanthy owned a Cambodian restaurant on "de Maubeuge Street," not far from the northern Paris train station. I first visited his restaurant alone after reading an article in a French newspaper praising the quality of his cuisine. At the time, Sok Vanthy was surprised to see a young Cambodian at his restaurant, which generally served foreign tourists or French customers. He was impressed by my seriousness as I talked to him more about how to liberate and rebuild Cambodia and how to help the Cambodian people than about dancing, nightclubs, women, music, or cinema.

Since our first encounter, Sok Vanthy and I had spontaneously built a strong friendship. His restaurant quickly became our permanent meeting place after 45bis Accacias Street, Son Sann's residence. Shortly after the KPNLF's proclamation, we went to work regularly, also at the KPNLF Information Office, sis at 2, passage Frequel, 75020 Paris. Usually accompanied by two or three friends, most often Darong, I preferred to come to dine at 10 or 11 p.m., when all ordinary customers had left the restaurant and

Sok Vanthy could take care of us. In this case, he would cook any speciality we wished. We enjoyed talking and drinking as Sok Vanthy made us discover his special reserve of French wines. We often finished our nights at 1 a.m. or later, and at dawn on almost every Saturday.

Son Sann said, "Enemy of our Enemy is Our Ally"

As campaigners for a great cause, we constantly needed resourceful information from military, political, or diplomatic fields. In January 1980, Thonn Ouk, the official spokesman of the KPNLF based in Paris, made his first trip to Thailand and then visited the KPNLF's liberated zone inside Cambodia. On January 5, 1980, Thonn Ouk joined Son Sann in the celebration of the completion of training courses for the first promotion of KPNLF special force combatants in a village named Sroch Srang-Kralar, which was under Vietnamese attack on December 4, 1979.

Son Sann took advantage of Thonn Ouk's presence at the ceremony site to emphasise how important support from the

Cambodian community abroad was to the KPNLF. The KPNLF president congratulated his combatants who chose to become KPNLF special force members. For the first time, he disclosed his intention to cooperate with all forces fighting against the Vietnamese occupants, as Son Sann said, "Enemy of our enemy is our ally. It is in this sense that we have to work hard to earn the sympathy of our population.[67] It was likely a message sent out from the nationalist group to their backers that a conditional union for a joint struggle to liberate Cambodia from the Vietnamese occupation is now possible. China probably, at the time, was the main power to push for a union of all nationalist forces with the Khmer Rouge. China and other powers opposing Vietnam sought a strong, coherent coalition of all Cambodian forces to wage an attrition war against Hanoi. Those powers might have suggested to the KPNLF president that the KPNLF would get sufficient support

[67] Son Sann, President of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Speech at the Closing Ceremony of the Political, Welfare Training and Graduation of the 1st Group of Special Forces, Khmer Territory, January 5, 1980, KPNLF Bulletin No. 2, February 1980, p. 16.

only if it joined a coalition with the Khmer Rouge. Thonn Ouk´s visit to the liberated zones inside Cambodia brought new stimulus to our propaganda efforts in Paris and throughout the European continent, as it became clearer for all of us that the KPNLF was a real non-communist resistance movement, having its well-structured organisation, its competent leadership, its liberated zones, its administration, and its military units. Compared with the confederation of Prince Sihanouk's Khmer nationalists, the KPNLF was far ahead.

Institutions and Congress of KPNLF

Foreseeing the central role the KPNLF could play in Cambodia's future, Son Sann took the initiative to establish and activate different institutions of his movement, while claiming the primary place in any future coalition and requesting more effective support for the KPNLF. In March 1980, Son Sann officially

appointed the KPNLF council of wisemen,[68] composed of two former prime ministers, Sim Var and Huy Kanthoul, and four former ministers, Nong Kimny, Chai Thoul, Lim Kry, and Thonn Ouk. General Saukham Koy, who replaced Lon Nol as president of the Khmer Republic on April 1, 1975, joined the council in December 1980.

To build its political base and legitimacy, the KPNLF held its first national congress in April 1980 on Cambodian soil, in Sroch Srang village. The congress brought together 2,000 people, including 24 delegates from all provinces in Cambodia except Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri. The list of delegates participating in the congress read, "Kampot, Kandal, Koh Kong, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Kratie, Kampong Som, Khao-I-Dang camp, 257 Hanuman movement, Reach Seih Chatomoukh movement, Takeo, Pailin, Banteay Chhmar, Battambang, Prey Veng, Preah Vihear, Pursat, Phnom Penh, Khmer Angkor 007 Front, Stung Treng, Svay Rieng, Siem

[68] Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 80/03/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 11 mars 1980.

Reap, Ouddar Meanchey, Sroch Srang village inhabitants and a Khmer Muslim delegation.˝

At the opening of the congress, Son Sann outlined the fundamental points of the KPNLF political program as indicated in its manifesto, made public on October 9, 1979, and raised two important issues of national interest: the possibility of forming a provisional national government and the KPNLF standpoint vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge. On the first issue, Son Sann linked a national government to Cambodia's representation at any international conference. Because the KPNLF had set its strategic objective of settling the Cambodia conflict through political means, its presence in international forums became its highest priority. The KPNLF president firmly believed that, in the following months and years, an international conference would be held to negotiate the settlement of the conflict, leading to the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and the holding of a general election. In this case, Cambodia's representation would be discussed. He said, "Who will represent Cambodia? The Heng Samrin "government," which is recognised only by a few communist countries of the Soviet bloc, or the government of "Democratic Kampuchea" (or the

Khmer Rouge government), which is internationally less and less supported. In response, he urged his followers to do everything possible, both diplomatically and on the ground, to make the KPNLF better known and establish it as a legitimate alternative to represent Cambodia. He said, "If our KPNLF is internationally recognised and can represent Cambodia, we will remain as the KPNLF. But if the formation of a provisional National Government proves to be necessary, we must be in a position to form it very quickly." At the time, Son Sann foresaw the formation of a nationalist and non-Khmer Rouge government. This third, credible force reflected the aspirations of most Cambodians.

Some international backers were encouraging him to join forces with the Khmer Rouge to combat the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Son Sann was placed in a dilemma: either join the Khmer Rouge to gain external support or set up his own government with nothing. To do so, he needed to bargain. He used the KPNLF congress as the basis for his bargaining tactics. When he spoke to outsiders, he never spoke for himself; he would speak for his people, his army, or his organisation. He wanted to be seen as a democrat, so he must consult his people. Often, he

organised congresses, meetings, or conferences to get the gathering´s advice or approval. Usually, at the opening, he would give directions for the meeting´s conclusion, such as what he wanted the meeting to achieve. In case of consultation, he would present first, listen to supportive comments, and then ask participants to raise their hands for approval. The KPNLF congress of April 1980 was one of those kinds. To this end, Son Sann requested, in advance, the congress´s prior agreement for the KPNLF executive committee to form a provisional national government rapidly, in due time.

Requesting the permission of the congress, assembly, or committee over which he presides to have the right to decide or to do something in advance is the trademark of Son Sann's political manoeuvring in the years to come.

From the KPNLF standpoint vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge, Son Sann explained that the KPNLF was advised to form a united front with the Khmer Rouge. In the past, the KPNLF had always refused the proposals of the Khmer Rouge leaders. The KPNLF soldiers who were not newcomers had put up resistance against the Khmer Rouge since 1975. Son Sann told the congress that those

soldiers would never agree to join the Khmer Rouge; the Khmer people as a whole would not either want the Khmer Rouge or to be colonised by the North Vietnamese; the KPNLF had a mission to serve, to help and to defend the Khmer people against all their enemies. Son Sann added, "We had clashes with the Khmer Rouge; we had casualties, wounded people, some of them will remain crippled for life." At the same time, the KPNLF was accused of collaborating with the Khmer Rouge. To this accusation, he replied, "If we were already collaborating with the Khmer Rouge as it has been alleged, we would not need to be advised to form an alliance with them." Finally, the KPNLF president suggested that "The only thing we can do for the time being is not to fight the Khmer Rouge, provided that they do not attack us, they do not attack the Khmer people, and that they do not hinder our actions." "The common enemy is the invaders from Hanoi who pursue the genocide of the Cambodian people. We, for our part, fight them with determination. As a matter of fact, our main objective remains the liberation of the Khmer people from the North Vietnamese invaders," he said.

In those days, the KPNLF was watching its terminology carefully. The North Vietnamese troops were targeted as the only invaders, not involving all the Vietnamese people, as we believed that the people living in South Vietnam were also victims of the Hanoi communist dictatorship.

Finally, the KPNLF congress agreed to "authorise the KPNLF executive committee to form, if need be, a national provisional government representative of the whole Cambodian people (resolution point 5);" and to authorise the KPNLF leaders to inform the Khmer Rouge officials, with all the necessary precautions, that the KPNLF will not participate in any united front, but that the principal objective of the KPNLF remains the liberation of Cambodia and of the Cambodian people from the North Vietnamese invaders. The KPNLF will not fight the Khmer Rouge troops, provided that the Khmer Rouge Democratic Kampuchea troops do not attack the KPNLF soldiers, do not ill-treat the

Cambodian people, and do not hinder KPNLF actions (resolution point 6)."[69]

In sum, the KPNLF national congress adopted five resolutions on political, military, economic, social, and religious issues. In one political resolution, the congress decided to hand over full powers to the KPNLF, directed by an executive committee of seven members until the total liberation of Cambodia. KPNLF members knew the executive committee by its French acronym, COMEX. According to the KPNLF decree dated October 15, 1979, the executive committee initially included President Son Sann, Vice-President Chhean Vam, Delegate to military affairs Dien Del, Delegate to interior Im Chhoodeth, Delegate to Religious affairs Prum Vit, and Delegate to information Nguon Pytoureth. In December 1979, Hing Kunthon[70] was appointed as delegate to economic affairs. Later, when Nguon Pytoureth resigned from the

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[69] Resolution, the National Congress of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Held in Plenary Session in the Khmer Territory, April 25, 1980, KPNLF Bulletin, Special Issue No. 4, op. cit.

[70] Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision No. 79/07/FNL, Territoire Khmer, le 17 décembre 1979.

KPNLF, Im Chhoodeth replaced him. Prum Vit became the Delegate to interior, and Keo Saovuth took responsibility for religious affairs.

The KPNLF congress of April 1980 denounced the attempts to organise elections by the regime in Phnom Penh installed by Hanoi, as organised in the presence of the North Vietnamese occupation troops; the elections would have no value (point 3). The other important points of the congress resolutions can be read as follows: "the congress appeals to all the Cambodian personalities who held responsibilities at any level, as well as to all Cambodian patriots of all tendencies, even those who are obliged to collaborate with the Phnom Penh regime, to help the KPNLF in its struggle against the North Vietnamese invaders (point 4);" "the congress decides to support unreservedly the UN resolution dated November 14, 1979, which responds to the unanimous wish of the Cambodian people, expressed in the very many petitions from different provinces of Cambodia, handed over to the national congress of the Khmer people (point 7) and requests the Secretary-General of the UN to make every effort to convene, as soon as possible, an international conference on Cambodia, in

conformity with the UN resolution of November 14, 1979 and with the wish of the whole Khmer people (point 8);" "the congress supports unreservedly all diplomatic actions of the ASEAN countries and of the European Commission until the final solution to the Cambodia problem, in conformity with the UN resolution of November 14, 1979 (point 9) and supports the plan of settlement, under the aegis of the UN, of a safe zone along the Khmer-Thai border, allowing the Cambodian refugees to be in security and to receive, without loss and at lesser costs, aid from the worldwide humanitarian organizations (point 10);" "finally, the KPNLF national congress denounces any attempts to make an agreement with Hanoi and Phnom Penh for the repatriation of Cambodian refugees, as a violation of the human rights and contrary to the stipulations of the UN resolution of November 14, 1979 (point 11)."

The political resolution also read, "After the general elections, under the United Nations control, over the whole of Cambodian territory, a new national congress will decide on the Khmer people's regime." At that moment, all resolutions of the congress were unanimously adopted by a show of hands.

However, the decision to give full powers to the KPNLF, directed by an executive committee rather than the president, would later create room for a power dispute between the KPNLF president and the KPNLF executive committee, or Comex. But in 1983, to remedy the conflict, Son Sann organised another gathering called the "Assembly of the KPNLF" and asked the assembly to give him full powers by the same method of hand-raising.

On the other hand, holding a new congress inside Cambodia after general elections would prove unrealistic, as the KPNLF needed to transform itself into a political party with a clear choice of political regime, platform, and program to prepare for future general elections.

Praised by the international press for successfully holding its national congress inside Cambodia, the KPNLF was likely offering an attractive profile of a credible national resistance movement. Through the April congress, the KPNLF leaders still resisted any attempt by their international backers to force them into a united front with the Khmer Rouge. However, the seat of Cambodia at the UN was a burning issue, as it became a target of a diplomatic

battle between the opponents and the proponents of the Vietnamese invasion. The Vietnamese-installed Heng Samring regime was preparing general elections to legitimise its rule, shifting from a foreign-installed regime to a universally elected government. Known for their atrocities in a genocidal regime, the Khmer Rouge were not in any position to defend the seat they had occupied since the Khmer Republic of Lon Nol fell.

In the meantime, the international exposure of the KPNLF was enabling enough for the international coalition against the Vietnamese invasion, especially China, Thailand, other ASEAN members, and the USA, to envisage a new form of the Cambodian government under the leadership of Son Sann in association with the Khmer Rouge. For the coalition partners, now was the time to push further toward the concretisation of the KPNLF-Khmer Rouge union. But Son Sann resisted. He insisted that, for the sake of the Cambodian people, victims of the Khmer Rouge's barbarous regime, he could not join the coalition, the stand that the KPNLF congress had confirmed. At the same time, Son Sann looked for ways to strengthen his movement.

Prince Sihanouk Resigns from the Presidency of the Khmer Confederation

For his part, Prince Sihanouk seemed to be frustrated with the little support he was getting from the international backers, as he was locked in a dilemma: on the one hand, not to lend any collaboration to the Khmer Rouge anymore; on the other hand, not to leave the leadership of the non-communist movements exclusively to Son Sann and his KPNLF.

In the past few months, the prince had declared that he had no intention to collaborate again with the murderers of his people and that it was not the right time for him to take the leading role within the KPNLF created by Son Sann, whose military chiefs were among the soldiers who had deposed him from his position of head of state in March 1970. During those days, international backers´ pressure had been mounting to form a new Cambodian government, forcing into a coalition the KPNLF of Son Sann and the Khmer Rouge at the cost of the exclusion of Prince Sihanouk. In truth, the prince´s confederation of Khmer nationalists had little

impact on the Cambodian conflict. In addition, one of the most respected figures in Cambodian politics, Penn Nouth, a longtime loyal advisor to the prince and many times his prime minister, gave his full support to the KPNLF.

In fact, Penn Nouth had declined the prince´s offer for him to preside over any organisation or institution created by the former king. In a letter dated April 15, 1980, sent from France, Penn Nouth wrote, "All movements setting a goal for a national struggle against the invasion and occupation of our homeland by the Vietnamese armed forces as well as for the liberation of our people from the regime of terror and genocide of Pol Pot-Ieng Sary can count on my sympathy and my active support. However, I deplore the multitude of movements, which only dangerously weaken our national struggle. It belongs to all patriots to judge by themselves where the true national interest of our nation is placed and, for them, to behave accordingly."

Penn Nouth´s letter dealt a blow to the prince´s effort in building up the credibility of his movement. Consequently, Prince Sihanouk took the initiative to re-position himself; he wanted to be available for the next play in politics. As a result, he decided to quit

his current position. In May 1980, the Prince sent several telegrams to his followers. In his telegram dated May 20, 1980, to In Tam, he thanked the latter for his loyalty to him; he asked all his followers to pardon him, as he had decided to quit his function as president of the Confederation of the Khmer nationalists; he left In Tam free to choose whether to continue or to quit his own function of secretary general of the Confederation.[71]

In another telegram dated May 19, 1980, he sent to his close aides, Khek Vandy, Colonel Tim Naing, Colonel Buor Holl and Mrs Chuon Saodi, the prince revealed his difficulty. The telegram read[72], "Please transmit my kind regards to Kong Sileah and Moulinaka, In Sakhan and the Khmer Angkor Front, H.H. Ang Duong Sovann Kiri and his movement, Ou Saroeun and the Neutralist Khmer Liberation Front, Colonel Van Saoyuth and the Nationalist Liberation Front, as well as all other movements and front armies

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[71] Samdech Sihanouk (Télégramme en date du 20 mai 1980) à Son Excellence In Tam, Bulletin Mensuel de Documentation No. 4, juillet 1980.

[72] Samdech Sihanouk (Télégramme en date du 19 mai 1980) à M. Khek Vandy, Colonel Tim Naing, Colonel Buor Hell, Mme Chuon Saodi, Bulletin Mensuel de Documentation No. 6, juillet 1980.

who have been so kind as to send me their supporting letters and messages during my stay in France, to which my reply is as follows: … I am extremely sad and ashamed for being unable to work positively and concretely to help you for: First, I do not dispose of any wealth and cannot actually live without the generous hospitality of President Kim Il Sung. Stop Second, my approaches to the governments of France, USA, and China regarding supports and aid to your armies completely failed. Stop Third, China demands that you unite fully with the Khmer Rouge if you wish to obtain Chinese aid. Stop Fourth, Thailand definitely dislikes me and does not allow me to put my foot on their soil. Stop I admire you, fervently support you, and it is my duty to strongly advise you to imitate His Excellency Son Sann and his front or, better, to unite with them in order to benefit, like them, from indispensable aid from China, Thailand, and the American CIA. Stop Do not say that you are supporting me, because those fighting in favor of Sihanouk will obtain nothing from China and no protection from Thailand, which are absolutely indispensable to you. Stop You must rally with China and with the Thai government, or you will have no means for your struggle.˝

At the time, young people like me in France believed that the prince was just capricious, as he had changed his mind many times in the past. In fact, Prince Sihanouk′s decision to quit what he called "politics" was not just a royal caprice, but also certainly a smart calculation for his next political move. A smart calculation for his personal gain, or for the interest of the national cause, future events will prove. Free from any specific engagement, the prince tried to show his flexibility.

Since his liberation from Khmer Rouge control, Prince Sihanouk had sent several signals in different directions: -To the Cambodian people, on the one hand, his desolation at the suffering and sorrow inflicted by the Khmer Rouge, as the Prince himself was under house arrest and then a victim of the Khmer Rouge inhumane regime; on the other hand, his love and compassion for the Cambodian people, as he still played the role of a traditional chief, if not that of a god-king; -To the Hanoi leaders, his friendly approach when he proposed to them to talk and when he suggested an idea of returning to Cambodia to help with agricultural work and build schools, as if he were accepted as their true partner; the Prince would have helped them to end the

Cambodia conflict amicably; and to the international anti-Vietnamese coalition, a warning that he might shift sides if not taken into proper consideration.

At that time, Son Sann Was Starring Alone.

Naively or intentionally, Son Sann took the prince´s appeal to his followers to join the KPNLF as a granted offer or a secured political support and would exploit it to his advantage. In summer 1980, Son Sann returned to Paris. His presence boosted the morale of his supporters within AGKE/KPNLF in France and, once again, with Prince Sihanouk absent from the political arena, Son Sann emerged as the only credible nationalist leader.

I spent most of my time joining his team of aides, preparing meetings and press conferences, and visiting the Cambodian communities throughout France. On July 10, 1980, Son Sann gave a lecture about "Cambodian prospects" at the French military school (Ecole Militaire) during which he condemned both Asian communists, the Khmer Rouge and the North Vietnamese, the

Khmer Rouge for the auto-genocidal regime unprecedented in history, the North Vietnamese for the continuation of genocide by obstruction, and the extermination of the Khmer people (plundering and robbing, threatening the Angkor temples, diversion of humanitarian relief, circulation of false "riel." imposed constitution, rigged forthcoming elections, arrest of nationalists, "People's revolutionary" tribunals, and jails in the Pol Pot way).

Son Sann declared that if the KPNLF received the necessary aid to move forward and better serve, help, and defend the Khmer people, the latter would reinforce support from the people and intensify their aversion to, and non-collaboration with, the North Vietnamese invaders. The resistance against the occupiers would strengthen and become a contagious example. The KPNLF president said, "Vietnam will have more and more internal difficulties, and will accept the UN resolution of November 14, 1979: withdrawal of the occupation troops, and general elections to enable the Cambodian people to express their will freely. In fact, Son Sann explained that with sufficient support from the free world, the KPNLF would fight an exemplary anti-communist war that could be repeated in other regions of the world. For this, he said,

"According to the Cambodian saying, 'the fire starts from burning twigs'; this fire will start from Afghanistan "twig" for the Middle East, and the KPNLF for Cambodia. Please help us and help us quickly."[73]

To support the idea that he was the only active nationalist Cambodian leader, Son Sann cited statements by the two other leaders, Prince Sihanouk and Lon Nol, to justify his actions." He said, "Prince Norodom Sihanouk (May 1980) and Marshal Lon Nol have requested that the nationalist combatants join the KPNLF. On behalf of the front, I would like to express to these personalities all our thanks publicly."

[73] Son Sann, Conférence sur les Perspectives Cambodgiennes, À l'École Militaire, le 10 juillet 1980, Bulletin du Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer No. 7, juillet 1980, p. 9-13.

KPNLF's Camps Under Attacks

While the KPNLF was seeking international support, the North Vietnamese troops made several attempts to destroy the military forces of the Cambodian nationalist movement. On March 23, 1980, they attacked Sok Sann village, pounding it with 105mm and 122mm shells, several of which contained gas, sowing panic among the population and causing the evacuation of villagers to a safer zone. From April 25 to 27, 1980, the North Vietnamese attacked Sok Sann village again, just at the moment of the KPNLF national congress, which was being held in another region. The KPNLF denounced the attacks as a continued genocide committed by the North Vietnamese against the Cambodian population and appealed for more assistance.

A statement read, "The KPNLF is proud of its armed forces and does not hesitate to proclaim once more that it does not lack volunteers with the same courage and determination as those combatants in Sok Sann. What it needs are weapons and, above all, ammunition. Please give them to it in sufficient quantity, and

the KPNLF will be perfectly in a position to cause serious trouble to the North Vietnamese occupying forces, to safeguard the Khmer race and nations.″

The attack perpetrated by some 3,000 North Vietnamese troops on a peaceful Cambodian village did create some difficulty for the KPNLF. Still, it proved that the nationalist movement had become a significant force the Vietnamese invaders had to reckon with. As military activities intensified, talk of talks to settle the conflict began to spread, although strategies differed between the belligerent camps. By calling for talks with ASEAN, Hanoi sought international recognition for the regime they installed in Phnom Penh as the legitimate government of Cambodia, based on the fact that they had deposed the genocidal regime of Pol Pot.

On July 17-18, three ministers of Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea (the Heng Samrin regime) met in Vientiane. Supported by Laos and Vietnam, the Heng Samrin regime issued proposals aimed at "easing tension and seeking to turn the Thai-Kampuchea border into one of peace and friendship.″ From our part, our group in Bangkok was of the view that, in fact, the talk about the refugee issues was nothing other than to gain

international recognition for the Vietnamese-installed government rather than to address the real problem of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. The proposals included: -the establishment of a "demilitarized zone" in the border areas between the two countries and of a joint commission to implement agreements guaranteeing peace and stability in border areas; -negotiation for the settlement of the refugees, suggesting that refugee camps be established far from frontier areas to avoid border clashes; -the disarming of Pol Pot and the "other reactionary forces" and their regrouping into separate camps; -the distribution of aid inside Kampuchea and not on Thai territory, with an agreement between international organizations and the "Kampuchean Administration" (the Heng Samrin administration); and negotiation between Kampuchea (the Heng Samrin regime) and Thailand to solve the relevant questions, directly between governments or between non-government organizations, Kampuchea and Thailand, or indirectly through a country representing Kampuchea and another representing Thailand, or through an intermediary forum agreed upon."

Son Sann as a Stubborn Politician

Since its proclamation in October 1979, the KPNLF had been constantly under pressure from its international backers, especially China and Thailand, to enter into a union with the Khmer Rouge. Son Sann publicly declared his intention to form a new government more presentable than the Khmer Rouge, but he refused to unite with them. Eventually Thailand put pressure on him. The most punitive pressure, usually carried out by Thai generals, was to deny the KPNLF food, medicine, and ammunition when the front did not fully implement Thai recommendations.

From February to June 1980, Son Sann, whom foreign diplomats labelled a stubborn politician, had resisted the Thai military pressure to ally with the Khmer Rouge. He upset the Thais to the point that they decided to cut off all supplies to the KPNLF. In those days, the KPNLF army was facing serious starvation. Son Sann's trip to Europe in summer 1980 was intended to create room for greater freedom of action, seek more support from Western countries, and thus escape Thai military pressure. He asked his colleagues, Comex members, whether it was an

appropriate time for him to return to his base in September 1980. In a note dated October 4, 1980, Neang Chin Han, secretary-general; Hing Kunthon, a committee member; and Dien Del, the KPNLF military chief, replied[74], "The Comex and all camps would love to have the president back. We miss our president. But under the present circumstances, it is wishful thinking that the president continues to manoeuvre, lobby, and take action from the exterior, where he has more freedom and a better chance to succeed. The situation we have known from February to June 1980 remains in our mind. Our efforts consist of realising and materialising his high directives to move forward."

This note also informed Son Sann of a tentative contact with the USSR through an Australian journalist, Neils Davis, who reported that the Soviets were making new approaches regarding the Cambodia conflict. Neils Davis was killed by crossfire between Thai belligerents while he was reporting, during a military coup, in Bangkok, in September 1985.

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[74] Neang Chin Han, Hing Kunthon, Dien Del, Note d'Information du 4 octobre 1980.

COMEX Recruits New Member

While struggling to resist pressure to ally with the Khmer Rouge, Son Sann had to watch his colleagues within the KPNLF COMEX carefully, as some members tried to wield power over his organisation. In Son Sann's absence, the Comex recruited a new member in Bangkok, Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth, a former press attaché at the Cambodian embassy in Washington, D.C., and an intellectual familiar to Lon Non, the most famous brother of Lon Nol, former president of the Khmer Republic. We currently call him by his first name, Gaffar. According to KPNLF internal documents, it is reported that, at the death of Lon Non in 1975, Gaffar seduced his widow while Gaffar himself was married and the father of two children. But according to a KPNLF theory that the past should be forgotten, no one should be rejected. Gaffar was accepted by the Comex and was introduced to Son Sann in the same note of October 4, 1980[75].

[75] Neang Chin Han, Hing Kunthon, Dien Del, Note d'Information, op. cit.

The COMEX members praised Gaffar as a valuable, high-calibre member with a PhD in political science. The note also announced to Son Sann that Gaffar would work on probation with Dien Del in the central zone of the KPNLF. At the time, the KPNLF had three zones. Each zone was placed under the responsibility of a military chief: Central under Dien Del, North under Im Choodeth, and South under Prum Vit.

KPNLF's Offices of Information Overseas

During the same period, the KPNLF officially set up information offices in Europe, the USA, and Japan. Pen Ran, a former Cambodian national bank executive, led the KPNLF London office. The office included Dr Lao Mong Hay, Dr Pek Bunthath, Nouv Kanun, Dr Heng Phalla Sambath, Ung Bun Koang, Moeng Phok, Chea Bunny, and Tan Mien. In the USA, Sangvar de Lopez, a former colonel of the Cambodian air force, led the Washington office with members: Mrs Nop Paramoun, Sok Savankun, Phok Sophat, and Prom Horn. The KPNLF information office in Paris was

officially established in October 1981, although the office had been open since October 1979. In fact, not to mention AGKE, the Paris office was led by Lim Kry, a former minister of justice under Prince Sihanouk, with five assistants in charge of the following sections: coordination, administrative, information and propaganda, and social and cultural affairs. I oversaw administrative affairs, while colleagues such as Net Kuon, Sam Sok, Mrs Leang Kim Seng, and Chai Sirivuth handled other business. Say Boran, a capable jurist, had served as the office secretary general before the office was reformed. He would later serve as an advisor.

Prince Sihanouk to Join Hands With the Khmer Rouge Again

Just one month after he announced that he had abandoned "politics," Prince Sihanouk was ready to come back in June 1980 to join a united front with the Khmer Rouge. The prince proposed to form a provisional government of a multi-party union with the Khmer Rouge, "including the KPNLF representatives if they so

desire", he said, and even with the Heng Samrin supporters if some of them wish to join it, under the condition that the Khmer Rouge become just a party but not a government, a political party like many others, but a political party with an armed force.

In an interview with Newsweek, Prince Sihanouk reiterated his proposal. It came up again in February 1981, when Zhao Ziyang, the Chinese prime minister, visited Thailand and discussed the Cambodian problem with General Prem Tinsulanond, the Thai prime minister. China and Thailand sought ways to convene an international conference on Cambodia, as UN resolutions provided for. In fact, on October 22, 1980, the UN General Assembly adopted another resolution similar to that of November 1979.

On February 1, 1981, Zhao Ziyang confirmed the evolution of his government position on the Cambodian resistance, following pressure from ASEAN countries to change the Democratic Kampuchea government. Now China was ready to support a new Cambodian government led either by Son Sann or by Prince Sihanouk. It was a green light for change, but it was also tactical in favour of the Khmer Rouge, as it gave them a choice between dealing with Son Sann, who was seen as rigid and stubborn, or

with Prince Sihanouk, a much more flexible partner, to be their partner in the future government, thus putting the two non-communist leaders into competition. If Son Sann continued to refuse the united front, the Khmer Rouge would negotiate with the prince, who was preparing to accept any deal. This three-party approach, or tripartite principle, became key to forming the new coalition government.

Reason Behind Non-Merger Between Son Sann's and Prince Sihanouk's Groups

In light of subsequent research and analysis, I came to realise why Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk, the non-communist Cambodian leaders, could not merge into a single resistance movement. In fact, after freeing himself from the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge clique in early 1979, Prince Sihanouk wanted to live in the United States or France. Nonetheless, because the two countries failed to respond to his request, and because Chinese leader Deng

Xiaoping insisted, Prince Sihanouk consented to return and stay in China in early 1979, as I already wrote above.

The key point is that Prince Sihanouk was still unwilling to join political activities at that time because he was terribly saddened by the loss of his cherished children whom Chinese leaders promised to find. Besides, perhaps the prince was waiting for Vietnam´s reaction to the quest for negotiation after he had sent three letters to Vietnam´s Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, in October 1979. Moreover, perhaps to open the way for negotiation, Prince Sihanouk then proposed leaving Cambodia´s seat vacant at the United Nations and at the Non-Aligned Movement, which was scheduled to meet in Havana, Cuba. In fact, the Phnom Penh Government's stance of leaving Cambodia´s seats unoccupied was contrary to China´s, ASEAN´s, the Khmer Rouge´s, and our position in the Son Sann group.

Together with the stance of leaving Cambodia´s seats empty, Prince Sihanouk asked that all the Cambodian armed groups, specifically the Khmer Rouge, be disarmed. Moreover, in exchange for the withdrawal of all the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, the Prince requested that the International Peacekeeping Forces, or

IPKF for short, operate as police and protect the Cambodian citizens in Cambodia for at least five years. The prince's stance displeased China, which then began lauding the Son Sann group, whom the prince had incorporated into the cluster of Blue Khmer, or Free Khmer, including the Lon Nol group.[76]

In that epoch, China's position was categorically against Vietnam, strengthening the Khmer Rouge with military aid, and opposed to any attempts to divest this clique of weapons. Diplomatically, China had to find ways to protect Democratic Kampuchea's seat at the United Nations from falling into the hands of the Phnom Penh Government. As such, China had to help make the Khmer Rouge Government up so that it appeared well-suited, clean, and acceptable internationally by seeking ways to induce non-communist Cambodian leaders, such as Son Sann and so forth, to join forces with the Khmer Rouge.

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[76] Norodom Sihanouk, A Sad Deterioration of My Relationship with the People's Republic of China, the Cup of the Dregs, a handwriting manuscript published on www.norodomsihanouk.info, May 4, 2004.

At the time, when Prince Sihanouk displeased it because he lacked an absolute stance against Vietnam and wanted to disarm the Khmer Rouge, China, with cooperation from ASEAN and specifically from Thailand and Singapore, raised Son Sann as the only non-communist Cambodian leader, who was the trust and hope of the anti-Vietnam resistance movement. At the time, believing China and ASEAN no longer needed Prince Sihanouk, Son Sann played the leadership role exclusively. Not only that, his children and close entourage also launched verbal attacks on the prince, thereby infuriating him.

In his book, Prince Sihanouk wrote: "In 1979-1980, Son Sann attacked me verbally and accused me, in the presence of international and national journalists and refugees, of standing still and uninvolved at the river bank when a Cambodian ship was sinking. Son Sann said he was ready to jump into the river with his followers, whom he called the Cambodian people, to save the ship[77]. While Son Sann was in the limelight on the international

[77] Norodom Sihamoni, Following the Historical Inter-Cambodian Summit of Singapore, Sihanouk's Enemies Lay into Him Tooth and Nail, the Cup of Dregs, op. cit., p. 4.

stage as the sole Cambodian non-communist leader supported by China and ASEAN to lead a new government of Democratic Kampuchea, Prince Sihanouk felt he was being pushed off the political stage. Voicing his view publicly, he said that if Son Sann played a key role in his place, the beneficiary would be Vietnam because our fellow Cambodians were asked to choose between Son Sann and the Heng Samrin regime; they would pick the regime. However, between Sihanouk and the Heng Samrin regime, they would choose Sihanouk at the drop of a hat. The prince published that, according to information he obtained from Western journalists, most Cambodians were still loyal to him, despite years of enemy propaganda debasing him and besmirching his reputation.[78]

In fact, China did not turn its back on Prince Sihanouk. It had just elevated Son Sann for a while to provoke a reaction and prompt the prince to jump back in and cooperate with the Khmer

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[78] Norodom Sihanouk, To Eliminate Me to Son Sann's Advantage Would Only Help the Viets… Editorial – BMD November-December 1981, handwriting manuscript, publish on www.norodomsihanouk.info, May 14, 2004.

Rouge anew. At a meeting in November 1980, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and Singapore prime minister Lee Kuan Yew agreed on the principle of forming a new Democratic Kampuchea government. Here is the full text of the principle called "The Three Points Principle:[79]

1. Efforts should be made to promote an alliance of the various resistance forces in Kampuchea to set up a united-front government led by Sihanouk or Son Sann. This government must include the forces of the Kampuchean Communist Party[80]. Whether the name Democratic Kampuchea should be retained is a question worth studying. Representatives of Democratic Kampuchea to the coalition government must, of course, be acceptable to the various parties, but Democratic Kampuchea itself must decide the candidates. Nobody should give them orders.

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[79] The Three Points of Principle Concerning the Kampuchean Question Set Forth by Vice-Chairman Deng Xiaoping During his Talks with Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 11 November 1980.

[80] Kampuchean Communist Party is the official name of the Khmer Rouge's communist party. Kampuchea means Cambodia and Kampuchean means Cambodian.

2. ASEAN, the United States, and other countries can make joint efforts to help establish a non-communist army inside Cambodia. But the preconditions must be that the army is genuinely anti-Vietnamese and fights for the maintenance of national independence and for national liberation, and that it must not collude with Vietnam and the Heng Samrin puppet regime in opposing the Communist Party of Kampuchea. Sihanouk or Son Sann can command this army. They will handle all its affairs, including personnel. However, nothing should be done to weaken the existing resistance forces in Kampuchea.

3. China has explicitly stated that after the total withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea, the name of the country and the leadership of Kampuchea will be decided by the Kampuchean people themselves through a free and democratic election under international supervision. China has no intention whatsoever of establishing any satellite states of its own anywhere in any part of the world.

The three points unequivocally asserted that China and Singapore had already agreed to set up a new Democratic Kampuchea government to be led by non-communist leaders,

under the condition that the Khmer Rouge forces, be they political or military, never be harmed. The two sides left the possibility for ASEAN, the United States, and the West to help create a non-communist Cambodian army, but this army should absolutely not oppose the Khmer Rouge forces. Most obviously, not only had China's policy protected the Khmer Rouge from collapse, but it also inspired non-communist Cambodian leaders to help bolster the Khmer Rouge. That tactical point was that it did not patently specify which player, Prince Sihanouk or Son Sann, should lead the new government or command the non-communist army. This tactic led the two leaders to contest leadership, because a leader with the most flexibility would have supremacy. On top of this, the Chinese leadership continued trying to persuade Prince Sihanouk to return and collaborate with the Khmer Rouge, even though it was sometimes dissatisfied with some of the prince´s political positions.

Explaining the reason for his concurrence to return to work in cooperation with the Khmer Rouge, Prince Sihanouk said that first was to secure aid for the Sihanoukist Army and that second, he couldn't turn his back on his great Chinese friends, who had

supported him vigorously in the 1970-1979 war against the Lon Nol clan. He recalled that a top Chinese woman whom he had strong respect for was the wife of the late Premier Zhou Enlai, who had constantly told him to forget his sufferings caused by the loss of his beloved children and grandchildren so he could muster energy to liberate his country, as the prince was certainly aware of where his nation′s supreme interest was.[81] China had certainly informed the prince of the agreement between Deng Xiaoping and Lee Kuan Yew, specifically the three-point principle mentioned above. Therefore, when Prince Sihanouk decided to return and collaborate with the Khmer Rouge, he was unambiguously cognizant of what he could carry through.

[81] Norodom Sihanouk, The Leading Role of People′s Republic of China and ASEAN in the Process of Building Up Democratic Kampuchea′s CGDK, The Cup to the Dregs, op. cit., p. 12.

Son Sann Cannot Unite All Nationalists.

For quite some time, Son Sann, for his part, had understood the disadvantage of the tripartite principle and made efforts to avoid it. He made a final attempt to unite all non-communist combatants under the KPNLF′s flag. Although practically all non-communist fronts and armed elements in the field had pledged their loyalty to the KPNLF and almost all had participated in its national congress on April 24-25, 1980, under the chairmanship of Son Sann, there were still some armed elements that remained independent of the KPNLF or still claimed their political affiliation to Prince Sihanouk. Among them was a royalist group named Moulinaka, which Kong Sileah led and, later, when the latter died mysteriously in August 1980, was led by Nhem Sophon, and another group named Khmer Angkor Front of In Sakhan.

In January 1981, Son Sann met with Nhem Sophon twice in Nong Chan camp, hoping that the Moulinaka leader would definitely join the KPNLF. But finally, his efforts were in vain. Moulinaka chose the royalist camp and became the backbone of

Prince Sihanouk's army. With the support of those armed elements, the prince created his own movement; he named it in French "Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique, et Cooperatif (FUNCINPEC)" in March 1981. Three resistance movements joined FUNCINPEC: Molinaka, Uddor Tis and Khleang Moeung.[82] In fact, we found the same Khleang Moeung movement in both FUNCINPEC and KPNLF. Its leaders were veteran fighters: Ta Maing or Loeung Sinak, Ta Luot or Siem Sam Onn, Tuon Chay, and Chea Chhuth, who had sworn to die together, side by side, to serve the cause of national liberation, even though they joined different fronts, KPNLF and FUNCINPEC. Because those veterans still kept their special friendship and relationship intact, Gen Dien Del suspected their loyalty to the KPNLF. That is why, when he was obliged to resign from KPNLAF in October 1982, after the murder of Ta Luot, General Dien Del suggested that Son Sann carefully scrutinise the loyalty of all combat units before handing over new weapons to them.

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[82] Norodom Sihanouk, The Birth of FUNCINPEC—The First Summit of the Three Khmer Anti-Colonialist Leaders and the "Dragon Lady," The Cup of the Dregs.

However, Son Sann´s efforts to unite all non-communist fighters seemed to have been encouraged by ASEAN countries, and upon his arrival in Bangkok on January 3, 1981, Rajaratnam, deputy prime minister of Singapore, made public that his government welcomed the idea of having Son Sann as the leader of the national resistance against foreign occupation. Carlos Romulo, the foreign minister of the Philippines, also indicated to the Japanese foreign minister, Ito, that ASEAN could recognise Son Sann. Based on the incomplete statements by the two ASEAN ministers, Rajaratnam of Singapore and Romulo of the Philippines, Son Sann believed Prince Sihanouk was losing China's and ASEAN´s support. Therefore, Son Sann starred alone on the international stage, which upset Prince Sihanouk and made him more disappointed with the KPNLF and its leadership.

Son Sann said, "To turn right,"
It Is Necessary to Take a Short Left turn"

In April and May 1981, Son Sann toured the USA. Alexander Haig, the U.S. Secretary of State, received him after the KPNLF President began consulting his supporters on joining a coalition to defend the Cambodian seat at the UN.

At the KPNLF convention held in Arlington, USA, he declared, "The Cambodian people are afraid of the Khmer Rouge. When Prince Sihanouk made known his decision to unite with the Khmer Rouge, the people were very worried about the prince's move, and some of them definitely rallied with the Vietnamese[83]." "The Khmer Rouge should not be allowed to come back to power." In addition, for the first time, Son Sann publicly revealed suggestions from some foreign powers for the KPNLF to take every step to prepare to take the Cambodian seat at the UN. Son Sann reported that friendly governments had suggested he form a new government

[83] Son Sann, Speech, at the Convention of the KPNLF, USA, KPNLF, July 1981, p. 3-9.

with some participation from the Khmer Rouge, a government under his premiership. Son Sann told the convention that he had replied to the Khmer Rouge′s request to form a new Democratic Kampuchea government: if the Khmer Rouge invited him to do so, they should give him all ministries; otherwise, the Khmer Rouge would have to keep them all.

The KPNLF president explained that he would take a turn. He would move from a hard-line position of not uniting with the Khmer Rouge to that of conditional unity. However, he assured his people that the KPNLF would not absolutely "turn left"; it would definitely "turn right." But to turn right, it was necessary to take a short left. Nevertheless, in any move, his main and constant objective was to strengthen his movement. In concrete terms, he meant that the KPNLF would form a coalition government with the Khmer Rouge to safeguard Cambodia′s seat at the UN and reinforce the KPNLF′s strength.

Son Sann said, "To Enter the Tiger Cage, Give Me a Stick"

After the USA, Son Sann returned to France. In addition to West Germany, which he had visited in May, Son Sann went to Holland, where he met with the director of the Asian and Oceania bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to whom he made known his conditions for leading a new "Democratic Kampuchea" government to defend its UN seat[84]. The conditions were basically as follows: -The majority of portfolios must be given to the nationalists, -Leaders of the Khmer Rouge, well known for the responsibility of their regime, must not be allowed to take part, and the KPNLF must have sufficient force. For the last point of his conditions, Son Sann requested that: -Humanitarian assistance to 100,000 civilians be provided urgently, diplomatic and political support be more active, and sufficient financial aid be given so that

[84] Visit of the KPNLF President in Holland on June 16, 1981, KPNLF Bulletin, July 1981, p. 18-19.

the KPNLF can carry out its activities. On these conditions, Son Sann used to say, "If you want me to go into the "tiger cage," please give me a stick." Of course, the stick was indispensable for his defence; if not, the tiger "Khmer Rouge" would devour him.

Son Sann announced that I (Ieng Mouly) Was Volunteering to Go to the Front.

During his stay in Europe, Son Sann was looking for capable executives and staff as volunteers to serve his movement in different fields- diplomatic, finance, or military- in anticipation of his enhanced role in the future Cambodian government. He just got valuable support from his longtime and trusted friend, Penn Nouth, who had sent his four sons, Penn Thol, Penn Thal, Penn Nhach, and Penn Thula, into the service of the KPNLF. Since they were free from the Khmer Rouge, the four had lived in different places: Penn Thol with his family in Japan, Nhach and Thula in Canada, and Thal in France. Penn Thal, probably the favourite son of Penn

Nouth, volunteered to join the KPNLF in the field. He began showing up from time to time at some KPNLF meetings in Paris.

Among our colleagues in Paris, Son Sann chose Say Boran as his assistant. Boran was still a bachelor in his late thirties. He used to work late and often spent his nights in the KPNLF office, helping publish the KPNLF bulletins. Boran was hesitating to abandon his job in Paris. He did not say clearly when he would be ready to join the KPNLF in the field. Say Boran was also my close friend, with whom I went out regularly. We dined together either at Sok Vanthy or at several Chinese restaurants. He knew well my nationalistic feelings. He might suggest to Son Sann that I was volunteering to go to the front. That is why, in a meeting of the KPNLF members, to my big surprise but to the audience's acclamation, Son Sann announced that I had decided to join him on the field, working as a real freedom-fighter. I could not say no, as going to the war zone was my real intention, even though I had not discussed it with either Son Sann or his son-in-law, Dr Chhay, beforehand. From then on, my long-held desire to return to Cambodia began to come true. The arrangement was that I would fly to Bangkok with Penn Thal. But we would not depart

immediately. We had a few months to travel to different provinces and attend many meetings to bid farewell to friends and supporters in France.

COMEX Creates New Internal Problem

In the meantime, in the KPNLF′s zone, once again, during the absence of Son Sann from the KPNLF headquarters, some members of the COMEX recruited a newcomer from France named Ok Serei Sopheak. Sopheak left France on April 21, 1981. On May 11, 1981, he got authorisation to enter the KPNLF central zone under the command of Gen. Dien Del. Sopheak, and other new members coming from the Heng Samrin-controlled area or from refugee camps were sworn in as KPNLF combatants in a ceremony held on June 10, 1981, presided over by Dien Del and Hing Kunthon. Ok Serei Sopheak's presence on the field could be seen as a sign of growing support from the Khmer community abroad for the KPNLF, a strong signal meant to convince refugees and other local KPNLF cadres not to flee the country and to

mobilise all resources to serve the resistance movement. However, Sopheak's case sowed discord among the KPNLF leadership and fuelled anger among Son Sann's followers in France. In fact, Sopheak did not contact the KPNLF representative in Paris before travelling to Thailand, as the official representative in Paris should first introduce and recommend him to the KPNLF leadership. Sopheak passed through the KPNLF headquarters and reached the liberated zone without Son Sann's knowledge.

In those days, joining the KPNLF on the field was an honour, as few people could afford it or be selected to do so, especially from Europe or the USA. KPNLF members paid close attention to those who sacrificed their lives for the national cause. In the past, they had known Serei Sopheak in Paris more as a fierce competitor working for other associations or political groupings than as someone supporting the KPNLF/AGKE. Many members were frustrated and shocked to see that an outsider could be given such a role at the expense of their dedication and loyalty. However, from the interior, Sopheak wrote an article in the KPNLF bulletin, telling a success story of the KPNLF, painting a picture of a well-organised village in a liberated zone, and giving his

impression on military and civilian training in support of a war of national liberation.

But in late July, Sopheak returned to Paris. He explained the reason for his return as follows:[85] -to make final arrangements with his family in France so that he could move and live definitely in the KPNLF liberated zone; -to testify, before the Cambodian community in France, the truth about the KPNLF´s activities inside Cambodia, with a suggestion that the KPNLF propaganda should target more at young Cambodian people; and finally to regularise his situation within the KPNLF, especially to improve his relationship with Son Sann and his entourage. In Paris, Sopheak did not join Son Sann´s inner circle but continued to maintain direct contact with key members of the COMEX, such as Neang Chin Han, Hing Kunthon, and Dien Del.

The Serei Sopheak case showed that the KPNLF information office in Paris, dominated by Son Sann´s supporters and family members, did not control all networks that could provide resources

to the front. It proved that key members of the KPNLF′s COMEX did not work exclusively with the president and his men in Paris to expand the front′s sphere of influence, not to mention their influence. It also showed that the KPNLF did not belong solely to Son Sann and that his son-in-law′s information management was not specifically advantageous to KPNLF members, since outsiders could get it directly from KPNLF headquarters. However, the COMEX would discuss Sopheak′s case at a later stage.

An International Conference on Kampuchea

From the beginning of the conflict, the United Nations was constant in its approach, which was in conformity with its General Assembly resolution, calling for the convening of an international conference on Kampuchea to seek an agreement on the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, on measures to

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[85] Ok Serei Sopheak, Letter in Khmer Addressed to President Son Sann, President of the Khmer People′s National Liberation Front, Field, Creteil, April 1, 1982.

ensure public order and respect for human rights, and, among other steps, on the holding of general elections under the UN supervision. The Security Council adopted two resolutions in November 1979 and October 1980. In June 1981, the UN Secretary-General sent a verbal note to member states to gauge whether convening an international conference was possible[86].

On June 18, 1981, the Secretary-General invited member states to a conference to be held at UN headquarters on July 13, 1981. The UN considered Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea (the Khmer Rouge) as parties to the conflict, but, unlike Democratic Kampuchea, Vietnam did not participate in the conference. 79 member states sent their representatives to the meeting. At the first plenary session of the conference, the delegate of Singapore officially proposed inviting three Cambodian political groups: the KPNLF, the FUNCINPEC, and the Khmer People and Revolutionary Party (Heng Samrin) to participate in the conference with no right to vote. The conference approved the

[86] Nations Unies, Rapport de la Conférence Internationale sur le Kampuchea, New York, 1981.

participation of the KPNLF and the FUNCINPEC but rejected Heng Samrin´s representation[87]. At the proposal of the Philippines, supported by Senegal, Australia, Venezuela, and Belgium, the conference elected the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Willibald Pahr, as its president. The conference issued a statement reaffirming the right of all states to the inviolability of their sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity and underlining the duty of all states to respect this right of their neighbours. The statement practically blamed North Vietnam for its invasion and occupation of Cambodia and noted grave international consequences that could aggravate tensions within the Southeast Asian region. Since participating in the conference, the non-communist resistance movements had remained separate, becoming two competing nationalist fronts: the KPNLF, led by Son Sann, and the FUNCINPEC, led by Prince Sihanouk.

[87] Nations Unies, Rapport de la Conférence Internationale sur le Kampuchea, op. cit.

Son Sann Meeting Prince Sihanouk

On August 3, 1981, Son Sann went to see Prince Sihanouk in the prince′s villa in Mougins, Côtes d′Azur, in the south of France. His close aides advised him to stand up to the former Head of State and be firm, as Son Sann held some legitimacy in the anti-Vietnamese resistance, while Prince Sihanouk was acting in a private capacity. At the time, many Cambodian refugees saw Son Sann as a prime minister-elect, not just as the leader of a nationalist movement. In fact, Son Sann was seeking the prince′s public support for his efforts to unite all nationalist forces into one non-communist movement so he could avoid tripartism in the next formation of a coalition government with the Khmer Rouge. After the meeting, in a press statement, Son Sann made public that the prince supported his efforts to form a coalition government representing all resistance forces against the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia. The two leaders expressed the view that the Khmer Rouge would return to power after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops, causing fatal danger to the Cambodian

people who definitely opposed the return of their genocidal regime. Son Sann told the prince that Cambodian nationalists demanded the KPNLF take precautions in advance and seek pledges from major powers to guarantee the survival of the Cambodian people. Son Sann suggested that Prince Sihanouk not create another front if the prince supported his efforts. But the prince was not prepared to abandon his newly created political movement. Prince Sihanouk clarified that he supported Son Sann's efforts on condition that Son Sann recognised his front, the FUNCINPEC.

Back at his base, Son Sann began consulting the population living under KPNLF control. On August 24 and 25, 1981, he visited Sroch Srang village in Banteay Ampil, the stronghold of the KPNLF army, Nong Chan and Rithisen camps. In public meetings, Son Sann explained to the population the situation of the Cambodian conflict and the need for a possible political solution at an international conference. He then asked the meeting to approve his approach and the conditions he should put forward for forming the coalition government. Son Sann said, "Please raise your hand if you agree on the following points: 1. Do not allow the creation of

any new nationalist movement other than the KPNLF (he meant not to allow the creation of FUNCINPEC), 2. Request a force at least equal to that of the Khmer Rouge; 3. In any coalition government, either with the Khmer Rouge or with other partners, KPNLF members must occupy the majority and the most important seats; 4. If, in the future, in case of any difficulty, the KPNLF members still want me to continue my mission.″ Son Sann prepared the four questions so an affirmative answer would serve as a condition for any negotiation to form a future coalition government. In response to his request, all participants did raise their hands.

Son Sann-Sihanouk-Khieu Samphan Meeting

In the end, ASEAN and China arranged for anti-Vietnamese Cambodian leaders to meet in Singapore in September 1981. The tripartism was unavoidable, even though Son Sann still attempted to reject its principle. On September 4, 1981, in Singapore, Prince Sihanouk, Son Sann, and the nominal leader of the Khmer Rouge,

Khieu Samphan, signed a joint statement in which they agreed to"[88] 1. Express the desire to form a coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea with a view to continuing the struggle in all forms for the liberation of Cambodia from the Vietnamese aggressors; 2. Set up an ad hoc committee to study the principles and the forms enabling the achievement of the above coalition government and objectives."

Following the signing of the joint statement, the ministers of foreign affairs of Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia agreed that a coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea, comprising the three anti-Vietnamese parties, would be formed soon, that Son Sann would assume the functions of prime minister and that, in his capacity as prime minister-designate of the coalition government, Son Sann would lead the Cambodian delegation to the UN. In accordance with the joint statement, an ad hoc committee comprising representatives of the three leaders was set up to study the principles and forms of a coalition government.

[88] HRH Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, H.E. Mr. Son Sann, H.E. Mr. Khieu Samphan, Singapore, Joint Statement, 2-4 September 1981.

Prince Sihanouk appointed: In Tam, Buor Hel, and Chak Saroeun; Son Sann:[89] Hing Kunthon, Neang Chin Han and Peang Meth Gaffar; and Khieu Samphan: Mrs Ieng Thirith, Suong Sikhoeun, and Pech Bun Reth, as their representatives in the ad hoc committee.

Inconclusive Debates in the Ad Hoc Committee

The committee met for the first time on September 13, 1981, in Bangkok, Thailand. The representatives met again on September 18, 22, 26, and 28, 1981, without reaching any agreement. According to In Tam, Prince Sihanouk had ordered his representatives not to express any view or opinion during the talks. The prince advised them to support any agreement reached by the Khmer Rouge and Son Sann´s representatives, leaving the negotiation in the hands of the two antagonists, the KPNLF and the Khmer Rouge. It was an easy but cunning stratagem. In fact,

[89] Son Sann, Décision, Singapour, le 5 septembre 1981.

Prince Sihanouk was well aware of the agreement between Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew when they met in November 1980.

On October 2, 1981[90], Son Sann sent a memorandum to the ministry of foreign affairs of Thailand, the host country, summing up the situation of the ad hoc committee. The memorandum explained the difference in standpoints between the KPNLF and the Khmer Rouge. On the one hand, the KPNLF president took a firm stand that the coalition government should only have a transitory character; its concept should be based on the constant search for a political solution; it should have its own institution with full powers; and it should not be dependent on any existing organ of the state of Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge). On the other hand, he reported to the host country the Khmer Rouge stand, which demanded that the new government should be the pure and simple continuation of the government of the state of

[90] Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Mémorandum, Presented by Mr. Son Sann, President of the KPNLF to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Royal Government of Thailand, October 2, 1981.

Democratic Kampuchea, with its concept of an excessive armed struggle, its structure, its program, its institutions, and its forms of functioning. In addition, the Khmer Rouge insisted that the coalition government should be based on an equivocal tripartite system and on the principle of consensus as a system of governing and decision-making, as well as on a long process of elaborating a program of government of people's democracy. Son Sann maintained that, in its composition and structure, the functioning of this government should consist of exceptional measures and proceedings required by the circumstances of a country at war, and for a definite period, to canalise, mobilise, and reinforce all the Cambodian parties engaged in the national liberation struggle against the North Vietnamese aggressors. He suggested that, in every case, all governmental activities should respect and conform to United Nations resolutions and to the resolution and declaration of the International Conference on Kambodia of July 17, 1981, in New York.

On October 4, 1981[91], the ad hoc committee met again. The Khmer Rouge accentuated the formulation of its political principles in the following fundamental points: 1. The new coalition ought to hold a position of genuine union. No party should hold a preponderant position. 2. To this end, this government ought to be based on the tripartite principle: as much in its structures as in its composition, equal representation of the three parties to prevail. 3. On important questions, consensus ought to be required within this government. 4. The continuity of the State of Democratic Kampuchea and a member state of the United Nations. The Khmer Rouge considered the four points as vital.

The KPNLF representatives asked to make a reservation on the first three points, which ought to be linked to an examination of the question, relative to the prime minister and the composition of the government. As for point 4, the KPNLF representatives required more information first to build an accurate picture of the institutions of the state of Democratic Kampuchea. This time, as

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[91] Translation (into English) of the Official Record of the Sixth Ad Hoc Meeting held on October 4, 1981 under the Presidency of Mrs. Ieng Thirith of Democratic Kampuchea.

indicated in the record, Prince Sihanouk's representatives agreed with the Khmer Rouge on almost all points, leaving Son Sann's representatives alone and weakening the non-communist camp's position. The Khmer Rouge used Prince Sihanouk to pressure Son Sann to soften his stand. The maneuvering was working well for the Khmer Rouge within a tripartite system, while they would be neck and neck with Son Sann in a bipartite one. In this case, if they won Prince Sihanouk´s heart, Son Sann would be isolated and would then need to review his strategy. That is why the Khmer Rouge insisted on the tripartite principle. Finally, the tripartite principle was working against Son Sann. But Son Sann still resisted and resisted. In the end, the proposed goal of forming a coalition government in time to represent Cambodia at the UN was not achieved.

In fact, the Khmer Rouge, like Prince Sihanouk, certainly had been informed by the Chinese about the three-point principles agreed upon by Deng Xiaoping and Lee Kuan Yew in November 1981. That is why the Khmer Rouge paid little attention to the KPNLF´s position on the formation of the coalition government.

The KPNLF leader continued to stick to his constant demand for more aid to his movement, for the majority of seats in the coalition government for his side, and for the exclusion of the most famous leaders of the genocidal regime from this government. The KPNLF proposed forming the coalition government by establishing two institutions: a national council presided over by Prince Sihanouk, with Son Sann and Khieu Samphan as members, and the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea, with Son Sann as its prime minister. The proposal would make Prince Sihanouk head of state to ensure continuity of the state and guarantee national independence, sovereignty, unity, and the territorial integrity of a neutral and non-aligned Cambodia, whose neutrality should be internationally guaranteed. The national council would serve in an advisory capacity to the coalition government. The KPNLF proposed that the coalition government assume the duties and competence of a legal government of the state of Democratic Kampuchea, with full powers to determine and conduct the nation's policies and to exercise its authority in all domains during the period of the struggle for the total liberation of

Cambodia. The proposal clearly underlined the government's transitory character.[92]

On the other hand, the KPNLF proposal enhanced the role of the prime minister as the authority to accept or reject nominations for cabinet posts, enabling Son Sann to reject any nomination of the famous Khmer Rouge leaders such as Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Nuon Chea, Ta Mok, or other notorious Khmer Rouge leaders for ministerial positions.

On October 28, 1981, the ad hoc committee met again for its seventh session, with no conclusion. The next day, in the afternoon of October 29, 1981, representatives of Son Sann were called to the Thai foreign affairs ministry for a meeting. The Thais put strong pressure on Son Sann to decide whether to accept or to reject the idea of forming the coalition with the Khmer Rouge, based on the fact that Son Sann could also approve and make any reservation. They summoned him to reply within hours. Son Sann's reply was given the same afternoon to the Permanent

[92] Memorandum presented by Mr. Son Sann, President of the K.P.N.L.F. to the Ministry of

Secretary Kasem S. Kasemsri. The reply was as follows[93]: Primo: Agreed on the principle of accepting with reservations in the negotiations within the Ad Hoc Committee; Secondo: Agreed in principle on points 1, 2 and 3 of the meeting of 4 and 28 October 1981 of the Ad Hoc Committee, with the reservation that Son Sann has no role to play in the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea (national council and cabinet of ministers); Tertio: The KPNLF asked to clarify on an urgent basis to compatriots in the interior and exterior over this new position. However, in conformity with the Joint Declaration signed in Singapore on September 4, 1981, the KPNLF stated that it would continue to participate in the Ad Hoc Committee and in the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea. This time, Son Sann threw his jockey.

Foreign Affairs of the Royal Thai Government, October 2, 1981.

[93] KPNLF, Confidential Notes on the Formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, November 1981.

If Son Sann Not In, Sihanouk Not In Too

With this new input, the ad hoc committee met again on October 31 and November 14. After nine working sessions, the ad hoc committee failed to reach any agreement. Son Sann used tactics that involved accepting all points with reservations. One of them was that he would personally stay outside the coalition. In reaction to Son Sann's decision not to join the coalition government, Prince Sihanouk sent a telegram dated November 20, 1981, to In Tam, his representative, saying, "I will not be able to accept being the president of the praesidium (a position proposed by the Khmer Rouge), as the long-term interest of our people commands us to stay outside of Democratic Kampuchea[94]." According to In Tam, the prince feared that if he joined the coalition without Son Sann, the latter would make propaganda that he (Son Sann) alone had no association or connection with the

[94] In Tam, 5th Anniversary of CGDK and the Voice of Phnom Penh (in Khmer), Nokor Khmer Review, 9th Year, No. 98, June 1986, p. 2.

blood-dirty Khmer Rouge. In truth, a coalition of Prince Sihanouk and Khieu Samphan would be no different from the one he formed in the 1970s, which brought Pol Pot to power in 1975. Logically, Son Sann′s participation in the new coalition government would have added credibility, as the KPNLF represented a real alternative on the international scene and in the country′s interior. So, Son Sann′s decision not to play any role in the coalition was the stumbling block to forming the new government.

On November 22-23, in Bangkok, the government of Singapore proposed a "loose coalition" formula in which the coalition government "would be concerned only with the single objective of pursuing the struggle against Vietnamese occupation, after which it would be automatically dissolved to pave the way for the election of a government in Cambodia through free elections conducted by the United Nations." Son Sann accepted this "loose coalition formula" without debate, as it was based on the transitory nature of the government he had suggested.

For their part, the Khmer Rouge took a firm stand that the coalition government would, besides the imperatives and institutional constraints existing, function based on four principles:

(I) The principle of tripartite; (II) The principle of equality and non-preponderance; (III) The principle of consensus on important matters; and (IV) The coalition to be set up must be based on the legal status of the state of Democratic Kampuchea, which is a member state of the United Nations. In addition, the Khmer Rouge asked to retain control over the government′s diplomacy. It proposed appointing Ieng Sary as deputy prime minister in charge of foreign affairs, which directly contradicted Son Sann′s position.

The Khmer Rouge Get Support from Prince Sihanouk

To pressure Son Sann, the Khmer Rouge worked out an agreement with Prince Sihanouk that enormously weakened Son Sann′s position. In a memorandum dated May 7, 1982, [95] addressed to Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Khmer

[95] Democratic Kampuchea, Memorandum by the Kampuchea Democratic Party Concerning the "Declaration of the Formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, Confidential Document, May 7, 1982.

Rouge stuck to their four principles. They cited the agreement that Khieu Samphan had reached with Prince Sihanouk in Beijing in February 1982 as strong support for their position. They blamed Son Sann for the difficulty in forming the coalition government. The Khmer Rouge memorandum read, "IN HIS TALKS IN BEIJING ON FEBRUARY 21 AND 23, 1982 WITH HIS EXCELLENCY KHIEU SAMPHAN, PRESIDENT OF THE PRESIDIUM OF THE STATE AND PRIME MINISTER OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA, HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE NORODOM SIHANOUK HAS ALREADY AGREED ON ALL THOSE PRINCIPLES." "SO FAR, IN HIS POINT OF VIEW AND POSITION AS WELL AS IN HIS ACTUAL DEEDS, HIS EXCELLENCY SON SANN HAS NOT YET ACCEPTED THE ABOVE PRINCIPLES."

The Khmer Rouge, in those days, benefited from strong support from several Thai army generals, especially from then Maj Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a former colonel who had arranged for Son Sann to lead the Cambodian non communist resistance in 1979. In fact, Gen Chavalit immediately played many Cambodian cards to keep any key to solving the Cambodian conflict under his control. Chavalit was regarded as a main Thai military strategist

who had played a key role in effective counter-insurgency operations, especially against Thai communists. In the end, he was the man who helped put pressure on Son Sann to accept the Khmer Rouge conditions.

I accompanied Son Sann to Meet US Ambassador.

In early 1982, Son Sann shuttled between his base in Bangkok, Paris, and other Western capitals. On March 19, 1982, he paid a courtesy call to the U.S. Ambassador, Evan Galbraith, in Paris[96]. For the first time, I was told to accompany him as his aide to see the ambassador. It was my first contact with the world of diplomacy. As usual, Dr Chhay was assigned to drive us to the embassy, while I took responsibility for note-taking throughout the conversation. Son Sann was seeking U.S. assistance in medicines, clothes, and ammunition for the population of his villages in the

[96] Ieng Mouly, Compte-rendu de l'entretien du Président du FNLPK avec l'Ambassadeur des Etats Unis en France, Paris, le 19 mars 1982.

liberated zone, Sok Sann 1 and Sok Sann 2, after Hanoi troops had captured those villages. Son Sann denounced the use of chemical arms by the Vietnamese troops during their attacks against the KPNLF villages. Son Sann promised the U.S. Ambassador to make public the results of laboratory testing of the chemical substances found at the time of the attacks. During his stay in France, he held many press conferences and visited the Cambodian community in different provinces. At each public meeting, Son Sann introduced Penn Thal and me to the audience as two new volunteers ready to go to the front lines. In fact, Son Sann planned to strengthen his personal staff as soon as possible, in anticipation of the ongoing formation of the coalition government and incoming foreign assistance to KPNLF. Our presence with him on the field would help him control his movements more effectively, which were quietly expanding. The last meeting was held in Toulouse, where I counted many friends among KPNLF members.

Penn Thal and I Say Goodbye to Paris

Unlike the departure of previous volunteers, which was kept secret, ours, Penn Thal and I, was announced to the press. We agreed to leave Paris for Bangkok on May 18, 1982. But Son Sann returned to Thailand before us to oversee negotiations to form the coalition government. I made no special preparations for my trip to Thailand, except to pack some books and clothes, as I would leave my apartment to a Buddhist monk named Venerable Sar Sastr as his temporary residence. I put the rest of my belongings, which were nothing but books, private documents, family photos, winter clothes, and some glassware, in two big metallic trunks to be kept in Darong's house. I arranged to sell my car, a Renault 5 "Le Car," a special model of the French R5, to Darong's brother, Sambonna, who agreed that I would hand over the car and its key to him at the airport on the day of my departure.

On Saturday, May 15, 1982, Lim Kry, former minister of justice and the head of the KPNLF information office in Paris, organised a dinner for Penn Thal and me to bid farewell, gathering almost fifty

guests, all KPNLF active members. It was a moving moment as Lim Kry, in his improvised speech, praised our courage and our sacrifice in a long struggle where death and life would be a matter of day-to-day concern. In reply, Penn Thal asked me to say a few words. I took out from my pocket a handwritten paper on which I had prepared some remarks for the purpose. I expressed my gratitude to my colleagues, who had worked closely with me for many years, for their friendship and their love for Cambodia, as they had sacrificed their precious time, money, and other contributions to support our nation's long struggle against its enemy.

My paper read,[97] "In the present circumstance when our nation is under foreign occupation, all sons and daughters of Cambodia have the duty to make sacrifices and to safeguard the heritage of our ancestors. We are all responding to the call of our motherland through our moral and material support to our people's struggle and through our service to the KPNLF." "We

[97] Ieng Mouly, Handwritten, Undated.

(Penn Thal and I) sincerely hope that, even though we live far away from you, you will continue to strengthen our friendship, to support the struggle for national liberation until final victory, especially to be united within the KPNLF so that we would be able to meet each other again on the sacred soil of our land." When I finished reading my remarks, I quoted a French leader of World War I, Georges Clemenceau, who said, "It doesn't suffice to be heroes. We want to be the winners."

On May 18, 1982, at the airport, many friends and supporters, almost a hundred people, came to see us off. It was a particular event in my life. Among the crowd, I saw a group of VIPs led by Sim Var, a former prime minister and a fierce critic of Prince Sihanouk, and a group of Buddhist monks in saffron robes. They gave me a benediction. I saluted them in return. It was ever a memorable moment. Sim Var paid high esteem and respect to my decision, which he named "pure patriotism." Later, he sent me a letter saying, "Due to my age, I cannot afford such a luxury to go to the forefront to serve our nation."

Sim Var was in his late seventies. My friend, Roland Rousseau, who was also present at the airport, was very

impressed to see so many people coming to salute our departure. Sok Vanthy, the restaurant´s owner, shook my hand with the kindest words. As a souvenir of our friendship, he asked me to give him my FFR 100 watch, which I bought when I got my first job at Pharos France, for what I did right away. In return, he gave me his watch; he had just managed to rid himself of his left wrist. On the spot, I did not pay much attention. But the watch was worth many thousands of dollars, as it was a Rolex. Once Penn Thal and I left the crowd, we passed through immigration control and went into the waiting hall in the airport's international transit area. Another friend, Daravicheth, a young lady of my age, still followed us and managed to reach the area too. She wanted to spend the last moment with us before we got into the aircraft. I didn't know she had passed through police control without a passport or ID card and without a boarding pass. But she was a beautiful talker. I learned later that after our departure, on the way back, the police caught her, and she spent three hours explaining why and how she had sneaked into the international area of the airport. In the end, she had to wait for someone to bring in her official ID documentation.

Penn Thal Told Me Not to Lose Dignity

On the plane, I learned more and more about Penn Thal, a man of great culture. He graduated from a business school in Toulouse, France, and spoke French and English fluently. During the whole flight from Paris to Bangkok, even with our economy-class ticket, Penn Thal managed, with the flight attendant's help, to be served champagne and other French wines. He had lost his wife and daughter under Pol Pot´s rule. Through our conversation, I could see in him a man of immense suffering, but also one of great courage. He had been liberated from the Khmer Rouge not for long; now he volunteered to serve the KPNLF on the front line, leaving in France his only son, who had survived the Khmer Rouge regime, in the care of some friends. Rapidly, I earned his friendship and brotherhood. He said, "Little brother, we can lose everything, but we cannot lose our dignity." "Now, we put our lives in the same basket; we are on the same boat."

While flying in the sky, my only thought was the "liberation," the liberation of Cambodia, her liberation from foreign occupation,

her liberation from communism and dictatorship. I had no idea of any failure in my enterprise. I had no real notion of a time limit for the ongoing struggle for national liberation. But my thinking was very simple: I would sacrifice ten years of my life at the service of the Cambodian resistance, especially within the KPNLF. For me, it was simply an adventure in which I did not expect to find anything other than the land of my ancestors restituted to my fellow countrymen, and the rights of the Cambodian people to determine their destiny. The news that my mother is still alive gave me a lot of moral comfort. From now on, I had two mothers to liberate: my mother (of blood) and my mother (land). In addition, I felt a sense of duty when I read the letter of Tepthida, as she said, "...even during the time of his forced evacuation to the countryside, father had continued to pray to Buddha, invoking the Lord's power to protect you and to spare you from any suffering so that you could help liberate us from the yoke of dictatorship."

Bitterly Disappointed, on the First Day on Thai Soil

We arrived in Bangkok early on the morning of May 19, 1982. Unlike other passengers, a Thai official met us at the foot of the aircraft, and I recognised a Cambodian colleague, Neang Chin Han, the KPNLF secretary-general. After we greeted each other, Neang Chin Han, in his perfect French, introduced us to the Thai official, who wore no military insignia. In fact, he was an army colonel, specially assigned to look after our group. The colonel was smiling and friendly. We called him "Monsieur Mol," his nom de guerre. Mr Mol asked for our passports, then proceeded to the immigration office and helped us collect our luggage. Then he led us to the parking lot, where he had stationed his old-brand car. Although he was a colonel, a high military rank, Mr Mol drove his car himself. He had no driver. He drove us for a long ride from the airport to another part of the city called Bangkok Noi, Bangkok. After taking long, busy streets and wide boulevards, he turned into a small soi (pathway or alley). He drove a hundred meters further and stopped in front of a well-fenced villa that looked like an

ordinary residence in the area. It was at 227/11 Charan Sanitwong Road, Soi Ratsatha 22. The gate opened, and the car slipped in quietly. Two young men came to help unload the car and took our luggage. We finally arrived at our destination. The villa was the residence of Son Sann and his staff at the KPNLF's Bangkok office. It was a villa rented from another Thai colonel, then Colonel Suchinda Kraprayung, a deputy to Gen Chavalit.

We arrived when breakfast took place. I found Gen Sak Sutsakhan at the table, the last head of the Khmer Republic, who had come from the USA a few months ago to join the KPNLF. He was still taking his coffee and smoking his cigarette, while Son Sann was preparing, on the first floor, for a trip to Tokyo. Mrs Suon Kaset was very happy to see us, especially to see Penn Thal, whom she had known for a long time. She called him by a single term of endearment: "Big brother." Mrs Suon Kaset was about to leave for Tokyo too. Son Sann greeted us with some pleasure, but he had little time to chat, as it was time to head to the airport. He instructed Penn Thal to rest in his room, where a bed was available. As for me, it was up to the secretary general. Neang Chin Han, who seemed to be very much unconcerned, carelessly

said, "Upstairs, there might be a place available." Boun Say and Hing Kunthon, with whom we had had good relations in Paris, showed no excitement at our arrival. They timidly said only a few words. Friendlier Gen Sak told me to stay with him. When the delegation left for the airport with Colonel Mol, we found our rooms. We went up to the first floor. Penn Thal entered Son Sann's room while Gen Sak and I stayed in the waiting room, which was actually used as our bedroom. There, I found no furniture except a folding bed and a folding cabinet belonging to Gen Sak. Son Sann's room was at the back. Opposite it, another room was occupied by Gaffar, who worked and slept there. The ground floor was arranged as a living room where Son Sann used to receive his guests, a meeting room, an office for the secretary- general and his staff, a kitchen, and a bathroom.

Now I might have a space to lie down, but no sleeping materials such as a pillow, mat, blanket, towel, etc. So, my immediate need was to be equipped with those articles of prime necessity. I had to go shopping with the assistance of one of the two young men named Sovann, who had welcomed us at the gate and who could speak good Thai. Sovann was a one-leg amputee.

As a KPNLF soldier, he lost his leg by stepping on a land mine during a patrol in the vicinity of Sok Sann village. With a perfect prosthesis, he looked like an ordinary young man, except when he walked. As a reward for his service rendered to the resistance movement, Sovann was assigned to do small work in the KPNLF Bangkok office.

I paid for my shopping myself, since it was for my personal use. It was so hot, even in the morning, in Bangkok, as I had missed this kind of weather. I sweated so much so often that I proposed taking refuge in air-conditioned rooms in shops, hotels, or malls that we eventually found. But on the streets, few small shops had air-con. Even though I enjoyed looking at people who looked like us Cambodians, I did not yet find Thai women pretty, as I was still getting accustomed to Western beauty. Salespersons were friendly and polite. Sovann advised us not to let them know our nationality or speak Cambodian, as we Cambodians were not generally well regarded by the Thais.

Furthermore, Cambodian refugees were considered as second-class people. However, I could not communicate with him in any language other than Khmer. When asked in Thai what

language we were speaking, Sovann replied, "Malay," "Myanmar," "Philippine," or "Indonesian," but not "Khmer." I also enjoyed looking at the colourful architecture of pagodas and public buildings, which contrasted with what I had seen in Europe. Since my last stopover in 1973, Thailand had developed remarkably. It made me think of Cambodia. How much had we lost during the last decade of wars and dictatorship rule?

In the absence of Son Sann, I did not feel we were warmly welcomed in those dog days of May in a tropical country. Since we left Paris less than 24 hours ago, our enthusiasm had been rising to the point where we were willing to sacrifice our lives for our people and our nation. But with the coldness we had received since our arrival, I began to realise that some people might doubt our goodwill. Those who had joined the front before us might incorrectly interpret our good intentions. They might see it as a well-designed strategic plan to jeopardise their positions, or at least diminish their influence within the KPNLF. Penn Thal and I were not an isolated case. Gen Sak, a former head of state of the Khmer Republic, faced the same confidence problem. For the moment, those colleagues might regard us as Son Sann's men.

They may believe we are coming in force to oppose their group, COMEX, led by Dien Del, Hing Kunthon, and Neang Chin Han. Fortunately, Penn Thal had enjoyed a good relationship with the three men. Thanks to Thal, they finally accepted me as his "little brother."

In fact, the Thai army allowed KPNLF political leaders to live in and to lead the Cambodian national resistance from Bangkok. Many of them shared their time shuttling between the Thai capital and the border area with Cambodia, or on Cambodian soil. When in Paris, our friends thought of colleagues working in the liberated zone, but they did not realise the liberated zone also included Son Sann's residence in Bangkok. The Thai army rule was that we must live in a safe house under the protection of one or two Thai soldiers in plain clothes who could be our driver and guard. We could not move outside the safe house without one of them accompanying us, usually our driver, whom we called "Hua Na" (Hua: in Thai means head, Na: face), or our guide or leader. Because we were under the protection of the Thai army, we called any Thai soldier "Huana" or "leader." We called our driver "Huana"

the same way we called his bosses, Colonel Mol, and other officers, including Gen Chavalit.

In those days, the Thai government had a firm policy to fight against illegal immigration from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Any individual from those countries who had no proper authorisation or identification documentation, found by Thai police outside refugee camps or in Bangkok, would be automatically sent to jail. Many Cambodian refugees who dared to live as illegal immigrants in Bangkok were taking a permanent risk of being caught and detained by the Thai police at any moment. Most Cambodian nationals looked physically like their Thai neighbours. A Cambodian man or woman could move freely around Thailand unnoticed, except that he or she did not speak Thai, or spoke with an obvious foreigner's accent. In this case, the Cambodian became a suspected illegal immigrant. Among the Thai population, anyone was prepared to report the suspicious presence of any Cambodian to the police, who immediately proceeded to a strict identification control. Now I understood why Sovann had advised not to reveal our true nationality. When we travelled unaccompanied by our Huana, our status was no different from

that of any illegal immigrant in Thailand, as none of us had any proper documentation. In addition, upon our arrival, Colonel Mol took our French travel documents for immigration clearance. He has not returned them to us yet. We got our documents back only a few months later, after the formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK).

Since my first day in Bangkok, I had entered the war zone. If I could not move with a certain degree of freedom, how could I carry out my mission successfully? Under Thai army control, how could we turn our movement into a stronger one? How could we overcome the confidence problem with our colleagues and within our organisation? Not to mention the big picture of the war against the Vietnamese aggressors and the menace of the Khmer Rouge returning to power, I was really swimming in a sea of question marks. Under the effects of jet lag and a hot climate, I could not sleep at all for the first night of my new life. In addition, the noises of "Tuk-tuks," a popular three-wheeled Thai taxi, kept me always alert. Curiously, any tuk-tuk that passed through the pathway in front of the residence had to accelerate, increasing the intensity of its engine noise considerably. For me, all problems were only

challenges. However, I was determined to fulfil my duties as an ordinary son of Cambodia.

Chapter Seven

Mr. Secretary-General

(The 1980s-1990s)

The secretary-general of the KPNLF is an important personage within the organisation, even though he is not a voting member of the executive committee or COMEX. He is the main coordinator of all front activities and handles financial, political, diplomatic, and administrative matters. The secretary-general serves as the KPNLF representative to Thai authorities, especially Thai military officials in charge of Cambodian affairs. In the absence of the KPNLF president and in the case of an inactive vice-president, the secretary-general is practically the second-in-command of the resistance movement. In theory, he should be the closest companion of the president. The president and the secretary-general should work hand in hand to achieve their mission. However, since the 1980s, many factors have influenced the relationship between Son Sann and Neang Chin

Han to the point that trust and confidence have eroded, creating internal rifts and tremendously weakening the KPNLF, the main national non-communist resistance movement. In the end, Secretary-General Neang Chin Han was forced to resign in 1988.

Pipe-Smoking Men and All Ears and Eyes of Son Sann

Neang Chin Han was suitable for the position. He was the best administrative manager, excelling at paperwork. From the beginning, he attempted to establish an office-work system within the KPNLF like that of a mini-state, with its rules and regulations taken in the form of decisions, decrees, and decree-laws. He issued decisions that later became KPNLF laws, likely to prevent abuse of power and set specific rules for collective work. He managed to issue regulations covering almost every task of the KPNLF headquarters in Bangkok in such a way that, at least on paper, all staff, including Son Sann´s children and private assistants, were placed under his direct authority.

To further strengthen his position, immediately after Penn Thal and I arrived in Bangkok, Neang Chin Han secured Son Sann's approval to appoint two deputies: Boun Say as his first deputy in charge of finance, and Gaffar as the second deputy in charge of external relations. In addition, Neang Chin Han maintained excellent relations with Dien Del, the KPNLF military chief, and Hing Kunthon, the KPNLF executive committee member in charge of the economy and the committee´s representative to the KPNLF army, or KPNLAF. Dien Del and Hing Kunthon lived mostly in a KPNLF military camp at Ampil base, situated on a portion of Cambodian territory bordering Thailand. Both men formed a strong leadership couple who understood each other well, with one handling civilian affairs and the other military operations. Neang Chin Han and Hing Kunthon formed a pipe-smoking group, as they were fond of pipe smoking, using westernised tobacco. Hing Kunthon, in memory of the hardship he had endured under Pol Pot, took only two meals per day, breakfast and dinner, having no lunch. He hated eating rice porridge, as, for him, it was a symbol of the Khmer Rouge regime. Neang Chin Han was the right man in the right place. But his

success depended considerably on his relationship with the Thai authorities and on the trust and confidence he received from Son Sann. In the past, he had benefited from much esteem and regard from the president because of his very personal or intimate friendship with Mrs Suon Kaset, the president´s personal assistant. Son Sann listened very much to Kaset, whom he considered his rare and trusted advisor. Kaset practically had Son Sann´s ear. Neang Chin Han, Dien Del, Hing Kunthon, Gaffar and Boun Say formed a close group that held effective power within the KPNLF (if any power existed), while Son Sann enjoyed his international prestige and popular support.

"The Salute of National Anthem"

In Bangkok, KPNLF officials took breakfast early in the morning at a rectangular table, where they briefed each other on ongoing political or military activities, or on the general situation, whether related or unrelated to Cambodia. They shared information from their individual sources, mostly the print press,

radio listening, or outside contacts. Breakfast was also a time to exchange jokes. But for some senior officials, it was a perfect moment to praise or blame the actions or behaviour of any colleague absent from the gathering. After breakfast, they began the day by reading daily newspapers, especially the Bangkok Post and the Nation. Neang Chin Han was regularly busy with the press cutting.

At precisely 8h00 a.m., practically one by one, they moved into a room where a daily ritual took place that they jokingly called "the Salute of the National Anthem". In fact, it was the exact time when Son Sann reached the main dining room, sat at the table, took his breakfast and read his newspapers. One by one, the staff wished him "good morning" and briefed him on work progress or any information worth his comments or recommendations. If he did not receive visitors, he remained immobile in his seat and spent hours and hours reading, talking individually with his assistants and aides, or presiding over staff meetings before retreating into his private room.

Son Sann appeared again, in the same room, at lunchtime, where all important officials, including myself, were gathering. Son

Sann would not begin his lunch if any of us were missing without explanation. He did the same at dinner, which took place at exactly 7h00 p.m. Dinner or lunch was another occasion for Son Sann and his staff to brief, update, or exchange views on several issues ranging from international politics to the situation inside refugee camps. After lunch or dinner, some officials, mostly Son Sann's closest entourage, remained seated at the table with him, chatting or reviewing work performance or the behaviour of other staff. Many officials preferred to take a siesta after lunch or retreat to their private rooms after dinner, a practice Son Sann did not appreciate much. He did not like his aides going out at night to spend time in nightclubs or dancing bars. Meals usually were served without alcohol, as under Son Sann´s authority, life must be sombre. Some colleagues drank beer or whisky in hiding. Son Sann reminded us not to forget the hardship of our combatants and to make every effort not to create any gap between our way of living and that of people in the fields.

Cambodian Resistance Movements
Under Thai Army's Control

The Thai army had its own organisational structure to deal with the Cambodian resistance movements, KPNLF, FUNCINPEC and Khmer Rouge. At the level of the KPNLF's headquarters in Bangkok, a Task Force 315 was set up under the direct authority of Gen Chavalit, who was promoted to the position of assistant chief of staff of the Royal Thai Army in October 1982, with the rank of Lieutenant General. Gen Chavalit became Thai prime minister in 1996. Colonel Sumet Tienpheng, with his nom de guerre "Mr Mol," was the Thai liaison officer responsible for supervising KPNLF activities. He reported directly to Gen Chavalit. He authorised our trips between Bangkok and the border areas. He also delivered monthly cash to the KPNLF. Any problem involving the KPNLF must be settled through his good offices. He was the direct boss of the "Huana," posted in our safe house. The "Huana" could be our Thai driver or our guard. In the border areas, another task force, called "Task Force 838," or TF 838,

coordinated, supported, and controlled all military activities of Cambodian resistance fighters. The third Task Force, called "Task Force 80" or TF 80, dealt with the Cambodian refugee problems. The two Task Forces were based in Aranyaprathet. TF 80 had an open structure under the Thai supreme command and worked mainly with international and non-governmental relief organisations. TF 838 was set up as a secret military border command with several teams of "Huana" deployed in the KPNLF military and other Cambodian resistance bases in the border areas. According to the Thai military ruling, when we needed to travel to the border, we had to submit a request to Mr Mol through the resident "Huana," our driver. If he agreed, Mr Mol would send a radio message to the border task forces. Then the Huana driver drove us to Aranyaprathet, where he obtained a pass from TF 80 to visit the refugee camps or from TF 838 to visit the KPNLF's military bases. But when we needed to bring foreign visitors to the refugee camps, we had to request authorisation from the Thai supreme command in Bangkok before we could travel to Aranyaprathet to obtain a pass from TF 80 for the visitors.

The CGDK Was Born Under Thai Military Pressure

When I arrived in Bangkok, the coalition government was still being formed. Thai authorities put intense pressure on Son Sann to finalise the agreement quickly. Throughout May, Son Sann received many visits from Thai military officials, including Gen Chavalit. He was increasingly frustrated to see that his stance was getting little support from those Thai generals who were fully behind the Khmer Rouge intransigence. The Thai generals regarded Son Sann´s position as hard-line, a stumbling block to negotiations. For his part, Son Sann tried his best to demonstrate his willingness to participate in the coalition.

On May 7, 1982, he had accepted, in principle, in toto, a Thai draft proposal presented by the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which included the Khmer Rouge´s four principles he had not been able to accept in the past: the principles of tripartism, equality, and non-preponderance, and consensus on important matters. In his memorandum dated May 7, 1982, and transmitted to Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila, the Thai minister of foreign

affairs, he asked the minister not to amend or revise the draft. Along with his acceptance, he stated that he had made the maximum concession.

The Thai minister was satisfied with Son Sann´s acceptance. But the draft ended up somewhere peacefully, with no follow-up, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Royal Thai Army took different approaches regarding the formation of a Cambodian coalition. If the ministry was willing to take into consideration Son Sann's demand, along with other ASEAN members, the military clearly took the side of the Khmer Rouge, following the Chinese policy line.

On May 25, 1982, Gen Chavalit paid a surprise visit to KPNLF´s headquarters at 00h20, carrying a new draft proposal entitled "Declaration of the Formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea.˝ The Thai general summoned the KPNLF president to accept it or to face punitive measures. Son Sann found the new draft vastly different from the first Thai proposal. In a note he submitted to Gen Chavalit in person in the morning of Friday, May 28, 1982, Son Sann wrote, "... Without desiring to reflect on the origin of the new draft, I wish to underline

that an acceptance of it would push even further away from the solemn engagements we have made with the Khmer people, from the spirit in which our ASEAN friends have conceived of CGDK, and especially from the first Thai draft proposal." "Furthermore, the new draft proposal is very lop-sided in favour of one party (the Khmer Rouge) at the expense of the other two (KPNLF and FUNCINPEC), and the essential principles which are said to constitute the "political basis" for CGDK are not even respected in the draft proposal itself." "Remaining true to my repeated determination to participate in the formation of CGDK quickly, I wish to say that there is a solution to the present monumental difficulties. I shall present this solution in due course, and that is soon[98]."

The solution Son Sann proposed was a simplified formula in which Prince Sihanouk would assume the function of head of state of Democratic Kampuchea; Son Sann the function of prime

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[98] Observation of Mr. Son Sann on the Draft Proposal entitled "Declaration of the Formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea" as provided by Major General Chaovalit, May 27, 1982.

minister of CGDK; and Khieu Samphan that of deputy prime minister. To discharge its functions and duties, CGDK should establish two coordination committees: one for military operations and the other for diplomacy. Each committee should comprise a maximum of two representatives from each of the three parties. He then agreed to adopt the above-mentioned principles of tripartism, equality, non-preponderance, and consensus on important matters. But the Khmer Rouge still rejected his proposal. Moreover, they chose to engage in armed hostilities against KPNLF forces to pressure Son Sann to accept their formula. In a memorandum dated June 1, 1982[99], presented to Gen Chavalit, the KPNLF president reported two incidents that occurred on May 21 and May 29, 1982, in Sok Sann village and the KPNLF's liberated zone 401. First, a group of 25 Khmer Rouge soldiers were found digging a hole to plant land mines in the KPNLF's area. The exchanges of fire took place when a KPNLF unit leader told the hole-digging Khmer Rouge to stop. Second, an armed

[99] Memorandum presented by Mr. Son Sann to Major General Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth, the Royal Thai Armed Forces, June 1, 1982.

clash between 30-man Khmer Rouge intruders and KPNLF forces in the KPNLF′s controlled zone. The memorandum read, "These acts of hostilities are not the first. "Khmer Rouge armed intrusions into our very zone, usually followed by fighting, have occurred repeatedly in the past.″ In fact, in February and June 1982, the Khmer Rouge forces had attacked the KPNLF′s liberated zone 101 at Nam Yin, in Preah Vihear province. The memorandum continued, "These attacks were brought to the attention of competent Thai authorities. And at the present, Khmer Rouge soldiers are mining (planting landmines in) the area in front of the KPNLF camp of Rithisen. While we solemnly protest against such acts, we must express our fear that their continuation may seriously jeopardise the already very delicate CGDK talks.″ The Thai did not react to this memorandum. They used their unresponsive behaviour as pressure on Son Sann to force the latter into an alliance with the Khmer Rouge.

While Son Sann displayed his disappointment, he finally took a resolution to consider and eventually to accept a draft proposal coming from the ASEAN governments. However, sticking to his demand to "have a stick before entering the tiger case,″ he linked

his acceptance with the delivery of assistance to KPNLF. In his memorandum dated June 2, 1982[100], and classified as secret, presented to Gen Chavalit, he said, "I wish to register our disappointment and our dissatisfaction over the fact that, in spite of our flexibility and positive attitude, as well as our numerous and continuous concessions, CGDK is still far from being formed. In the face of the Khmer Rouge intransigence, no one appears to be able to do anything to get them to soften their stance, and aid and assistance still continue to be denied to us to meet our real and immediate need and the immediacy of our situation in the field." "... "As our compromising, fair, just, and positive approach to the formation of CGDK has been continually rejected by the Khmer Rouge, and as we cannot possibly accept the Khmer Rouge's intransigent demands, I hereby propose: 1. We shall be well disposed towards considering a just and fair draft proposal if it comes from the governments of ASEAN, provided that it does not stray away from the core spirit of the Thai draft proposal of early

[100] Memorandum presented by Mr. Son Sann to Major General Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth, the Royal Thai Armed Forces, June 2, 1982.

May 2. 2. In order to seek a political solution to the Cambodian problem in conformity with the declaration of the ICK and all relevant United Nations General Assembly resolutions, my acceptance of an ASEAN-sponsored draft proposal shall be made parallel with the agreement by the governments of ASEAN to deliver aid and assistance to the KPNLF as promised, and the day when I shall append my signature on the said draft shall be marked as the day when the delivery of the first package of aid and assistance of the governments of ASEAN to the KPNLF shall be made.˝ In sum, Son San resolved to accept any proposal from ASEAN governments so far as ASEAN provided assistance to the KPNLF.

On June 2, 1982, Son Sann finally signed his acceptance of a declaration of the formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) presented to him again by Gen Chavalit. This acceptance was signed in a note addressed specially to the Thai general. The accepted formula proposed Prince Sihanouk as president and Khieu Samphan as vice-president of the CGDK, while Son Sann would be prime minister. The draft also included the setting up of five coordination

committees: foreign affairs, finance and economy, defence, culture and education, and health and social affairs. The next day, June 3, 1982, Son Sann still made his ultimate attempt to amend the document he had accepted in writing. He proposed to Gen Chavalit that the words "President" and "Vice-President" be deleted and replaced with "Head of State" and "Deputy Head of State". He also requested Gen Chavalit to limit the number of coordination committees to two instead of five, retaining only the coordination committees for foreign affairs and defence[101].

In addition, when he signed the acceptance, Son Sann still took the precaution of not recognising Prince Sihanouk or Khieu Samphan as the leaders of the party or institution they represented, respectively. On the draft note confirming his acceptance, a note prepared by Gen Chaovalit, indicating his readiness to meet his two other partners, Son Sann, by handwriting, just scratched out the words "the leaders of," meaning the leaders of "FUNCINPEC" and DK, and wrote instead,

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[101] Memorandum presented by Mr. Son Sann to Major General Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth, June 3, 1982.

in the reserved space, the words "H.R.H. Samdech Norodom Sihanouk" and "H.E. Khieu Samphan" without mentioning their titles[102]. Son Sann believed he had made his last attempts to avoid the tripartism. But in the end, he failed: on June 12, 1982, he accepted a new draft presented again by Gen Chaovalit, in which the Khmer Rouge achieved their target and secured what they wanted. Prince Sihanouk became president, and Khieu Samphan vice-president of Democratic Kampuchea, and Son Sann became prime minister of the Coalition Government. The new formula created four coordination committees, each chaired by three representatives from the three parties: finance and economy, defence, culture and education, and health and social affairs, with foreign affairs handled under a special arrangement. In fact, the Khmer Rouge retained control of foreign affairs, as vice-president of Democratic Kampuchea, Khieu Samphan was given responsibility for overseeing the coalition government's

[102] Son Sann to General Chaovalit, (A kind of Memo), June 2, 1982.

diplomacy[103]. With strong backing from China and some influential Thai generals, the Khmer Rouge achieved their goal of involving Prince Sihanouk in their business again. But Son Sann's acceptance of the coalition government marked the Khmer Rouge´s ability to survive politically. If Son Sann addressed his note of acceptance dated June 2, 1982, to Gen Chaovalit in person, the other note he signed on June 12 was addressed to "whom it may concern[104]," meaning that his acceptance could now be shown to all stakeholders of the Cambodian resistance government, especially the international partners, ASEAN, China, USA and others.

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[103] Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, H.E. Mr. Son Sann, H.E. Mr. Khieu Samphan, CGDK, Declaration of the Formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Khmer, Kuala Lumpur, 22nd of June 1982.

[104] Son Sann, To Whom It May Concern, (A kind of Memo) June 12, 1982.

The KPNLF President Asks Me to Set Up A Financial Control System

During the negotiations, when the KPNLF workload was incredibly heavy, Son Sann suggested that Gaffar share his work with me so I could help him run the president's office, but Gaffar declined my offer of assistance. Without asking me, he told Son Sann privately that "Mouly was very busy with his own work," a way to turn me away from the official business of the front. In fact, since my arrival in Bangkok, I had not had much to do except translate some French texts into Khmer. I was officially appointed "charge de mission" for economy and finance on June 11, 1982[105].

In my capacity as charge de mission, Son Sann gave me a special directive to put in place an adequate system of accounting and financial control procedures so that the distribution of subvention or financial support to different units within the KPNLF

[105] Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision no. 82/07/FNL, Territoire Khmer, 11 juin, 1982.

would be more transparent. At first, it was more a matter of thought and reflection than the implementation of any concrete measure. On June 12, 1982, I submitted a memo to Son Sann outlining my views on how a financial control service should be structured. I planned to create a financial controller position under the direct authority of the president of the executive committee and to implement an accounting system, with its chart, supporting tools, and accounting reporting procedures. In the system, I tried to integrate cost accounting into a public administration organisation, providing quick access to the origin and nature of expenditures, as well as income. Son Sann immediately endorsed my proposal. In handwriting, he wrote in the margin of my memo, "Please put in place the system before the arrival of international aid, in order not to be submerged with the workload." He finally signed in September 1982, a decision[106] creating the budget of the KPNLF and appointing three officials: namely Neang Chin Han, Boun Say, and myself, Ieng Mouly, to occupy the positions of authorising officer, treasurer, and controller, respectively. But the

[106] Decision is a document equivalent to an executive decree.

system remained unimplemented for a long time, as the KPNLF had to deal with more urgent, life-and-death issues that dominated the front´s activities.

In fact, my idea was not well received by my fellow KPNLF officials, as it might disrupt their routine. My proposal was probably idealistic but not totally realistic, as the KPNLF did not yet have legal status in Thailand. Boun Say told me to start by opening my personal bank account to see what difficulties I would encounter, since no one in the KPNLF had been able to open a bank account in Bangkok up to that day. Even the KPNLF was obliged to use a private account of a Thai-Chinese-born friend. But for me, it was not a big issue, as before leaving France, I had obtained a recommendation from my bank to their correspondent in Thailand to help me. Finally, I opened my bank account almost immediately. The account would be used later for the monetary operations of the KPNLF Red Cross upon its creation in 1984. Since then, my name and bank account number in Bangkok have appeared on the KPNLF Red Cross letterhead.

I said, "Joining the CGDK Is Not a Success"

On June 20, 1982, Son Sann, Gaffar, Mrs Suon Kaset, and Penn Thal left Bangkok for Kuala Lumpur to participate in the signing ceremony of the declaration on the formation of the coalition government with two other leaders, Prince Sihanouk and Khieu Samphan. For the first time, I wrote a letter to Tep Darong in Paris, telling him what had been happening during the last few weeks since my arrival in Bangkok. I described internal mistrust within the KPNLF leadership and shared my personal thoughts on the coalition government. I wrote, "…the life here under President Son Sann would not be too difficult, if we were not too ambitious." "I have just been assigned by the president to set up a financial control procedure that would not please some of our leaders." "All of the KPNLF members should be well aware of the well-founded reason behind the KPNLF's participation in the coalition government. In fact, it was believed to be the only way to enable the KPNLF to receive international aid and assistance that we are badly in need to face our internal and external difficulties." "In my

own opinion, we cannot say that the coalition is a striking political victory for us. But from now on, we can expect a political solution to the Cambodia conflict.˝ ˝The president was under intense pressure to accept this formula for the coalition. We´ll see if we can get out of this situation, which is, at the moment, not satisfying to us at all. You may remember what I´ve told you: if one day, we accept to join the coalition with the Khmer Rouge, it is because the president cannot count on … (I mean, ˝On our own capacity as well as on our leaders of the interior.˝) Anyway, we should be more vigilant. We must accept this turning point as a lesson learned and make further efforts to face all contingencies. The struggle is still difficult, and a long way to go for all of us[107].˝ I also told Tep Darong that a KPNLF delegation would be sent to different regions around the world to lobby for support for the newly formed coalition government.

[107] Ieng Mouly (Lettre à Tep Darong) le 21 juin 1982.

Thailand Was the First to Recognise the CGDK

The signing of the declaration of the formation of the government cleared the way for the Thai government to recognise Son Sann as prime minister of CGDK. With this recognition, the KPNLF could deal more openly with the Thai Foreign Affairs Ministry and with diplomatic missions accredited to Thailand. The KPNLF opened its own account, using the letter of recognition addressed by Gen Prem Tinsulanond, the Thai prime minister, to Son Sann as a reference[108]. As Gaffar was responsible for the opening, he managed to put his name, along with the names of Boun Say and Gen Sak Sutsakhan, the three persons to operate the account. At the same time, Son Sann appointed Gaffar as his chief of staff, or, in French, chef de cabinet, in addition to his responsibility for maintaining permanent contacts with friendly embassies, mainly with ASEAN and the USA.

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[108] Prem Tinsulanonda (General), Prime Minister of Thailand, Letter to His Excellency Mr. Son Sann, Prime Minister of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, July 29, B.E. 2525 (1982).

Except for Im Chhoodeth, some senior KPNLF officials, such as Gen Dien Del, Hing Kunthon, and Neang Chin Han, did not express enthusiasm for joining the coalition government and did not attach much importance to it, probably because of the partnership with the Khmer Rouge and Prince Sihanouk. In the end, they proposed a list of less important officials to participate in the government. In July 1982, when the government was officially proclaimed, Boun Say was appointed as a member of the coordination committee for economy and finance; Im Chhoodeth, as a member for defence; Bou Kheng, a medical doctor, as a member for health and social affairs; and Chhoy Vy, a former high school teacher, as a member for education. Dr Bou Kheng and Chhoy Vy had joined KPNLF a few years ago. They were living under Gen Dien Del and Hing Kunthon´s authority in Ampil, the KPNLF military headquarters. After its official and complete formation, the CGDK received full recognition from the UN and a large majority of nations worldwide. Members of the coordination committee were duly recognised with ministerial rank, giving them precedence in protocol over other officials. In the KPNLF, less

important officials became higher-ranking ones, in accordance with each official position in the government.

Penn Thal and I On a Mission to Africa

In October 1982, Penn Thal and I were assigned a mission to travel to Africa to lobby for African support for the newly formed coalition government. To prepare for our trip, we had to return first to Paris, where we would get our visas and air tickets. I was told Malaysia was helping make this trip possible. We would visit three countries: Niger, Ghana, and Mali. From Paris, we flew to Niger on Air Africa, which some French friends jokingly called "Air Maybe" because of its frequent schedule changes. We spent one day in Niger. We arrived late in the afternoon in Niamey, the capital of a francophone African country.

It was my first trip to the continent. I didn't realise we were actually representing a nation. On arrival, we blended into the anonymous crowd of passengers. Outside the airport, we found a taxi and went straight to the hotel. It was an international-class

hotel run by French management. From the hotel, I phoned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to seek a meeting with a high-ranking official. I got an appointment to meet the director general the next morning. When the appointment was set, I just realised that we did not have an official credential letter introducing us to our Niger host. In fact, we were not well documented for our diplomatic trip. It was the first official business I ever had in my life. Using a portable typewriter, I managed to produce, on the spot, a letter of credence that I presented to the ministry's protocol officer. Both Penn Thal and I were introduced as members of the CGDK prime minister's cabinet. The director general, our host, was very friendly and talkative. On his desk, I noticed a pile of the French weekly newspaper "Le Monde Diplomatique." He spoke fluently in French.

Penn Thal made an exposé on the general situation of Cambodia. He focused on the Cambodian people's struggle for national liberation from the Vietnamese occupation. Penn Thal let me explain how the CGDK worked and who made it up. First, I described our group as a nationalist movement led by Son Sann, the coalition government's current prime minister. I said, "We have

our own army, our own political organisation, and our own population" "Before the Vietnamese invasion, the Khmer Rouge were our main enemy, as they were responsible for mass murder in Cambodia. But under the Vietnamese yoke, our nation will one day be wiped out from the world if we are not united to form a strong opposition force fighting them. That is why we join the coalition government with Prince Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge in a loose formula in which each faction retains its autonomy, its army, and its political structure. The CGDK comprises ministries that are called coordination committees." And I continued, "Each coordination committee is presided over by a minister from each faction in a way that the CGDK has three ministers in each committee: one for KPNLF, one for Prince Sihanouk, and the other for the Khmer Rouge. So, except for foreign affairs, which were under the Khmer Rouge, the coalition has three ministers for defence, three ministers for education, three ministers for finance and three ministers for social affairs. But each minister exerts his authority within his own faction only; for example, the minister of education of KPNLF has nothing to do with the education department of the Khmer Rouge, or with that of Prince Sihanouk,

and vice versa.″ At the end, I added, "The purpose of the CGDK is not to look for a military solution. Our combined forces will oblige the Vietnamese to come to the negotiating table, as we are fighting for the implementation of the UN resolutions calling for the complete withdrawal of foreign forces and for the organisation of general elections in Cambodia.″ The director general was very receptive, and our approach was encouraging. Our host even proposed that we should see his minister, and his gesture was very simple. He just went to the next door-room to look for the minister, who naturally was not available. We left the ministry of foreign affairs, hoping our Niger friends understood our problem and received our message of peace well, as we were fighting for a real democratic regime to be elected by the people of Cambodia, not for the return to power of the Khmer Rouge.

In the afternoon, we flew to Ghana, an English-speaking nation. We transited briefly in Burkina Faso, which was then called Haute Volta. It did not take us too long to reach Accra, the capital of Ghana. As the aeroplane got closer to the airport, I could see green scenery, suggesting a more prosperous country than poor Niger. On landing, I saw a black Mercedes limousine,

the only vehicle parked in the airport compound, which made me think the car must be waiting for an important person or a VIP. As we got off the aircraft and followed the other passengers through the corridor to the immigration desk, two Ghanaian officials stopped us and asked, "Are you the two Ambassadors from Cambodia?" I wasn't sure which one of us was an ambassador, but I replied quickly, "Yes, we are." Then one official took our passports and air tickets for immigration and luggage clearance, while the other escorted us to the VIP lounge. The protocol department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent both officials to take care of us upon our arrival.

Changing Status: From Refugee to Diplomat

In the VIP lounge, we were briefed on our next schedule, including a late-afternoon meeting with the director general of the ministry of foreign affairs. We would spend the night in a big, high-class hotel in town at our expense. In the end, I was assured that the ambassadors from Cambodia were none other than the two of

us. And the black Mercedes limousine was actually waiting for us too.

Sitting in the backseat of the limousine driven by a chauffeur, on the way from the airport to the hotel, I enjoyed my first diplomatic privilege enormously and tried to adjust my status from a refugee and political worker in exile to that of a special envoy representing my nation. When we met with the director general, we delivered the same message as we did in Niger. At the meeting, our host informed us that another delegation from Cambodia had visited Ghana just a week earlier. It was the Phnom Penh regime. They were lobbying for African support too. The government of Ghana was confused by the Cambodian visits from different sides. Anyway, in the end, we were assured of Ghanaian support.

At night, we did not dare to go outside the hotel as we were told that the country had just experienced a military coup. Even our hotel was guarded by an armed soldier. Ghanaian officials told us to wake up early in the morning, at 4.a.m., to get ready to depart for the airport. So, we did. Penn Thal was a heavy drinker of whisky. Even at that early hour, he began the day with his iced

whisky soda instead of taking a regular breakfast. While waiting for the car to take us to the airport, he continued his drinking. The car would only come at around 8. a.m. When we arrived at the airport, we did not board the plane immediately. We did spend a few more hours in the VIP lounge, where Penn Thal enjoyed his drinking again. He had suffered greatly from the loss of his wife and daughter during the Khmer Rouge rule and chose alcohol as a remedy to turn away his sorrow. When it was time to board the plane, it was so hot that I could hardly bear it. We were offered the first seats, as special guests of the Ghanaian government. We would fly from Ghana to Ivory Coast, where we had to catch a connecting flight three days later to Mali, our final destination before we returned to Europe. In a stopover in Haute Volta, Penn Thal got off the aircraft while I did not leave my seat. Half an hour later, he came back holding in his hand a bottle of whisky that he would take pleasure in during the flight again.

Penn Thall Fell Down, But He Said, "It's OK"

We landed safely at Abidjan Airport. We had no entry visa, as we had no official business in Ivory Coast, except to wait for our connecting flight to Mali. Although we thought that a sightseeing tour in downtown Abidjan would give us a much better understanding of the country, we lined up with the other passengers for immigration clearance. I walked past Penn Thal, waiting to move step by step closer to the immigration desk. Suddenly, I heard behind me a heavy fall accompanied by a howl of pain. When I turned back, Penn Thal was lying down, immobile on the ground. In fact, he had been attacked by a kind of heat-shock crisis that led to a blackout. He was profoundly unconscious. I was so worried about his health that I attempted to do some resuscitation exercises. I asked for help and a taxi to take him to the nearby hospital. We passed through the immigration desk without clearance and found a taxi outside the airport. On the road to the hospital that the taxi driver had recommended, Penn Thal woke up. He looked pretty normal.

Surprised to find him in the backseat of a taxi, he asked me, "Where are we going?" I said, "To the hospital." He asked again, "Who is sick?" I tried to explain that he had fallen unconscious a few minutes ago while we were lining up in front of the immigration desk at the airport. Penn Thal did not remember what had happened.

In a French private clinic, when asked about Penn Thal's sickness, I could not explain, except to say he had been unconscious after abruptly falling down. Penn Thal himself was in such good shape that no one could detect any sign of illness. He had no recollection of any instant that had caused him to collapse. Instead of revealing any weakness, he just made irresistible jokes to the Frenchwoman nurse who diagnosed him. Finally, he was fine, and we didn't need to see a doctor. However, I had to pay FFR 200 to the nurse for her service and kindness.

Back at the airport to collect our luggage, the Ivorian immigration officers were upset and made serious inquiries about how we could leave the airport without proper clearance or an entrance visa. They also did not recall, or probably intentionally ignored, that they had helped us a few hours ago for an

emergency passage of Penn Thal to downtown Abidjan. Consequently, the airport-police commissioner, who did not rush to rule on our case, subjected us to a long interrogation. I explained to the police officer that we were Cambodian nationals on an international mission to seek support for Cambodia's newly formed coalition government. In the late afternoon, they escorted us to a hotel inside the airport transit zone, where we spent the next two nights waiting for our connecting flights to Mali. Since we were not allowed to leave the transit area, we spent the rest of the day visiting duty-free shops.

A Young Togolese

Just before dinner time, we met a young Togolese student sleeping on a bench in the waiting hall. He had been in the airport for two days, expecting to take the same flight as us to Mali. We quickly became friends, and we invited him to dine with us at the hotel. We did not tell him who we really were, although he might have believed we were Asian businessmen. I ordered him steak

and French fries. I was astonished to see how much he enjoyed eating. The student had not eaten for the last two days, as he could not afford to pay for meals in the area. I did not drink beer or alcohol, fearing that it could tempt Penn Thal, who really needed to be recovering from the alcohol attack several hours before. But to my surprise and great disappointment, Penn Thal did not control himself and ordered a bottle of beer. I was so furious that I wanted to send him back to Paris and continue the trip alone. But with the locals present, my anger did not surface.

Two days later, we flew to Mali as planned. When we arrived at Bamako airport, two protocol officials from the ministry of foreign affairs greeted us. The officials escorted us to the VIP room in the arrival hall instead of the immigration desk, as ordinary passengers would. While we were heading to the VIP room, the Togolese student who followed us, probably presuming that we were going in the wrong direction, shouted loudly at us from fifty meters behind, "Eh, eh, you aren't going in the right direction! Not the right direction! Come this way. Come this way." But we pretended not to hear him and moved smoothly to the VIP room. After our luggage was collected, the Malian officials told us

a Togolese had been waiting for us at the carousel, the luggage-collection site. One protocol officer said that when he identified our luggage and tried to collect it, the young student grasped the officer′s hand and asked, "Why are you taking my friend′s luggage?" "Do you want to steal it?" The officer finally told him he was from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in charge of taking care of us Cambodian diplomats on mission in Mali. In fact, the young Togolese was pure in his friendship. He was deeply loyal and attentively attempted to defend our interests on our behalf.

The Malian protocol officer always appeared relaxed. He was friendly and ready to render service. But his schedule was very often flexible. We had to allow a 30-minute margin for lateness each time we made an appointment. In the end, he arranged for us to meet the secretary-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The meeting took place in a government compound, well-guarded by security men. At the official meeting, Penn Thal let me speak alone. My presentation was fully in French. I raised with our host the meaning of our struggle for national liberation and explained how the Cambodian nationalist leaders had reached the agreement to form a loose coalition

government with the Khmer Rouge. ‟It was the only way to unite all Cambodian forces to fight the Vietnamese occupation of our country,″ I said. Our host seemed to be well aware of our cause and ready to help. We were encouraged by the Malian government′s promise of support.

Just before we left Mali for Paris, late one afternoon, I got a phone call in my room. It was a call from the Togolese student who had managed to get on the right track and reach our hotel. He had just made a call from the lobby hall. He told me he had walked over 20 km on foot. He wanted to be sure we were in the right hands. In fact, he also wanted to spend his last hours with us. We entertained him once again with a dinner ‟à la française″ and African dances performed by the best beauties of Mali, according to the protocol officer. After enjoying the entertainment, the student left for an unknown location.

The next morning, the protocol officer came late to pick us up for the airport, saying he was busy with other business. On the way to the airport, while we were travelling in the official car, he noticed a young Malian woman walking along the street. He told the driver to stop the car and asked us to let him take her to the

airport. He said the girl was his cousin and wanted to go to the airport too, since she had never been there. We agreed. In the end, we were three in the backseat of the official car, including a corpulent Malian lady. We ended our trip to Africa with a feeling of satisfaction in what I called an accomplished mission, with a colourful recollection. It was that picture of natural simplicity in friendship, a relaxed mood, fun, and work that I recorded in my memory from Africa.

Ta Luot Was Murdered in Ampil Base

At the end of October 1982, I got back safely to Bangkok. During our absence, a grave incident had occurred inside Cambodia that signalled the precursor to our movement's weakness. According to a press release of the KPNLF dated October 15, 1982, a murder was committed in the afternoon of

October 11, 1982,[109] inside the KPNLF Ampil military base, killing on the spot Mr Siem Sam Onn alias Ta Luot, one of the founding members of the KPNLAF, his wife and one of his aides. Ta Lout was also the chief of Rithisen camp, the largest Cambodian refugee camp at the Thai border. The KPNLF military base was under the command of Gen Dien Del, who was naturally accused of sponsoring the killing. The incident provoked a strong reaction from Ta Lout´s supporters, especially from Ta Maing´s troops. Kho Chhea, Ta Maing´s deputy, angrily led his men to attack Dien Del´s headquarters, causing heavy casualties in terms of deaths, injuries and material damage. Before my trip to Africa, I had been in Ampil for a few months to teach accounting to some military officers. I had been lodged in a small guesthouse, which was now destroyed by the fighting. Furthermore, a private aide named "Yak," or "Giant" because of his tall stature, who used to cook meals for me and wash my clothes, was killed on the spot by mortar shelling.

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[109] Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Communiqué de Presse, le 15 octobre 1982.

The fighting pitted two-armed groups against each other: one trained and led by a commander with extensive field experience, the other led by a high-ranking officer from a former regular army. The killing of Ta Lout raised some suspicions among many self-proclaimed freedom fighters who had taken up arms, long before KPNLF was created, against the Khmer Rouge and then later against the Vietnamese invasion- suspicions that Gen Dien Del might be implementing a plan to eliminate them one by one, their historic chiefs, so that the general could impose his own men within the KPNLAF, guaranteeing his genuine control over the front. The incident interrupted Son Sann´s mission in New York, where he represented the CGDK at the United Nations General Assembly. The KPNLF leader flew right away from New York to Bangkok and then visited the village where the incident took place. On October 15, 1982, he presided over a religious ceremony in memory of the victims. Son Sann met with several KPNLF officials, including Gen Sak Sutsakhan, Hing Kunthon, Ta Maing, and Lay Khek, to hear their accounts. Ta Maing, or Loeung Sinak, his official name, commanded Zone 201, with Kho Chhea as his Deputy Commander and Lay Khek as his Chief of Staff. Ta Maing

and Ta Lout were two leaders of an anti-Khmer Rouge movement called Nen Raung, one of the KPNLF's backbones from its early days.

Creating A Committee to Replace Dien Del

To defuse the tension as a result of the killing, Son Sann decided to dismiss Dien Del from the position of chief of general staff. In replacement, Son Sann created a provisional committee composed of Gen Sak Sutsakhan, as chairman, and Gen Thach Reng, Chea Chhut, and Hing Kunthon as members.[110] Gen Thach Reng had served as commander of the Cambodian special forces during the Khmer Republic of Lon Nol. He joined the KPNLF in September 1982. I heard of his name in Paris from Say Boran, who told me that Thach Reng was a good soldier. He was among

[110] Appeal (in Khmer) by the President of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Commander-in-Chief of the Khmer People's National Armed Forces, Ampil, October 18, 1982.

a few military officers who had pursued law studies until he earned a bachelor´s degree in law. Thach Reng was a strong proponent of guerrilla warfare. The other member, Chea Chhut, was the chief of the second-largest refugee camp named Nong Chan. Chea Chhut, a non-career military commander, was a close associate of Ta Lout and Ta Maing. The committee's composition gave Son Sann the balance of power he expected, hoping to make the KPNLAF more active and aggressive on the battlefield and more consistent with his own policies and vision for national liberation. Gen Dien Del, however, continued to hold his grip on the KPNLAF indirectly through Hing Kunthon's presence on the committee. The four-man committee acted like the KPNLAF's chief of general staff.

The First Split Within KPNLF

In his letter dated October 17, 1982, Dien Del told Son Sann that, in this unpleasant atmosphere, he could not meet the KPNLF president because he was not in good moral or physical shape[111]. But Dien Del pledged full cooperation with the newly formed committee. In his second letter, dated October 19, 1982, Dien Del wrote that he had made supreme sacrifices and suffered considerably to help create the KPNLAF.[112] He agreed to resign in the interest of the KPNLF, as he strongly believed that Son Sann was acting under pressure from foreign friends whose support was fundamental to the nationalist movement. Dien Del alleged that his removal was intended to secure military support from international donors. The letter read, "Our foreign friends have promised to help us, but they said I am the obstacle (right or wrong, we don't know yet). Now, I am making sacrifices with

[111] Dien Del, Letter (in Khmer) to the President, Banteay Ampil, October 17, 1982.

[112] Dien Del, Letter (in Khmer0 to the President, Banteay Ampil, October 19, 1982.

bitterness by walking out in a way to give you full cooperation.″ Foreign pressures or not, it wasn't clear at the time. But the October 11, 1982 incident gave Son Sann enough reason to remove Dien Del from his responsibilities, as the KPNLF president saw the general as a leading author of factionalism within his resistance movement.

In fact, since 1979, Dien Del had consolidated his position as a military chief by setting up some new units loyal to him. Using his authority over logistical support, Dien Del might favour or disfavour any KPNLF military commander according to the degree of loyalty to him. In addition, Dien Del's close connection with Hing Kunthon, Neang Chin Han, and Gaffar could form an opposition group that might endanger Son Sann's leadership. However, the gravity of the incident compelled Dien Del′s three associates to tactically support Son Sann in removing the general from office. On the other hand, many Son Sann supporters blamed Dien Del for conducting a lifestyle considerably incompatible with the living conditions of refugees or ordinary combatants. In fact, the general enjoyed heavy drinking while Son Sann constantly advised on Buddhist teachings and a sober lifestyle.

Dien Del's removal helped rebalance forces among many self-proclaimed freedom fighters within the KPNLF, as Dien Del was losing their trust and confidence. Son Sann counted on support from the new military leadership to strengthen his movement's unity and shift the military concept from a purely conventional approach to a guerrilla warfare strategy. At the time, Son Sann listened to Gen Thach Reng repeat military theories that guerrilla warfare was the best solution to counter Vietnamese military domination. Although Gen Dien Del agreed to resign, he still remained at the KPNLF military base. His physical presence at the base made the new committee's job uneasy.

Thai Police Searched Our Headquarters for Suspected Traffickers

Another incident happened while I was away from Bangkok. In mid-October 1982, Thai police searched the KPNLF headquarters, not knowing that we had been allowed by the Royal Thai Army to run our resistance movement from the Thai capital.

The incident began when a Thai policeman stopped a three-wheel taxi "Tuktuk" full of radio communication equipment, mostly talkies-walkies, which Khim Sovann, the one-legged aide, had bought from downtown shops and was carrying on his way to the KPNLF safe house. The police officer found nothing wrong, but he had serious doubts about the equipment's ultimate destination. He might have been thinking of it being used by a group of drug dealers. He quickly reported his findings to his chief, who, in turn, dispatched a police squad to locate and surround the KPNLF safe house at night. Before their assault started, the police had prepared well for their operation to the point where no one could notice any police presence in the vicinity of the house.

At daybreak, armed police climbed over the compound wall. They entered several rooms of the safe house and immediately took control of all access. Within hours, scores of Thai police generals arrived along with TV crews, expecting to catch a big fish among drug dealers. Instead, police found a Cambodian resistance movement in the heart of Bangkok. But the search did not take long, as KPNLF officials immediately informed Col Mol and Col Suchinda, the house owner, who intervened. Col

Suchinda later became Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon. In 1991, he led a military coup against then Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan and became prime minister in 1992. The incident was closed within the day, but it did not stop Thai media from revealing the location of the KPNLF headquarters in Thailand.

We Moved to Mayalap

In the end, the Royal Thai Army decided to rent us a new safe house in Bangkhen, on Bangkok's eastern outskirts. The house belonged to Gen Mayalap, a former Thai government minister and Army Chief of Staff. It was one of the three villas in the compound of Mayalap´s family. We were recommended to move in on November 1, 1982. Normally, in the new house, I would share a room with Gen Sak Sutsakhan, Gen Thach Reng, and Penn Thal. Like before, we had to bring our own furniture: for each of us, mainly a light floor mattress, since we always slept on the floor, and a folding cabinet covered with a plastic sheet. Gen

Sak Sutsakhan was more privileged than the rest of us because he had his own folding bed.

I Enter the Army

With the reshuffle of the KPNLF military command, I received a new assignment to be posted at Ampil base inside Cambodia. In fact, Gen Sak Sutsakhan and Gen Thach Reng proposed that I join them in the field and serve in the KPNLF army. I agreed to the proposal. Subsequently, on November 7, 1982[113] all members of the General Staff Committee decided to appoint me as its secretary. Unexpectedly, I did not have time to enjoy the fresh comfort of an air-conditioned room in the new KPNLF Bangkok residence, as I had to take up my new responsibility in Cambodia as soon as I could.

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[113] Sak Sutsakhan, Decision of the General Staff Provisional Committee (in Khmer) of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces, Ampil, November 8, 1982.

Ampil was not only a military headquarters of the KPNLF, but it was also home to thousands of Cambodian refugees who refused to live under the Khmer Rouge and the Phnom Penh regime. In search of freedom, they believed Ampil was the right place to uphold basic human rights. The village was established in Cambodian territory, in Banteay Meanchey province, near the Thai border. Some refugee encampments were only a few meters from the border, marked by a small stream.

Inside the village, the KPNLF military compound was well guarded by the MP (Military Police) in parachutist (Para) uniform. Military and official families were allowed to live around the compound, separated from the civilian population. The habitation was built mostly with bamboo and thatch. Ampil was well designed and organised, with road connections and a sanitation system. Offices and public buildings (or more appropriately, shelters) were well maintained. In addition to a military school where new recruits received military training to become KPNLAF officers, pagodas, schools, and theatres were built. They occupied a large area of land and provided huge halls for mass meetings. UN agencies and international NGOs provided food and healthcare to the

civilian population. KPNLF leaders, especially Gen Dien Del and Hing Kunthon, who had been living there almost every day for quite some time, intended to use Ampil as a showroom for international visitors, displaying a model of administration that could be applied in the future to one-day liberated Cambodia.

Since I joined the KPNLF in the field, I had been to Ampil several times, both for short visits and longer stays. My last visit came just before my trip to Africa, when I was sent to teach accounting courses to military officers. So, living in the village was not unfamiliar to me. This time, when I arrived, Gen Dien Del had moved to his new house, not to say "his villa," in a new location next to the military compound. The house was made of wood, behind a garden full of roses where the general spent most of his time tending them. In the military compound, several guesthouses were built, along with a central hall that could serve as a meeting room or dining room for important guests or officials. In front of the hall, the military dug a pond to store rainwater, which was badly needed in the dry season. In addition, a traditional-style kiosk was built in the middle area over the pond so fresh air would rise from the water.

My guesthouse was brand-new and had been recently finished. It was slightly bigger than the others because it was the accommodation site not only for me but also for Gen Thach Reng and another military officer named Col Chak Bory. For my protection, I was given a bodyguard of Khmer Krom origin named Chamroeun, who had served as a captain in the former South Vietnamese army in the 1970s. He was also assigned to cook my daily meals and do my laundry. Chamroeun spoke fluent Vietnamese, but his Khmer had a strong accent. He probably spoke better Vietnamese than Khmer. I remembered having him as my interpreter one day when I attempted to interrogate a Vietnamese prisoner. When I asked a question in Khmer, Chamroeun translated it easily into Vietnamese. But when the prisoner answered in Vietnamese, he repeated it in Vietnamese instead of translating it into Khmer. Since that day, I never asked him to translate again. Later, Chamroeun moved to work with Col Chak Bory before he got a US visa and settled permanently in the USA. After Chamroeun left for America, I found a new bodyguard, Srey Nuon. Srey Nuon, a former special forces soldier, became my only bodyguard from those days until retirement in the 2000s.

The New KPNLF Commanders
At Work in the Battlefield

Under its new military leadership, the KPNLF seemed to shift its military concept from conventional warfare to guerrilla warfare. The resistance movement and its armed forces adopted new mission statements. The movement set three strategic aims: First, the total and unconditional withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia; second, the elimination of traitors who threaten to destroy our country, our customs and traditions, and who want to impose a communist regime on us. And third, the development of resources and institutions necessary and vital to our national independence, to a society of justice, and to the well-being of the Cambodian people. The main military objectives of the KPNLAF were to focus on cutting off the communication and logistics supply lines of the Vietnamese, isolating and destroying their sanctuaries.

In fact, Thai authorities, especially Gen Chavalit, advised the Cambodian non-communist resistance forces (KPNLAF and the

National Army of Sihanouk, known at that time as Molinaka) that Vietnamese forces would launch major offensive attacks against them during the upcoming dry season. In a meeting with Gen Sak Sutsakhan, Thach Reng (KPNLAF), Gen Teap Ben, and Mr Tol Lah (Molinaka) on September 10, 1982, Gen Chavalit suggested that our forces should not remain inert. They should be dispersed, in due course, to avoid being targeted for destruction by the enemy. The Thai general recommended sending one third of our forces into operations in front of our military bases. He suggested that we should mobilise our main efforts in guerrilla and psychological warfare, and nothing else. In sum, he advised that we should dispatch our troops as follows: 1/3 into operations throughout Cambodia, 1/3 to be trained, and 1/3 to defend our forts and encampments.

Within the framework of the new concept, the KPNLF army seemed to take more initiative during military operations, which grew increasingly aggressive. In this military setting, I observed the reality of warfare, in both its exciting and horrific aspects. In the past, I had been involved in military activities only on paper, reading reports or, from time to time, listening to military

colleagues tell stories. Now, I was part of the KPNLF war machinery, in real time in the real world. I was excited and proud to see many soldiers who strongly believed in the righteousness of their mission leaving with joy for the battlefields. I was particularly impatient to hear news of victory. But not all battlefields were victorious. Some soldiers returned home and were greeted with pride as freedom fighters. It is the bright side of our warfare. But there were also those who died in the fields, leaving widows and orphans. When meeting with their families, I could not control my broken heart. I quickly understood that it was easy to send soldiers into war, but it was deeply sorrowful because of its devastating consequences. I also understood that freedom and dignity could not be obtained without paying a price.

By the end of 1982, the KPNLF had intensified its guerrilla activities[114]. Harassment operations were mounted in the region east of Choam Khsan (Preah Vihear Province), the region of Pailin (Battambang Province), Thmar Puok, and Banteay Chhmar,

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[114] Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Press Release, Khmer Territory, December 17, 1982.

north of Sisophon (Banteay Meanchey Province). KPNLF commandos attacked a Vietnamese position in Bantoat Bos, 25 km east of our military base, Ampil. On December 10, 1982, Chea Chhut launched an offensive against Yeang Dangkum, 7 km east of Nong Chan camp. He baptised the offensive as "Yeang Dangkum Operation." After two weeks of heavy, fierce fighting, Yeang Dangkum was completely under the control of Chea Chhut's men. In his report to Son Sann dated January 25, 1983, Gen Thach Reng wrote, "The month of January was distinguished by the clear initiative of our armed forces fighting the Vietnamese occupation troops. During this time, all our camps made efforts to send their combat units into the interior.[115] He then provided detailed accounts of the KPNLF's military activities, camp by camp and region by region.

The Yeang Dangkum operation gave me the chance to visit real Cambodian villages deep inside Cambodia, which were quite different from the refugee camps at the Thai border. For a long

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[115] Thach Reng, Compte-rendu pour l'information du Président du F.N.L.P.K., le 25 janvier 1983.

time, I had been longing to get in touch with Cambodian reality. To see for real the scenery of our ancestral land, the shape of Cambodian houses, surrounded by coconut, banana, papaya, or mango trees, gave me extraordinary delight and hope: hope that we would be able to liberate our homeland. I felt emotional when I saw the Cambodian flag, the one we used under Prince Sihanouk before 1970, flying over the enemy barracks inside Cambodian territory. The Yeang Dangkum battle was probably an apogee of our military victory. The international press echoed the operation's success. The BBC, Radio Australia, the Voice of America (VOA) and major press agencies reported in favour of the KPNLF. Gen Thach Reng gave his first interview to the VOA in the Khmer-language program. Since the communist regimes ruled the three countries, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, with their dictatorship and pure propaganda in 1975, the VOA had replaced Radio Beijing and won a large audience among the Cambodian population, especially the people living in the border area. On December 30, 1982, Gen Tach Reng and Chea Chhut presided over a ceremony of flag handover to several victorious combatants.

Gen Chavalit: The Builder of Our Military Strength or Weakness

Military initiatives in Yeang Dangkum had reinforced the credibility of the new KPNLF leadership. Gen Thach Reng won more trust and confidence from Son Sann. Backed by his close and intimate relationship with Mrs Suon Kaset, a private aide to the KPNLF president, Gen Thach Reng became Son Sann's military man. Thach Reng praised the operations as ones that put the 5th Division of the powerful Vietnamese army in difficulty. He claimed that the poor KPNLF guerrillas had succeeded in bringing and beating the enemy up wherever and whenever they wanted. But Yeang Dangkum's victory was short-lived, as our troops had to resist three major Vietnamese counter-offensives. Gen Thach Reng reported that the Vietnamese had deployed several regiments of the 5th and 309th divisions equipped with heavy weaponry, such as 105 mm cannons, 107 mm rocket launchers, US-built M113 armoured vehicles, and Soviet-made T54 tanks.

Under the VN shelling, we decided to withdraw from Yeang Dangkum safely and in a well-planned manner on January 16, 1983.

The outcome of the Yeang Dangkum operations was that I learned more about the weaknesses of our military enterprise. It revealed that, in terms of military capability, we were heavily dependent on logistical support from Thailand. In this regard, Gen Chavalit played a key role. Our past military successes resulted from his adequate support. In his report to Son Sann, Gen Thach Reng wrote, "During the Yeang Dangkum operations, all of our Huana, at every level, had lent us more and more encouraging cooperation. They responded positively and quickly to our emergency needs. Huana Chiv (Gen Chavalit), despite his tight schedule, agreed to see Thach Reng and gave the latter full satisfaction with regard to his request for a dozen special sticks (weapons), which enabled us to resist the eventual 4th VN offensive."

In fact, the Thai army had managed to provide us with a dozen Armbrusts, a kind of sophisticated anti-tank rocket launcher that helped destroy Vietnamese tanks and armoured vehicles,

boosting our troops′ morale enormously. The rocket launchers were said to be provided by Singapore. But when the Armbrust ran out of rockets, they became useless. After some successful operations, I was told that, probably under Vietnamese pressure, the Singaporean government asked the Thai army to return the rocket launchers to Singapore quickly, leaving our fighters disappointed with external assistance. Furthermore, according to KPNLF′s records, it was not entirely true that the Thai army had always given entire satisfaction to our requests, for example, in our request note to Gen Chavalit dated December 28, 1982, we requested 500 B40 rockets and received 102; we requested 400 M60 mortars and received none; we requested 400 DK 85 shells and received none; we requested 400,000 AK47 cartridges and received 177,600; we requested 14,000 M16 cartridges and received none; we requested 1,000 M79 shells and received none[116].

[116] Thach Reng, To General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, (A kind of Memo) Bangkok, December 28, 1982.

Gen Sak Sutsakhan and the Group of Dien Del's Men

With Gen Thach Reng at the military command in the field, Gen Sak Sutsakhan seemed to play a secondary role. Known more as a diplomat-soldier rather than a combat fighter, he tried his best to work with every faction of the KPNLF military leadership. Since he became the chairman of the general staff committee, he had been working to win the hearts of all KPNLF military chiefs, including Gen Dien Del supporters, not to mention Hing Kunthon, Dien Del's civilian partner at the Ampil base. He needed more and more cooperation from all groups to fulfil his duties. He spent most of his time on paperwork, working-group meetings, and public relations. He made field visits from time to time. The general had found in Hing Kunthon a close working associate. Soft-spoken, Gen Sak Sutsakhan was a man of good company. He never spoke ill of anyone. He liked socialising. He smoked like a chimney. After work, the general spent his time sipping iced whiskey-soda or beer. Finally, little by little, Gen Sak Sutsakhan and Hing Kunthon had become good co-workers. A

few years later, Hing Kunthon would become one of Gen Sak Sutsakhan´s trusted deputies.

Then the Vietnamese Retaliated

The Vietnamese revenge was merciless. To counter the KNLAF´s initiatives, the Vietnamese mobilised a strong force of 6,000 men, equipped with a score of T54 and T59 tanks, in addition to APC M116 and artillery. Not only did the Vietnamese retake their lost strongholds, but they also began to launch a big offensive against all CGDK military bases. They continued their first advance on Nong Chan camp.

To lend the Executive Committee, or COMEX, moral support to our combatants, Penn Thula, the youngest son of Penn Nouth, and I (Ieng Mouly) were assigned to work at Chea Chhut´s headquarters. We were told our presence would boost the morale of the civilian population and our troops, signalling that whatever happened to them, the top leadership would take care of them. But, to tell the truth, we could do little more than report any armed

incident to the media and ask friendly countries, as well as the international community, for help.

While Gen Thach Reng, in the company of Mrs Suon Kaset, was travelling from camp to camp, or enjoying a good time together in Bangkok, I took up my new residence in Nong Chan camp, living within a well-guarded military compound in a guesthouse next to the residence of Chea Chhut, the top commander of the region.

Each day, I accompanied the commander while inspecting KPNLF encampments inside Cambodian territory, a few km from the border and from the civilian camps. Often, we took refuge for the rest of the day in an advanced command post we called Tuol Phtiek, a hummock or mound in the middle of the forest, next to a footpath that led to the Vietnamese-controlled area. When we moved from one location to another, Chea Chhut rode his 125 cl Japanese-made motorbike, escorted by a dozen soldiers armed to the teeth, each riding their own engine. In general, two men rode one motorbike. While travelling, Chea Chhut made sure I felt safe; he took command of his Endura and offered me a seat behind him. In those days, some international news reporters

called our group motorbike-riding guerrillas. During heated battles, Chea Chhut gave orders to his men through radio from Tuol Phtiek. From there, he monitored enemy troop movements. At Tuol Phtiek, sometimes we received heavy artillery and rocket shelling from the Vietnamese and Heng Samrin troops. One day, while we were holding our daily briefing as usual, the enemy fired many 107 mm rockets into Tuol Phtiek. Most of the rockets fell and exploded in the forest a few hundred meters from our posting, destroying trees and bushes, but luckily not human lives. Two fell, totally unexploded, in the compound of our advanced command post. Our men were brave. They did not fear the enemy attack. One soldier snatched one unexploded rocket, put it on an artificial launcher, as we did not have the real one, and managed to fire it back to its senders.

With its batteries ignited, the rocket roared and quickly lifted off the launcher while we all, in files and ranks, watched the mighty killer engine move. The rocket propelled itself straight into the enemy zone, under the applause of our soldiers. From a few kilometres away, we heard heavy noises from the rocket explosion soon after it had been fired. There might be injuries and

killings, but we did not care much as we were at the heart of warfare operations. Hungry for more success, our team prepared to fire the second rocket. This time, the batteries were ignited. The rocket took off from its launcher. But instead of taking off spontaneously, the rocket rotated its head a few centimetres higher and whirled slowly in the same place, roaring wildly. At one moment, it pointed its head toward us, targeting our site of command, as we stood only a few meters from the launching site. I did not recall any moment of fear, but I was stunned by the high speed with which our colleagues were sheltering from the possible and imminent strike of the fired rocket, either by lying down on the ground behind big trees or by hiding behind the slope of a mound. In a second, everyone was confined to a small perimeter where it was unusually quiet. I heard no noise except the rocket engine. I guessed many soldiers were busy invoking magic powers to protect them, as this was how they generally practised in front of real danger. After turning left and right, right and left, the rocket pointed east this time, toward the opposite side. Its threatening noise grew louder, and the rocket took off. With its wicked noises, "Shoo, Shoo, Shoo," it flew away from our

advanced command post. In a few seconds, it collided with the branches of a big tree a hundred meters away, killing two of our combatants on the spot and injuring many others. It was a deadly accident. It was a sad experience for me. In fact, the rocket wasn't functioning properly because our operators didn't change the batteries after using them to ignite the first rocket. So the batteries didn't have enough power to run the device's engine at full strength. This was the explanation for that moment. My thoughts went to the dead and injured people who were innocent but were victims of a friendly action.

Every night, we prepared for the Vietnamese attacks. Before bed, many colleagues wore Para uniforms and combat gear. Thula, my roommate, wearing a T-shirt like me, always inquired about the way out and the procedures for emergency evacuation in case of an enemy strike. One night, we were together; he did not sleep at all, waiting for the imminent attack, while I was snoring more loudly than usual. That night, the Vietnamese did not attack. It was a quiet and peaceful night. The next day, I was called to Bangkok for other business. While I was away from Nong Chan, the Vietnamese offensive finally took

place. Within two days of fierce fighting, the Vietnamese seized the camp. One internal KPNLF document concluded the battle as follows: "In spite of their high spirit of sacrifice and determination, the combatants of Nong Chan were obliged to finally yield to the fourth Vietnamese offensive which took place on January 31 and February 1, 1983, and which had led to the KPNLF withdrawal from and the abandonment of the KPNLF Nong Chan camp[117]."

During the first quarter of 1983, in addition to Nong Chan, the elements of the 5th, 302nd and 309th divisions of the Vietnamese occupation forces shelled, attacked and destroyed Cambodian population centres at Phnom Chhat, Chamcar Kor, Prey Moan, which were under the control of the Khmer Rouge and Sihanoukborei of the royalist party. In his cable, Son Sann told the UN Secretary General, Javier Perez de Cuéllar, that the

[117] Sak Sutsakhan, Mémorandum à la Haute Information de Monsieur le Président du FNLPK et Commandant en chef du FANLPK, le 21 février 1983.

Vietnamese attacks had caused untold civilian suffering and loss of life, leaving thousands homeless.[118]

At the same time, the Vietnamese attacks did sow discord within our military leadership. Gen Thach Reng, who had taken most of the credit for the successful guerrilla tactics, especially during the KPNLF's offensive in Yeang Dangkum, blamed local commanders for the fall of Nong Chan camp despite the fact that he had given them accurate intelligence about where and when the enemy would attack. But the commanders retorted that Thach Reng was just a beautiful talker, as he never showed up during real fighting.

New KPNLF Vice-Presidents

For convenience, all KPNLF field commanders, including those of the Dien Del group, seemed to accept Gen Sak Sutsakhan as their military leader. By May 1983, Chhean Vam,

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[118] Son Sann, Prime Minister of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, Cable Message to UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar, April 9, 1983.

the KPNLF Vice-President, resigned. To replace him, Son Sann appointed Sak Sutsakhan as his 1st Vice-President and Dien Del as his 2nd Vice-President. Little by little, Gen Sak Sutsakhan earned the trust and confidence of our international sponsors, especially the ASEAN group. With his credentials as a former Head of State and Chief of General Staff of the Cambodian army during the Khmer Republic period, the sponsors might have seen Gen Sak as a good partner for military cooperation. But Gen Thach Reng and Mrs Suon Kaset, who were both considered to be all ears as well as eyes of Son Sann, looked at Gen Sak as a weak and indecisive leader.

Suon Kaset Was Invited to Leave Thailand

In those days, Suon Kaset and Thach Reng made many contacts with foreign embassies in Bangkok. They provided them with internal information on our military operations and on the bad behaviour of some of our military chiefs, information which was not always wrong or incorrect, but not necessarily helpful to build

up a good image of KPNLF. Those activities upset the Thai generals who controlled our national resistance movement.

In addition, Thach Reng and Kaset maintained a close relationship with some agents of the French and Singaporean secret services. By December 1983, the Thai authorities invited Kaset to leave Thai territory. Kaset returned to France, where she had lived long before she joined KPNLF in the field in 1979. Kaset's departure was a real loss to Son Sann, as she was a valuable aide. It was a blow to Son Sann loyalists´ efforts to strengthen the KPNLF president´s entourage.

With Emotional Passion, Thach Reng Followed Suon Kaset

Thach Reng and Kaset did not hide their love affairs or their love for each other. A few days after Kaset left, I took Thach Reng to downtown Bangkok so he could talk to her from a hotel and by phone. We found a hotel on Surivong Road. When he talked to her, I did not hear their conversation. But when they had

finished, Thach Reng told me he wanted to leave Thailand immediately. For the first time, I saw the general of the former Khmer Republic´s Special Forces at his lowest morale level, the general who used to preach to us about the high spirit of a long struggle for national liberation. He was so pessimistic that he decided to abandon the battle. He kept blaming Son Sann for not standing firm enough to prevent the Thai authorities from ordering Kaset to leave. Finally, I helped him buy his air ticket. He flew to Paris that afternoon.

Thach Reng's decision was disastrous, as once he left, the Thais would not allow him to return to Thailand. It was another loss for Son Sann in terms of military personnel genuinely loyal to him. In those days, Son Sann made mercilessly repeated calls for discipline and national unity within KPNLF, believing that the Thach Reng and Kaset cases were used by some Thai generals and KPNLF officials to prevent the president from interfering with the day-to-day business of the front. To Son Sann, unity and discipline meant all must only follow his leadership. For years, he had suspected that KPNLF officials such as Neang Chin Han and Gaffar might try to isolate him from his closest entourage.

KPNLF General Assembly

In January 1984, Son Sann practically visited all KPNLF camps. In each visit, he submitted his mandate to lead the KPNLF to the examination of the civilian population and combatants. Wherever he went, the civilian population and combatants reconfirmed his mandate to lead the KPNLF by a show of hands. On January 28, 1984, the KPNLF held its general assembly in Ampil camp[119]. In fact, what Son Sann wanted to organise was a KPNLF congress, which would have more legitimate power to amend some statutory rules of the KPNLF. But the first congress held in April 1980 recommended that the second congress should be organised only after the liberation of Cambodia from the Vietnamese occupation.

At the general assembly, Son Sann was reconfirmed as KPNLF president. He said, "With the power and the prerogatives vested in me by the people and the civilian and military cadres of

[119] KPNLF Bulletin, February 6, 1982, pp. 18-20.

the front, it is my full duty and my full responsibility to lead the KPNLF toward its prescribed goal and objective. I have to answer before the Khmer people and the Khmer nation for the success or the failure of this solemn mission which you all assigned to me." He told the assembly about the termination of the KPNLAF general staff committee and the nominations of Gen Sak Sutsakhan as chief of general staff; Col Prum Vit as 1st deputy chief for military affairs; and Hing Kunthon as 2nd deputy chief for civilian affairs.

Moreover, Son Sann secured the assembly's approval for an amendment to the role of the KPNLF executive committee, called "COMEX." The amendment would allow the President to direct the KPNLF effectively. Henceforth, the COMEX would assist the president in his function. Only with the president's approval or his express recommendations may the COMEX have at its disposal the KPNLF administration and the KPNLAF, the army of the Front, or may define the political lines of the KPNLF and direct its foreign actions. The amendment departed far from the executive committee's first decision, which gave the committee a prominent role in collegial decision-making rather than to the President. The

old provisions stipulate, "The Executive Committee assumes the direction of the KPNLF effectively. It decides all activities of the KPNLF, defines the political lines of the KPNLF, directs its foreign actions, and has at its disposal an administration and the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces (KPNLAF)."

I Returned to Bangkok, at the Service of KPNLF Red Cross

With the termination of the general staff provisional committee, I returned to the KPNLF headquarters in Bangkok to help Son Sann's son, Son Soubert, run the newly created KPNLF Red Cross, first as the Red Cross's secretary general and later as its treasurer. My presence in Bangkok would greatly reinforce Son Sann's entourage after the departure of Gen Thach Reng and Mrs Suon Kaset.

Samdech Penn Nouth Warned Us of Defeat

In February 1984, I went to Paris, where Thach Reng arranged for me to meet with Penn Nouth, a highly respected Cambodian statesman and many-time Prime Minister of Cambodia under then Prince Sihanouk, who had sent all his sons, not to mention my friend Penn Thal, to join KPNLF. I proudly reported to Penn Nouth the outcome of the KPNLF general assembly, the appointment of Gen Sak Sutsakhan and his deputies to the command of the KPNLAF, as well as the modification of the status of the Executive Committee, or COMEX. I told the statesman that the changes were meant to ensure the stability of KPNLF's leadership and improve the relationship between the President and the members of COMEX. By doing so, the President may avoid internal conflict with COMEX, which would force him to reshuffle the committee very often in case of discord.

When I had finished my expose, the wise man made his comments. I was astonished to notice his clear-sighted mind despite his great age. Penn Nouth might be in his early eighties.

Although he expressed, with his shaken voice, that, for years, had marked his personality, Penn Nouth managed very well to articulate clearly. First, he inquired when Thach Reng would return to the fields. Thach Reng said, "I am ready. I'm waiting for the green light from Bangkok, as until now the Thai embassy has denied me the entrance visa to return to Thailand."

Penn Nouth was serious in his reply to me. Substantially, he said, "I have always said you must review the internal organisation of each front. It is very important. If you cannot unite (he meant to unite KPNLF and FUNCINPEC of Prince Sihanouk), you should make every effort to improve your image. It seems you don't understand very well the spirit of a fighting front and that of a political party. In a front, you must gather, unite, or rally as many people as possible; in a political party, you must select your partisans according to their trust and confidence. I am speaking generally, not specifically about your front or the other one. To avoid factionalism, you must work for the interest of the people of Cambodia and of the Cambodian nation, not just for your group." After the meeting, I sent Son Sann a report outlining Penn Nouth's dissatisfaction with the current state of our national

liberation struggle [120]. For reasons unknown to me, the recommendations of the KPNLF general assembly, which had given COMEX a secondary role for years, had not been implemented by the committee or by President Son Sann himself.

Joint Mechanism for Cooperation Between KPNLF and FUNCINPEC

In April 1984, the Vietnamese launched their attacks against Ampil camp, the military headquarters of the KPNLAF and the home of about 36,000 Cambodian civilian inhabitants. They used rocket launchers, mortars, and recoilless weapons to shell the camp. They equipped their troops with heavy firepower to assault KPNLAF positions. But after ten days of intense fighting, no single Vietnamese soldier succeeded in setting foot on Ampil. The failure

[120] Ieng Mouly, A Son Excellence le Président du Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer et Premier Ministre du Gouvernement de Coalition du Kampuchea Démocratique, Paris, le 12 mars 1984.

of the Vietnamese, despite their superiority in firepower and ammunition, to take the KPNLAF headquarters boosted the credibility of its defenders. While Gen Sak Sutsakhan and Dien Del and his men were credited with a clear military success, the KPNLF scored a major political victory.

To coordinate their actions in support of the Cambodian Non-Communist Resistance (NCR), the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC, ASEAN had formed a Working Group chaired by a then Thai colonel named Surayuth Chulanond, who rose to the rank of full general and became Prime Minister in 2006 after a coup by the Thai generals against Prime Minister Taksin Shiwanatra. We called him Huana Vishu (his nom de guerre). While China was fully helping the Khmer Rouge, Democratic Kampuchea, the Working Group mobilised all efforts to support the non-communists. They encouraged FUNCINPEC and KPNLF to set up a joint mechanism for close cooperation in such fields as military operations, propaganda, and public relations.

At the time, Son Sann was not very enthusiastic about the idea, believing that KPNLF was stronger and bigger than FUNCINPEC. Cooperating with FUNCINPEC meant sharing

resources equally, even though they were supposed to be more for KPNLF. In one meeting, I heard Gen Sak Sutsakhan trying to convince Son Sann that the cooperation should be like "a big brother giving a helping hand to his younger brother to walk." On May 2, 1984, the two Non-Communist Resistance (NCR) movements, KPNLF and FUNCINPEC/ANS, agreed to set up a regular joint committee on radio broadcasting. The radio station was called Samleng Khmer, or Voice of Khmer (VOK).

PERMICO Versus MAYALAP

On May 7, 1984, Gen Sak Sutsakhan and Prince Norodom Ranaridh, then Representative of Prince Sihanouk, presided over a meeting to "make official" the birth of a Permanent Military Committee for Coordination called "PERMICO." In practice, the Working Group appointed Gen Sak as Chairman of PERMICO. With PERMICO's official creation, Gen Sak, Gaffar, and some other KPNLF staff left our safe house, Mayalap, to live separately on their own premises.

In fact, the Working Group provided PERMICO with full financial support. In those days, KPNLF was practically divided into two groups: the "Permico," Gen Sak's residence, the military group; and the "Mayalap," Son Sann's residence, the political group. The Permico group enjoyed more freedom in the way of living, contrary to the Mayalap group, where lifestyle was much more sober, with no drinking or outings at night. Son Sann did not appreciate this arrangement, as it might give the military chiefs more room to act independently of him and challenge his leadership. Also, he did not appreciate the arrangement because the Working Group had not dealt directly with him or his entourage.

Moreover, Gen Sak appeared to be leaning more and more in favour of Dien Del, Hing Kunthon, and Gaffar group, who had been taking refuge under his protection for quite some time. As President of the KPNLF, Son Sann viewed his own role as having overall responsibility for all issues, including military affairs. He could not accept dividing duties, leaving military matters to the military and limiting his overall responsibility. To maintain his influence over the military command, Son Sann sought ways to

reintegrate his close aide, such as Gen Thach Reng, into the KPNLF military leadership.

Official Visit to South Korea

From June 5 to 8, 1984, Son Sann made his first official visit to South Korea as Prime Minister of the coalition government. As an ally of the free world, he wanted to distinguish himself from Prince Sihanouk, who had lived in exile in Pyongyang and Beijing since March 1970. Cambodia must be a friend of the whole Korean nation, not just of communist Korea. In South Korea, Son Sann brought Gen Thach Reng from Paris. In fact, almost everywhere on his foreign trips, the KPNLF President preferred to take Thach Reng with him so that he could expose the general, who was really his trusted man, to the world and so that he could be seen as having a resourceful military officer in case of need. In addition to Gen Thach Reng, Boun Say, Gaffar, Son Soubert, Son Sann´s son, and I, Ieng Mouly, accompanied Son Sann during the South Korea visit.

It was my first trip to South Korea, and it was my first time accompanying Son Sann on his official visit as Prime Minister. Although I was a member of the Prime Minister's cabinet, I held the most junior protocol rank. Son Sann met with South Korean high-ranking officials, including the Prime Minister of this friendly country. He was satisfied with the visit. Before he left Seoul, he held a press conference, saying as follows: "Our visit to the Republic of Korea has been productive and fruitful."

In fact, South Korea provided KPNLF with cash assistance through the Korean embassy in Bangkok. I was told that, on one occasion, Gaffar was called to the embassy to receive cash in Son Sann's absence. With the money he received, Gaffar gave a portion to some KPNLF military chiefs without the KPNLF president's knowledge or authorisation. Son Sann was furious. He viewed Gaffar's behaviour as abusive and undisciplined.

Dien Del Ordered His Men to Abandon Ampil

Son Sann was deeply concerned about unity within his movement. In every internal meeting, he kept calling for stronger unity and solidarity. In addition, the Year 1984 was the year the Vietnamese hit hard against the KPNLF. Humiliated by their failure to capture the KPNLAF headquarters at Ampil in April, the enemy did not shift its objective: to wipe out the KPNLF military forces.

On November 18, 1984, the Vietnamese unleashed a major offensive against the regrouped Nong Chan combatants. On December 8, 1984, they attacked Nam Yin Camp. On December 11, 1984, they assaulted Sokh Sann, and on December 25, 1984, the Vietnamese hit Santi Sokh (O′Bok) and Rithysen Camps. But the real target was Ampil. In fact, since December 22, 1984, Ampil had been expected to be struck in the bloodiest manner. As of January 6, 1985, five out of eight KPNLF camps had been hit by the Vietnamese troops. The battle of Ampil had lasted until January 8, 1985, when Gen Dien Del issued an order to withdraw

all combat units from Ampil beginning at 11:00 a.m. Thus, by the afternoon of the same day, the KPNLAF headquarters was abandoned.

The abandonment of Ampil denoted a new period when all the military men were completely separated from the civilians, as the troops were assembled at the border while the civilians were evacuated into Thai territory. From lessons learned in the last battle of Ampil, our military leaders had begun to refer more and more to guerrilla warfare strategy and tactics.

Important Works of the KPNLF Red Cross

Since my return to the KPNLF safe house in Bangkok, I have been busy with the work of the KPNLF Red Cross, working hand-in-hand with Son Soubert, Son Sann´s son. As one of his closest associates, Soubert gave me full latitude and freedom to run the Red Cross. In fact, as president, he handled public relations, including fundraising, leaving all operational and financial management to me. In those days, with President Son

Sann´s prestige, the KPNLF Red Cross received support from overseas Cambodians as well as from friendly international NGOs and foundations.

At the end of 1984, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation of Germany awarded our Red Cross a grant. With the grant, we created a Khmer Buddhist Association, a Buddhist Research Centre, and a Technical Training Centre. Our idea was to help rebuild Buddhism after years of war, communism, and dictatorship. We believed that Buddhism, Cambodian culture, and tradition could serve as a reference point to reunite Cambodians who had been lost in the jungle of ideologies and partisanship. The technical training prepared technicians in mechanical engineering and radio and TV repair and maintenance, which Cambodia's future reconstruction would need. In addition, the project provided English and, later, computer training to Cambodian youth living in the refugee camps.

In sum, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, under the leadership of its Resident Representative in Thailand, Wolfgang von Erffa, provided valuable support for our immense and difficult tasks. With the KPNLF Red Cross in operation, Soubert and I

gained more autonomy from the office of the secretary-general. I was able to organise and coordinate important actions in support of President Son Sann. Under the banner of the Red Cross, I found it easier to travel in Thailand, more smoothly and more freely than before. I bought a minivan, and I hired a private driver, a Thai national who could hardly speak Khmer. Finally, I managed to skip or avoid the company of our Thai Huana while travelling throughout Thailand.

KPNLF Generals Claim Independence From Son Sann's Authority

The idea of separating the military domain from the civilian one raised the issue of military command independence from President Son Sann, who, at any cost, still insisted that, as KPNLF President, he must be Commander-in-Chief and have full authority over military command. Under constant and intensified

pressure from the Working Group[121], Son Sann was forced to appoint Gen Sak Sutsakhan as Commander-in-Chief of the KPNLAF and Gen Dien Del as Chief of General Staff on May 1, 1985. However, to show he remained the sole leader of the KPNLF, with overall military and civilian responsibilities, Son Sann issued a decree appointing the new Commander-in-Chief and noted the personal delegation of powers. He believed he could withdraw this delegation of powers from Gen Sak whenever he desired to dismiss the general from the position.

Gen Sak gained more legitimacy over the KPNLF military command with the new decree signed by Son Sann and endorsed by the KPNLF Executive Committee, COMEX. In addition to his position as Chairman of PERMICO, he appeared as a new leader of the two non-communist resistance movements, likely more independent of the two political leaders, Son Sann and Prince Sihanouk. The general was encouraged to stand up and

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[121] The Working Group mentioned in this book means the ASEAN Working Group under the Chairmanship of then Colonel Surayuth Chulanond that I have mentioned in previous pages starting from page 200 and in the pages to follow.

implement the Working Group's military strategy, completely separate from the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, which ASEAN saw as dominated by the Khmer Rouge. In this view, the Non-Communist Resistance (NCR) military leadership was encouraged to take total control of the two armies of KPNLF and FUNCINPEC.

Since May 1985, the military had worked independently, with its own budget, staff, and logistics. They received direct support from the Thai authorities, especially the Thai army, as well as from the Working Group. Son Sann continued his efforts to keep control over the military by calling for agreement and discipline among his followers. He openly expressed his distrust toward the military leadership arrangement, viewing the military´s independence from his authority as divisive behaviour. He placed himself in complete contradiction to the Working Group´s strategy.

Son Sann and Sak Sutsakhan's Groups Screaming at Each Other

At the time, two opposing campaigns ran: one led by Son Sann and the other by Gen Sak. Son Sann portrayed the non-communist military leadership as incompetent and incapable of liberating the country from the foreign occupation. When Son Sann met with ACM Siddhi Savetsila, the Thai Foreign Minister, in August 1985, he spoke of "the necessity for the non-communist resistance fighters to intensify guerrilla activities, to multiply the actions of psychological warfare, and to organise the mobilisation of the mass of people inside Cambodia." But he underlined "the incapacity of KPNLF combatants for organising all these activities."

For Son Sann, only his military man, Gen Thach Reng, could implement these policies. In opposition, the Gen Sak group complained openly that Son Sann had no idea other than to dismiss Gen Sak and appoint Gen Thach Reng as the KPNLF's Commander-in-Chief, thus creating division among combatants.

The group argued that Son Sann's interest was only to promote loyalty to his person or to his family, creating a clan and a partisan within KPNLF.

The KPNLF Wise-men Support Sak Sutsakhan

Through coordinated campaigning, the Gen Sak group gained support from the "Conseil des Sages" or the "Council of the Elders" or the "Wise-men Council of the KPNLF." On June 19, 1985, the council met in Paris. Two former Prime Ministers, Chhean Vam and Huy Kanthoul, participated in the meeting. They decided to withdraw their support from President Son Sann. In the view of Son Sann's entourage, Neang Chin Han, the Secretary-General, in addition to Gen. Dien Del, Hing Kunthon, and Gaffar, was seen as playing an important role behind the decision of the council. Son Sann tried to reverse the situation.

On September 6, 1985, he convened a meeting of the Council of Wise-men in Paris. After three hours of discussion, the meeting agreed that Dr Chhay Hancheng, Son Sann's son-in-law,

must not interfere anymore in the business of the KPNLF and that Son Sann must appoint anyone who is under 50 years old to be prepared to lead the KPNLF, as his heir or successor. Son Sann agreed. In fact, in Paris, the wise men believed that Son Sann was under the influence of his son-in-law, Dr Chhay, who held no official position within the front. Son Sann thought he had eased tensions and restored normal relationships with the elders, who were mostly his close friends or colleagues.

Quietly Thach Reng Returns to Bangkok

At Son Sann's repeated requests, Gen Chavalit finally agreed to let Gen Thach Reng secretly return to Thailand in October 1985. When Thach Reng arrived at Bangkok airport, the Thai army picked him up and escorted him straight to his hotel. Thach Reng did not have a Thai entrance visa, so his presence on Thai territory was a special case handled by the Thai army. I was extremely surprised when he called me from his hotel room in the afternoon to tell me he was now in Bangkok, Thailand. Without

a word, almost immediately after the phone call, I hired a taxi and went right away to see him.

Thach Reng was jubilant and very happy to be back in Thailand. He told me about his special mission and his meeting with Gen Chavalit. We spent the whole afternoon together, exchanging views on the military situation, and had a late-night gastronomic dinner. In the "Mayalap" safe house, no one knew about the presence of Thach Reng in Bangkok.

Every day, I kept seeing him secretly. After a week, he told me to find him a house, as he no longer wanted to live in a hotel. I thought the Thai army might not be willing to pay for Thach Reng's accommodation. In the end, we found a studio in a condominium on Decho Road, near a busy business centre in downtown Bangkok. I rented the house in my name, using my personal credit card. After a couple of months, we got the authorisation from the Thai military to have Gen Tach Reng stay with us in the Mayalap safe house.

In fact, Son Sann made tremendous efforts to regain control of the KPNLF. When he met with ACM Siddhi Savetsila, in mid-

August 1985, he put his person in the balance. To the Thai foreign minister, among other requests, he said, "I request friendly countries, especially the ASEAN, to help me reorganise the KPNLF in order to put order in our ranks and to revive strict discipline." In the end, he added, "If all my requests are not met, there is nothing left for me to hope anymore, but to ask all friendly countries to accept the expression of my profound acknowledgement for the precious and manifold aid given to the non-communist resistance, and to present a last request: that is to help me to be discharged of the heavy responsibility of delivering Cambodia to the communist hands."

The Second Rift in KPNLF's Ranks

One week later, on August 22, 1985, after the meeting with the Thai minister, Son Sann convened the KPNLF executive committee, "COMEX." In addition to committee members, Son Sann invited all KPNLAF base commanders and civilian camp administrators to attend. The agenda was to restore order and

discipline within the KPNLF ranks. One of the meeting's most important decisions was to dismiss Hing Kunthon and Gaffar from all their positions. But Gen Sak intervened to keep the decision from becoming public, to give these two people a chance to make amends and prove they could abide by the KPNLF's rules. While the KPNLF was conducting its Executive Committee meeting, an ad hoc committee of the KPNLAF and the Nationalist Sihanoukian Army (ANS), or the FUNCINPEC´s Army, issued on the same day a press release announcing the creation of the Joint Military Command (JMC) with Gen Sak Sutsakhan as Commander-in-Chief, Gen Teap Ben of ANS as Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Gen Tuon Chay of ANS as Chief of General Staff, and Gaffar as Deputy Chief of General Staff. With the presence of Thach Reng in Bangkok, the decision of the Executive Committee, COMEX, to end the missions of Hing Kunthon and Gaffar widened the division within KPNLF. Gaffar became openly rebellious. He made several statements in private and in the press, especially in the Far Eastern Economic Review, issued on October 24, 1985, calling for ASEAN to withdraw its support from Son Sann and to pressure the KPNLF President to resign.

Gaffar´s behaviour reached the point where reconciliation was no longer possible.

Penn Thal Died in Beijing

On December 4, 1985, Son Sann convened another executive committee (COMEX) meeting. This time, the committee expelled Hing Kunthon and Gaffar from the KPNLF. The decision finally upset Gen. Sak. The next day, in solidarity with his colleagues, the general handed President Son Sann a handwritten letter resigning from all his positions: military advisor to the president, vice-president of KPNLF, and commander-in-chief of the KPNLAF.

The situation proved more complicated, so Son Sann decided not to respond immediately to Gen Sak´s resignation. On December 7, 1985, the President made a five-day visit to China. Accompanying him to China, among others, was Penn Thal, who was very concerned with the internal problems of the KPNLF. He

kept telling me that we should do what we can to preserve the unity of our resistance movement.

On the departure, we went to the airport. I wanted to see them off to China. It was the last time Penn Thal and I saw each other. It was our last good-bye, or adieu; in the future, Penn Thal would not return. In fact, when the delegation arrived at Beijing airport, Penn Thal collapsed while the Chinese government's welcoming ceremony in honour of Son San´s delegation was in progress. This time, he fatally fell onto the hard ground, sustaining a serious cut on his head. The Chinese doctors could not stop the haemorrhage that caused his death a few weeks later. With the loss of Penn Thal, I lost a precious ally, an excellent advisor, a big brother, and a good friend. The KPNLF lost a valuable member.

Unthinkable Coup

As usual I spent my time between Bangkok and the border area. I visited the Khmer refugees in Site 2 camp as often as I could. Each time, we stopped by in Aranyaprathet, where we had

a safe house and some staff to help communicate with the Thai military either to obtain appropriate passes in order to access the border areas or to return to Bangkok, or to get supplies from the authorities. As a member of President Son Sann´s cabinet and as a former Secretary of the KPNLAF´s Chief of General Staff Committee, I continued to enjoy respect and assistance from the staff in the safe house in Aranyaprathet. The Cambodian liaison officer was my former subordinate when I was in the camp. He used to respond quickly to any request I needed, and he easily got from the Thai military any pass we requested. But this time, I was very surprised, very surprised to spend almost the whole day waiting for a pass to return to Bangkok.

It happened on December 19, 1985. In the morning of that day, when I arrived at the safe house after spending a few nights in Site 2, the Cambodian officer just kept me waiting and then he disappeared. Only late in the afternoon that he came back with a pass, clearing my way for a trip to Bangkok. On the spot, I did not realise the officer had received recommendations from Gen Sak´s office not to cooperate with us anymore. When I reached Bangkok, it was around 10 p.m. At the Mayalap safe house, I was surprised

again to see the villa gate locked and guarded by a worker. Gen Thach Reng hurried to greet me. He yelled at me, "Did you know that there was a coup d'Etat?" What coup d'État? I replied. Thach Reng said, "Did you read any newspapers?" No, I answered. Then he explained that this morning, in Bangkok newspapers, a group of KPNLF dissidents led by Gen Sak announced the formation of a committee called the "Provisional Central Committee for the Salvation of the KPNLF," a rebellion against President Son Sann. In fact, since December 17, 1985[122], Gen Sak's group had circulated a memorandum to the press and diplomatic missions in Bangkok to announce their decision to split the unity of the KPNLF, proclaiming that the group had taken control of the KPNLF's direction. But the news was made public through the press in Bangkok only on December 19, 1985[123].

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[122] Huy Kanthoul (H.E.) Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Provisional Central Committee of Salvation, A Verbal Note, December 17, 1985. (Note Addressed to Diplomatic Missions in Bangkok).

[123] Jacques Bekaert, KPNLF split by rebel faction, Bangkok Post, December 19, 1985.

In his written statement entitled "Special Order of the Day by Gen. Sak Sutsakhan," Gen. Sak blamed Son Sann and the KPNLF's Executive Committee for dictatorship and for being too preoccupied with internal bickering and personal affairs. The statement called the Special Order of the Day[124] read, quoted: "Since its creation on October 9, 1979, the KPNLF was endowed with an Executive Committee, a supreme organ, which directs the KPNLF in civilian, political, and military fields under the leadership of H.E. Son Sann. As my fellow compatriots must have heard, this Executive Committee has changed little by little in form due to personal conflicts. In my observation, the Executive Committee, which has dealt primarily with the issue of personality or personal affairs, has been preoccupied only with internal bickering, personal insults, and personal conflicts uselessly, and has not really applied the established rules and disciplines of the Front nor spent time during its meetings to find solutions to major problems

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[124] Sak Sutsakhan (General) Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces, Provisional Central Committee of Salvation of KPNLF, Special order of the Day, December 20, 1985.

in the national liberation struggle, because the President has exercised dictatorial powers and made all decisions by himself" ..."Due to the large number of petitions, and following deliberations and an exchange of views with a number of Khmer personalities and patriots, I have decided to create a Central Committee called "Provisional Central Committee of Salvation of the KPNLF" in order to replace the Executive Committee, which has considered personality conflicts more important than issues confronting the Nation, with the objective of dissipating and eliminating internal disputes, as well as seeking improvement in all affairs of the KPNLF and earning the trust and confidence of friendly and supporting countries, which have placed hope in the KPNLF in the struggle to liberate our country." End quoted. In his statement, Gen. Sak confirmed that he had been nominated as the Chairman of the Provisional Central Committee.

Two days had already passed when we knew about the "coup." Son Sann's entourage had no doubt that Gaffar was the leading instigator of the coup, as he had excellent contacts within the Working Group and at many Bangkok-based diplomatic missions. The others just followed him. They thought Gaffar was

just using Gen Sak to play into his game. Son Sann requested to meet with Gen. Chavalit in the afternoon.

Son Sann´s determination was to expel Gaffar and Hing Kunthon and bring Gen Sak back into his ranks. The KPNLF President believed that the Thai general would help him settle the internal dispute. Under some conditions, Son Sann would have agreed to keep Gen Sak as the commander-in-chief of the KPNLAF. As his first reaction to the coup, Son Sann told Boun Say, the deputy secretary-general, to invite Gen Sak and Gen Dien Del, in their respective capacities as commander-in-chief and chief of staff, to a private meeting at his residence on December 20, 1985. As circumstances developed, we were all very busy. I was assigned to work with the press in Bangkok, distributing press communiqués and other documents. Our strategy was to show the world that, despite dissident activities, Son Sann remained in full control of the KPNLF. In the press communiqué dated December 20, 1985, we declared the so-called Provisional Committee of Salvation of Gen Sak´s group illegal and appealed to everyone involved to dissociate from the organisers and reintegrate into the ranks of the KPNLF.

When the time for a private meeting arrived, neither Gen. Sak nor Gen. Dien Del showed up. We were so disappointed that the two generals refused to meet with our President. The next day, we issued a press communiqué telling the world the following: "Son Sann and the KPNLF Executive Committee remain always as they are and exert full authority over all the civilian and military institutions of the Front. In the communiqué, Son Sann expressed his gratitude to Prince Sihanouk for his royal support." We spent all day on December 21 waiting for any signal from Gen Sak for a private meeting with Son Sann.

The next day, Son Sann sent a new message renewing his invitation to the two Khmer generals to meet. In the message, he said, "Today, it remains only one day for us to see each other as family. I am waiting for you." Unlike the last message, which was signed by Boun Say, this time, Son Sann signed himself with his title as President of the KPNLF.

General Sak´s Group Not Recognised Son Sann as President Anymore

In response to the invitation, the two generals replied. First, Dien Del answered that as a military man, he is under the direct authority of Gen Sak. He cannot speak or act on Gen Sak´s behalf.[125] For his part, Gen Sak replied that he was ready to meet Son Sann with the following conditions:[126] First, the meeting must take place in a neutral site. Second, each party must be composed of five people. In their specific answer, the generals chose to claim equal rights and a separate, as well as independent, entity from Son Sann. Furthermore, the generals addressed their reply to the KPNLF president with only a simple mention of His Excellency Son Sann. They omitted the usual and official title of President of the KPNLF. For Son Sann, Gen Sak´s reply was equivalent to an insult and therefore unacceptable.

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[125] Dien Del (General) Message, A Son Excellence Son Sann, le 22 décembre 1985.

In the Middle of the Night,
I Secretly Went to Aranhaprateth

Although the prospect of a rapid meeting between the two KPNLF leaders was out of reach, each party tried hard to keep control over the Cambodian refugees living in the camps, especially in Site 2, the largest refugee camp at the border. For Son Sann, this population's support was priceless. He needed to show the world that, despite the dissidence, he was still the legitimate leader of the KPNLF. In principle, the support was mostly political, as the refugees lived on Thai soil and were provided food and shelter by the United Nations.

Access to the refugee camps mattered to each of us. We all depended on the Thai authorities. Since the dissent, our request to visit Site 2 had been denied. Ultimately, I was secretly sent to Aranyaprathet, the border town, to help deliver information and

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[126] Sak Sutsakhan (General) Message, A Son Excellence Son Sann, le 22 décembre 1985.

news to all leaders of the Site 2 refugees[127] so that they could be informed about the situation. With my presence at the border, I would help prevent them from falling into Gen Sak group′s propaganda.

Many international workers lived in Aranyaprathet. They had free access to Site 2. Every day, they went to work in the camp early in the morning and returned to Aranyaprathet late in the afternoon. Among those international workers, I could count on some friends to carry my messages to Site 2 and deliver them to Son Sann′s supporters without risking being caught by the Thai military. My presence in Aranyaprathet would facilitate communication between the camp and our Bangkok headquarters.

Secretly, I left Bangkok in the middle of the night without informing Huana, the Thai military staff who guarded our safe house. When I arrived in Aranyaprathet, I went straight to Erna Henrikson′s house, the "White Hair Grandma" as the refugees called her. With many years of dedicated service to the refugees

[127] In fact, the residents of Site 2′s camp were not considered by UN as refugees so they

to her credit, Erna had earned respect and esteem from all: the Thai authorities, the UN workers, and the refugees. Erna had been my friend since I first arrived in Thailand.

I woke her up. I explained to her what had been happening in Bangkok. The next morning, she left me alone in her house with some food. I would spend the whole day hiding in her house until late in the evening. When it was dark, I would get out and drive Erna´s car, a small Subaru, to see friends in different parts of Aranyaprathet and deliver envelopes containing my secret messages to Site 2. In my messages to the camp´s leaders, Son Sann loyalists, I assured them that Son Sann remained in control of the movement and that our group received overwhelming support from our compatriots living in the USA, Europe, Japan, and Australia. Prince Sihanouk still recognised Son Sann as prime minister of the CGDK and president of KPNF. I also gave them some instructions for future actions. Through the same intermediary, I received regular information from the camp about

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were not allowed to go to the third country. They were simply displaced persons.

hostile activities, such as dissidents' anti-Son Sann propaganda. We learned that Gen. Sak´s group put tremendous pressure on the camp´s leaders to rally to their side, threatening to arrest those who were opposing Gen. Sak´s leadership.

Wanted By the Thai Military

In those days, the dissident group benefited a strong support from the Thai military command. Not long after, the Thai special task force, TF 838, became suspicious of my presence in the border town. One morning, while I was eating my breakfast in the kitchen, Erna loudly alerted me from the living room, saying, ˝Mouly, stay in the kitchen, lock the door and keep quiet. Someone is coming for your search.˝ In fact, Erna did recognise the driver of the arriving civilian truck, who was none other than aTF 838´s officer.

A few seconds later, the car stopped. Even though I could not see the Thai man, I could clearly hear the car´s engine and the conversation from the kitchen. The officer spoke to Erna in

Thai. He said he had just wanted to come by to say hello and make sure everything was okay with her. After a short chat with Erna, the Thai officer left. Finally, out of precaution, I decided to abandon my clandestine activities and return safely to Bangkok the same day, after one week of hiding in Aranyaprathet.

Thai Military Controlled KPNLAF

While I was at the border in Bangkok, the Working Group and the Thai military command had tried to settle the conflict. They insisted on the reintegration of Gaffar and Hing Kunthon back into the KPNLF´s ranks, which Son Sann categorically rejected. They also insisted that Gen. Sak retake his position as Commander-in-Chief of the KPNLAF.

Son Sann maintained his position that, under certain conditions, he would return command of his army to Gen Sak. On December 23, 1985, at midnight, he met with Gen Chavalit to confirm his stance, and the Thai general advised Son Sann to find a solution acceptable to both sides. At the same time, TF 838

ordered all KPNLF base commanders to form a 10-man provisional committee under the direct command of Thai military officers while waiting for a quick resolution of the internal rift.

On December 24, 1985, Gen. Sak´s group ordered all KPNLF´s commanders not to make any radio contact with Son Sann´s headquarters, the seat of the Executive Committee, or Comex. Word got out from the border that the Thai had decided to limit Son Sann's responsibility to political and diplomatic affairs only, and to maintain Gen. Sak as Commander-in-Chief of the KPNLAF, with powers to oversee all military and civilian affairs.

On December 25, Son Sann made some concessions. In a memorandum to Gen Chavalit, he proposed that Gaffar and Hing Kunthon take a 6-month vacation leave. On December 26, he requested Gen. Chavalit for authorisation to visit Site 2. No answer from the Thai general. On January 1, 1986, Son Sann declared the dissidents´ PCCS an illegal entity, and he sent Gen. Chavalit another memo bringing to his attention his request to visit Site 2. Once again, there was no answer. Only on January 3, late in the afternoon, did the general´s office reply that they had

received the request, but had not decided. Son Sann regarded the Thai attitude as pressure on him.

Gen Sak Group's Trickery to Prevent Me From Meeting US Congressman Solarz

On January 6, Son Sann met US Congressman Stephen Solarz, a long-time supporter of the KPNLF. Later, in the 1990s, the US Congressman would be one of the architects of the Cambodian peace initiatives. Son Sann complained to his American friend about the internal rift and the Thai pressure. After the meeting, the KPNLF President decided to send me as his personal representative to Site 2 to greet the congressman when he visited the Cambodian refugees the next day, on January 7.

This time, the Thai military authorities gave one aide and me a pass to travel to the camp. I left Bangkok late in the afternoon, and I spent the night at Erna's house. The next morning, I arrived early at Site 2. Many civilian camp leaders were very happy to see me, as my presence gave them some comfort. The

atmosphere was cheerful and encouraging for our supporters. While I was looking for Lay Khek, a faithful Son Sannian and the civilian leader of Samlor camp, two Thai soldiers in black uniforms came to tell us that the Thai colonel, commander of the camp, wished to see me immediately. I thought it must be very important, as we had never seen him alone without the presence of Son Sann in the past.

I agreed to see the colonel, abandoning my initial plan to meet Lay Khek. When I arrived at the colonel´s office, I was served with a glass of fresh water and was politely told to wait. Then the soldiers disappeared. After four hours, I was told nothing important was happening and that there was no need to see the commander.

In fact, it was a trick played by the Thai military to prevent me from greeting US Congressman Solarz so that the US lawmaker could meet only the supporters of Gen Sak. Gen Dien Del, another leader of the dissidence who was living in Site 2 at the time, sent a victorious message to Bangkok, telling his group that I had been detained for four hours by the Thai military, so I finally missed the US congressman´s visit. Despite this trickery,

Gen Chavalit affirmed to American and Chinese officials that Thai policy vis-à-vis the KPNLF had not changed, and that Thailand still recognised Son Sann as the KPNLF President and the Prime Minister of CGDK. Son Sann insisted on visiting Site 2.

Finally, Son Sann Was Allowed to Visit Site 2

On January 14, he submitted a third request to Gen. Chavalit for a 3-day visit. Gen Sak opposed the visit and sent a protest letter to the Thai Foreign Minister ACM Siddhi Savetsila, and Gen Chavalit. For his part, Gen Dien Del, from the border, warned our group of possible incidents during Son Sann´s visit.

This time, despite the opposition, we succeeded. The Thais let the KPNLF President visit the camp, but only for one day, not three days as requested. It was great news for us, as Son Sann´s visit would boost the morale of our supporters. However, the dissidents persisted in deterring our efforts to get in touch with our base, the refugees.

On January 15, Gaffar went to our safe house in Aranyaprathet just to lock Son Sann′s bedroom and take away the only radio set that had been used to communicate between the border and the KPNLF′s headquarters in Bangkok. Finally, on January 17, Son Sann made his first visit to Site 2 since the dissidence took place. A large crowd waited for him in different parts of Site 2, including Nong Chan, Dangrek, Samlor, and O Bok. The Thai military officers who accompanied Son Sann on the visit told us they had also advised Gen Dien Del to come greet the KPNLF President, but the general failed to show up. Son Sann used to tell his international sponsors that he wanted to settle the internal rift in the family term. But the other side seemed to disagree.

Sak Sutsakhan′s Group Wanted Son Sann to Be Just an Honorary President

On January 26, Gen Chavalit met Son Sann. That afternoon, the Thai general organised a meeting so the two opposing parties

could discuss how to settle the internal conflict. Son Sann led our group, which was composed of Neang Chin Han, Gen Thach Reng, Prum Vit, and I, along with others. Gen Sak´s group was composed of Gen Sak, Gaffar, Huy Kunthoul, a former Prime Minister, Thonn Ouk, a former Minister, and others. Gen Chaovalit said a few words to welcome the two parties and then he left, leaving the Cambodians to seek their own reconciliation.

To begin the discussion, Son Sann asked KPNLF Secretary-General Neang Chin Han to speak first, to see which side he would be working for. Neang Chin Han was very cautious, making his rhetoric entirely based on the KPNLF rules, regulations, and policies, meaning that the dissidence was not in conformity with the KPNLF´s constitution. The other side responded by fully rejecting Son Sann´s leadership. They did not believe the KPNLF would be able to liberate Cambodia from the Vietnamese occupation if Son Sann continued to lead the front.

When it was my turn to speak, I asked Gen Sak´s group to explain the legitimate grounds for creating the PCCS to replace the executive committee, which the KPNLF national congress had set up. After several hours of discussion, we made no progress.

As a solution, Huy Kunthul and Thonn Ouk proposed that Son Sann serve as honorary president, leaving the full presidency of the KPNLF to Gen Sak. Their stand was so extreme that no one on Son Sann's side could accept it. In fact, they went too far beyond what the Thai military had decided: political and diplomatic for Son Sann, and military command for Gen Sak.

When Gen Chavalit came to close the meeting, the Cambodians did not know what conclusion to tell the Thai general. Before adjourning the meeting, Gen Chavalit warned the two parties of grave consequences for their division. He said something like this: "Because you, the non-communist group, are not able to unite, Cambodia will fall under the communist yoke again. There is no hope for a free Cambodia. Because you are not able to resolve your internal problem, you ought to wait for the measures we are going to take for you." It was a disastrous day for all of us. We all were ashamed.

Gen Sak Asked to Re-organise COMEX

While we waited for Gen Chavalit to dictate his ruling, on February 2, Gen Sak finally met Son Sann in private at the headquarters of the Executive Committee, COMEX. The KPNLF president told Gen Sak that he was prepared to give him the KPNLAF command, but the President took full responsibility for political, diplomatic, civilian, and financial issues. Son Sann asked the general to help him put order and restore discipline within the KPNLF. Gen Sak did not say whether he accepted or refused the offer, but said he would consult his people and promised to return to see Son Sann again on February 7. But when that day arrived, the general did not show up. He came only two days later.

During the meeting, Gen Sak Sutsakhan listened to what Son Sann said. The general was also receptive. But before he left, Gen Sak handed Son Sann a letter. In the letter, the general outlined his 3-point proposal: first, accepting Son Sann as president of KPNLF, with authority only in political and diplomatic areas. Second, Gen Sak would be commander-in-chief of the

KPNLAF, with full responsibility for military and civilian affairs. Third, an ad hoc committee would be set up to reorganise the KPNLF's current executive committee.

In the letter, what upset Son Sann most was how Gen Sak presented his 3-point proposal. In fact, this time, the general came as the leader of the dissidence, signing his letter with his new title of chairman of the provisional central committee for the salvation of the KPNLF (PCCS), which Son Sann, as president of the front, had declared illegal on January 1, 1986. In addition, removing civilian affairs from Son Sann´s responsibility was unimaginable, as the KPNLF president always based his political action on support from the civilian population, especially the refugees in Site 2. Son Sann insisted that putting civilian affairs under military command would result in the loss of UN assistance and support. Sticking to the principle of neutrality, the UN would deny assistance to any military camp or armed faction. On the other hand, in the minds of Son Sann´s supporters, only the national congress of the KPNLF would have authority to reorganise the front, not any ad hoc committee as proposed by Gen Sak. Because of the disobedient and exigent position taken by the

dissident group, we believed the group was being pushed by outsiders, the Thai military and the Working Group.

KPNLF Fell into a Deep Internal Rift

On February 15, Son Sann convened his executive committee, or COMEX. After deliberation under its president´s leadership, the COMEX endorsed Gen Sak's resignation as commander-in-chief, as submitted in his letter dated December 5, 1985.[128] Just weeks earlier, the general led his group to launch the PCCS. Unlike Gen Sak, Dien Del was dismissed from his positions as KPNLF vice-president, executive committee member´s delegate to military affairs, and KPNLAF chief of general staff[129].

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[128] Son Sann, Khmer People´s National Liberation Front, Décret no. 86/03/FNL, Fait le 15 février 1986.

[129] Son Sann, Khmer People´s National Liberation Front, Décret no. 86/04/FNL, Fait le 15 février 1986.

At the same time, Son Sann set up a military committee composed of Prum Vit, chairman; Keo Chuon, 1st vice chairman; Chea Chhuth, 2nd vice chairman; Im Chhoodeth, advisor; and Keth Reth, ad hoc chief of staff.[130] The committee would assume command of the KPNLAF. The committee's creation signalled to the dissident group that the door to future reconciliation was definitively closed, and Son Sann was determined to confront whatever would happen. Almost instantaneously, we received reactions from the Working Group and the Thai military.

On February 21, Major-General Kasem Tammakul of the Royal Thai Army, whom we had called by his nom de guerre "Huana Keth," informed Son Sann of the negative response from the Working Group. They disagreed with the COMEX's decision to dismiss Gen Sak as well as the way Son Sann had tried to banish the dissident group. Soon, their disapproval was followed by a series of pressures on our group, Son Sann's group.

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[130] Son Sann, Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Décret no. 86/06/FNL, Fait le 15 février 1986.

In Beijing, Son Sann Complained About the Rift But the Chinese Advised Reconciling.

From March 15 to 21, 1986, Son Sann, Khieu Samphan, and their respective parties went to China to see Prince Sihanouk to finalise the CGDK's 8-point peace proposal to settle the Cambodian conflict. Besides the CGDK's collective work, Son Sann raised the KPNLF's internal problems with his two coalition partners. Prince Sihanouk reassured Son Sann of his royal support. Also did Khieu Samphan.

With the Chinese hosts, Son Sann also discussed the KPNLF´s problem. He complained that Gen Chavalit and the Working Group had encouraged Gen Sak and his group to set up the PCCS so that the Thai military and the Working Group could directly control the KPNLF´s army. He suggested that the Thai had created a 10-man committee composed of all KPNLF base commanders. The committee was placed under Colonel Vishu's supervision. Son Sann questioned the committee's purpose, which,

in his mind, would not serve the interests of the coalition government.

Son Sann informed the Chinese that he had invited Gen Sak and Gen Dien Del to settle the internal conflict in a "family´s spirit", but the two generals refused to restore unity. Son Sann guessed that, without external encouragement, the two generals would not have taken such a hostile position. He revealed to his interlocutors that since February 1986, Gen Chavalit had frozen all financial subventions to his party. Unlike the dissident group, the KPNLF President had not received any money, including Chinese cash. Son Sann complained that, while it was difficult for him to see Gen Chavalit, the general's wife, Mrs Chavalit, had come to see him and pressured him to sell the Cambodian embassy land in Tokyo, but in the end, he resisted. Among the three Cambodian leaders of the CGDK, Son Sann categorically opposed Mrs Chavalit´s sale idea. In contrast, Khieu Samphan agreed to sell the land, while, as usual, Prince Sihanouk took the easier position of supporting any solution agreed upon by his two partners, Son Sann and Khieu Samphan.

According to the visit report, Chinese authorities, from the Asia department director of the ministry of foreign affairs to the secretary- general of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, advised Son Sann to preserve KPNLF unity. The Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Liu Shuquing, stressed that, as a friend of the KPNLF, China was concerned about the front´s conflict and confessed that it could not intervene or pass judgment. What China could do was encourage all KPNLF factions to unite so the conflict would not give an advantage to Vietnamese propaganda. As a friend, the Chinese wished to see strong solidarity among the three leaders and within each party in the coalition. The vice-minister added that Thailand was our rear front. We needed Thailand to facilitate the transportation of armed and unarmed supplies to the Cambodian combatants in the fight against the Vietnamese occupation. So solidarity with Thai friends would be imperative for the Cambodian struggle to achieve success. In sum, the Chinese recommended Son Sann work closely with Gen Chavalit.

In principle, the KPNLF president was ready to empower Gen Sak to take command of the KPNLAF, but he also wanted his

men included in the military command. Before he left Bangkok for Beijing, he made a proposal to Gen Chavalit that Gen Sak would be commander-in-chief, with the collaboration of Son Sann´s men, Im Chhoodeth and Chhim Om Yon, in the headquarters, and Gen Thach Reng in the field or in the border area. This proposal was tantamount to Son Sann´s interference in military affairs, which Gen Sak´s group found unacceptable. At this point, introducing Gen Thach Reng into the military command was out of the question, as Thach Reng had spent years criticising how Gen Sak and his associates commanded and ran the KPNLAF. On the other hand, Gen Chavalit probably adopted a strategy of not allowing any Cambodian nationalist army that could gain support from the Cambodian people and fight effectively against the Vietnamese. It is possible that, at the time, Gen Chavalit and his ASEAN partners believed the time might come to seek a political solution to the Cambodian problem; allowing the KPNLF to build an effective army might create a further complicated military situation they could not ultimately control.

In contrast, Gen Chavalit´s policy to keep the Khmer Rouge alive, active, and combative would please China. The Khmer

Rouge would not pose any risk to the political solution, because their genocidal regime in the past had made them the most hated on earth, and because they relied 100 per cent on China and Thailand. Both countries were working hand-in-hand to counter Vietnamese occupation in Cambodia. If China and Thailand told the Khmer Rouge to stop fighting, the Khmer Rouge must stop. I felt Thailand played the China card when it came to its own security, as the Chinese community was taking on more and more significance in Thai society; it played ASEAN and/or American cards when regional and/or global security mattered. I also felt that the emergence of Gen Sak´s group as a new entity distinct from the CGDK, which was under the exclusive domination of the Khmer Rouge, might give room for the US administration to support the non-communist resistance, providing them, at least, with non-lethal assistance. For Gen Chavalit, it was a practical strategy that would enable Thailand to receive aid, assistance, and backing from China, ASEAN, and the USA as well as from other western powers. I estimated that, of all the aid, only 30 per cent had reached the Cambodian resistance; the rest remained in the hands of the Thai military.

Son Sann About to Dismiss Neang Chin Han

For a few months, Son Sann had resisted any pressure. He had not given up his persistent desire to keep the KPNLAF under his control. Although the KPNLF Secretary-General, Neang Chin Han, was working at his side, Son Sann still distrusted him for his links with Gen Sak and the PCCS. In fact, the secretary-general always maintained his contact with the dissidents despite Son Sann´s efforts to make them illegal.

In a confidential note to Son Sann, Neang Chin Han advised the KPNLF president to re-evaluate his personal position vis-à-vis Gen Chavalit and the Working Group. The secretary-general suggested that the president should re-assert himself as the real leader of the KPNLF and the prime minister of the CGDK by travelling to other parts of the world, such as Australia and Europe. In spite of his suspicion about Neang Chin Han´s loyalty, Son Sann agreed with the secretary-general´s advice. His first trip to Australia, after the dissidence, was successful, making news in

the international media and thus turning attention away from the internal conflict within the KPNLF.

Thai Military Expelled Thach Reng from Thai Soil

While he was travelling in Europe, the Thai military took a new step in Bangkok to disconnect Son Sann from military affairs. On June 9, 1986, Huana Mol, the Thai liaison officer in charge of Son Sann's office, told Boun Say, a KPNLF deputy secretary-general, to accompany Son Sann´s military man, Gen Thach Reng, to see Huana Keth (Gen. Kasem Thammakul of the Royal Thai Army) the next day in a Bangkok safe house, at Soi Ari 3.

The next morning, on June 10, Boun Say and Thach Reng went to see the Thai general as told. But when they arrived at Soi Ari 3, Huana Mol told them that Gen. Kasem, busy with an emergency, could not meet them. However, the Thai general had

charged him to deliver the following message[131]"The special activities agreed upon between President Son Sann and Gen Chavalit have come to an end, and have even gone beyond the agreement. Gen Thach Reng's presence in Thai territory has caused a rift between the Thai foreign ministry and the Thai Army. After consultation with competent agencies, Gen Thach Reng is invited to leave Thai soil on June 12, 1986."

The message sounded like a thunderstorm over Thach Reng's head, and he tried to recall that, before he left, President Son Sann had recommended he beg the authorities to postpone any important decision until his return to Thailand. In addition, Thach Reng requested authorisation from the Thai authorities to stay until the end of June. The request was turned down late in the afternoon. This time, the Thai military cut the ground from under Son Sann's feet. Thach Reng had no choice but to leave Thailand.

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[131] Boun Say, Note à S. E. le Président du FNLPK, Document Secret, 21 juin 1986.

The Internal Rift Is Over

Finally, Son Sann decided to end the conflict. By a decree dated January 11, 1987, he renewed his personal delegation of powers and appointed Gen Sak as commander-in-chief of the KPNLAF.[132] The personal delegation of powers meant the general would deal purely with military matters and could be removed at any time. The decree came with conditions.

When officially notified of the decision, Gen Sak returned the decree to Son Sann with his handwritten comments, including mentions such as "Seen," "Notified," and "Accepted," followed by reservations, indicating that the conditions attached to the decree were unilaterally imposed on him in contradiction with the spirit of the ongoing negotiation. He accepted the appointment only in the spirit of discipline and order. Son Sann did not appreciate the general's comments much. Our group guessed that Neang Chin

[132] Son Sann, Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Decree no. 87/01/FNL (Unofficial Translation), January 11, 1987.

Han might be behind the general's reservations because of the longstanding friendly relationship between the two men.

The guessing fuelled more of Son Sann's suspicion regarding the secretary-general's loyalty. Although appointing Gen Sak as KPNLAF commander-in-chief did not resolve all the problems, as each conflicting party still claimed the right to control the refugee camps, it allowed each group to gain some advantage. Son Sann could proclaim to the world that he had ended the internal conflict and restored the unity of his movement.[133] In addition, the KPNLF president could pretend that he was leading a resistance movement with an existing army. For Gen Sak, Son Sann's official appointment gave him legitimacy, moving him out of rebel status within the KPNLF and enabling him to deal more comfortably with our international sponsors to secure more military support.

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[133] Khmer People National Liberation Front, Press Communique, January 18, 1987.

We Have Supporters and Deserters

The situation had not changed very much since Gen Sak was officially appointed as commander-in-chief. Except for the military operation reports he sent, from time to time, to the KPNLF president, the general continued to behave as if he were the leader of his own organisation, independent of Son Sann's authority, appointing, demoting, or promoting high-ranking military personnel without informing the KPNLF president. In addition, the military commanders loyal to Son Sann had no choice but to submit to Gen Sak's authority. Even though they managed to work in parallel with Son Sann´s office. In mid-January 1986, Gen Tach Reng showed me a balance of forces in which 9,372-armed men were declared pro-Son Sann and 3,828 pro-Gen Sak. The loyalists were: Keo Chuon, Prom Vit, Ta Maing or Loeung Sinak, Chea Chhut, and Chum Chheang.

From the beginning, I maintained good relationships with the commanders who pledged 100 per cent of their forces to support Son Sann´s leadership. Later, Liv Ne, the commander of Rithysen

Base, who had supported Gen Sak, joined our group, bringing with him at least half of the troops to our side. Accused of human rights violations, Chea Chhut and Liv Ne were removed from the border area and ordered by the Thai authorities to live with us in Bangkok in 1988. Unable to be separated from his troops, Chea Chhut defied the Thai order, secretly crossed the border, and returned to Cambodia, where he hid and set up his mobile headquarters before he finally joined FUNCINPEC.

If there were a significant number of loyalists, there was also some desertion from our group. The secretary-general, Neang Chin Han, and his deputy, Boun Say, spent most of their time at Gen Sak′s office and less and less in our safe house. In the end, Boun Say resigned as treasurer and deputy secretary-general of the KPNLF. After Boun Say′s resignation, Son Sann entrusted me with charge of KPNLF finances. Before he left, Boun Say handed over to Son Sann thousands of dollars in cash. Boun Say ultimately joined Gen Sak. With Boun Say′s departure, Son Sann foresaw the next desertion of Neang Chin Han. But the KPNLF president could not fire him until he found a replacement.

In the end, They Called Me "Mr Secretary General"

Son Sann began to consult his entourage. If Thach Reng were allowed to stay in Thailand, he would have been named as the new secretary-general. So Son Sann's first choice was Im Chhoodeth, who had remained faithful to him for years and had a good relationship with the Thai military. But Im Chhoodeth declined the offer. When I asked him to comment on his refusal, he said, "I like President Son Sann. He is a good leader. But I cannot work with the Little President." At that time, I did not understand who the Little President was: Son Sann's son, Son Soubert, or Thach Reng. In fact, Im Chhoodeth did not believe he could work properly because President Son Sann would not listen to him and would continue to let his close entourage, such as Thach Reng or Mrs Suon Kaset, influence KPNLF decision-making. Im Chhodeth said he could not work just as a puppet.

After Im Chhodeth refused, Son Sann proposed the position to Chhim Om Yon, who had returned to live in France. In a long reply letter, Chhim Om Yon set out some conditions. The most

important was the possibility of working in close cooperation with Gen Sak, as he wished to create favourable conditions for a full reconciliation between the KPNLF president and his commander-in-chief. The idea did not receive Son Sann´s blessing because the president wanted someone who would die-hard for him and be totally devoted. Working closely with the military was translated into another language as playing double games, with one foot in one camp and the other in another. Moreover, Son Sann was looking for someone who would fight with the military until they stopped challenging his leadership. Several months had passed, and we did not find the right candidate to replace Neang Chin Han.

Meanwhile, I had earned considerable trust and confidence from the president, thanks to the excellent fraternal relationship I had with his son, Son Soubert. Soubert is eight years older than I. For many years, I had considered Soubert as my elder brother.

In January 1988, Son Sann appointed me as his delegate in charge of civil administration of Site 2. My role was to help create a central administration of the camp and to organise an election to choose its leaders. Ultimately, Lay Khek, a pro-Son Sann, was elected as chairman of the central administration of Site 2. It was

probably on Soubert's strong recommendation that President Son Sann offered me the position of secretary-general of the KPNLF. I felt my appointment was based on the rare confidence I had earned from Son Sann, as I had proven my total loyalty to the president for years and worked alongside his son, Soubert. For more than five years, we had been completing each other. If I lacked experience dealing with diplomats or international organisations, I was good at handling internal affairs, with excellent contacts in the camps and among their leaders. For his part, Soubert had benefited from long experience in diplomacy and good relationships with international NGOs and institutions. He had a good command of English and French. In contrast, Soubert was not at ease speaking Khmer in public. At that time, appointing me as secretary-general was the same as having Soubert hold the position. I depended heavily on Soubert.

When the time came for Neang Chin Han to hand over his job to me, I had a strictly private conversation with him in his office. To my surprise, the outgoing secretary-general did not express any feeling of animosity toward Son Sann. He wished me every success in my new responsibility, making clear that our common

mission is not to reap personal profit but to achieve success for the KPNLF. It sounded like a lesson in patriotism. Once I took possession of my new job, people, including staff and colleagues, began to call me by my new title: "Mr Secretary-General." At first, I was so confused that I didn't realise they were talking to me. It took me several months to get used to my new position.

A few days later, we visited the border camps. In Sok Sann, a camp situated at the Thai border in Chanthaburi Province, Son Sann introduced me as the new secretary-general to a crowd of a thousand refugees. The president invited me to speak. For the first time, I made my first public speech in front of the large crowd, outlining the KPNLF's political program and my plan for our movement's future activities. It was an impressive speech for many colleagues who did not know how comfortable I am with public speaking. Im Chhoodeth was the first to congratulate me, saying: "We should have given you this job long ago if we had known of your talent in public speaking." In sum, my first public appearance was successful.

When I left Paris to join the KPNLF at the Thai-Cambodian border, I intended to serve my nation, giving up my life for the

noble cause of national liberation. I never sought individual profit, reward, honour, or high office in the organisation. I felt my appointment as secretary-general was largely accidental, the result of ceaseless internal bickering that marked a dark episode in our resistance history. Mistrust at the top of the leadership allowed external factors to dominate our lives and predetermine our destiny. Foreign powers that supported us had their own agendas, sometimes hard for us to decipher. Back now, 30 years later, I recognise the enormous difficulty of organising a resistance movement from the debris of havoc. I should not blame our top leadership for any shortcomings. By agreeing to engage in enterprises such as fighting for national liberation, they upheld the high value of patriotism and contributed to the common good as much as they could.

Chapter Eight

The Border Camps

(The 1980s)

In the 1980s, when I arrived in Thailand, several camps had already existed. The KPNLF had set up military encampments in Cambodian territory, along the Thai-Cambodian border, first to train its troops and later to help channel relief supplies to the needy Cambodian population who had fled starvation caused by the Khmer Rouge´s rule and aggravated by the Vietnamese occupation. As the population had been growing day after day, the KPNLF created larger camps with infrastructure and services that enabled its inhabitants to live with more dignity, under much more decent conditions than when they were under communist regimes.

In 1982, the Front controlled six camps: Ampil, Rithysen (Nong Samet), Nong Chan, Obok, Nam Yun, and Sokh Sann. Later, two more were added: Samlor Chhnganh and Dangrek. When the Vietnamese wiped out all of the border camps in the

1984/1985 offensives, the camps´ population was regrouped altogether in only one, the biggest camp, named Site 2. In 1988, Site 2 housed over 170,000 inhabitants, whom the United Nations recognised as displaced persons. The United Nations provided emergency humanitarian assistance, including basic relief supplies, because the Thai government did not allow any permanent settlement at the border. But the KPNLF designed another policy not only to provide security, safety, food, and shelter, but also to instil the values of Cambodian tradition, freedom, and democracy in the displaced population.

The Camps on Cambodian Soil

Up to 1985, residents of the KPNLF camps lived in a peace-loving community, enjoying some freedom of movement because they were not confined to any fenced site. Even though not many dared to move far away from the camps for fear of stepping on a landmine, or to cross the border into Thailand for fear of being arrested by Thai police, they upheld Cambodian

tradition, celebrating religious ceremonies whenever traditional events allowed. Older adults went to the pagoda, while youngsters went to school. The United Nations, international non-governmental organisations, and voluntary agencies provided food such as rice, vegetable oil, fish, and fresh vegetables; drinking water; health care; sanitation; and some social services, thanks to the generosity of the international community and donor countries.

Many families had their parents or relatives- fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, or uncles working for the KPNLF as civilian officials or combatants. To maintain its neutrality and avoid assisting armed men, the United Nations distributed food rations only to female residents. Girls 1m20 or taller would receive the rations. This UN policy caused serious problems for some non-combatant families that were composed of male members. It deprived them of food they badly needed. For other families whose members were mostly male, it gave them insufficient rations to feed. I did not know how the UN corrected the issues. But I knew some young boys dressed up as girls to show up when UN personnel processed the headcount so they could receive the ration ticket or the family book, indispensable

documents for food distribution. However, cases like this were very few.

Most of the houses were built with bamboo and thatch. Some military families lived in a very small number of basic wooden houses, built with wood they were allowed to cut in the nearby unregulated forest; many residents grew vegetables to supplement the rations they received from the UN distribution.

In general, each camp ran several departments to provide security, administrative services, health care and sanitation, education, cultural and arts, and other services to the population. A chief, usually a top military commander, headed the camp and held absolute power. The chief was called "Mr Chairman" or "Mr President," or in Khmer, "Lok Prathean." Generally, the chief was seconded by a chief of civilian administration who coordinated all activities and served as the Cambodian counterpart to UN or International Agency personnel in charge of the camp. Many chiefs of civilian administration spoke English or French, or both, or at least Thai. As an exception, Ampil, the military headquarters of the KPNLF, was headed by Gen. Dien Del and Hing Kunthon,

one as military chief, the other as a political leader, even though Gen. Dien Del exerted supreme authority.

In Ampil, we found two former Royal Ballet dancers, Srey Mom and Savay. Both still looked pretty despite many years of hardship under the Khmer Rouge regime. Now in the camp, they spent their energy training a new generation of Cambodians in the hereditary art of Khmer dancing. Savay and her husband, Vanreoun, had created a ballet troupe that entertained important guests when they visited the camp. Ampil ballet was recognised as the best ballet troupe at the border. Actually, each camp formed its own art and cultural group; for example, modern and traditional music bands[134], classical ballet, or traditional opera, a kind of Beijing opera (Lakon Bassac). The group would perform once a week and at every special event, to the amusement of the population. Many foreign visitors who had enjoyed the show praised our policy and congratulated our troupe for contributing to

[134] Artists like Neay Censis, Neay Citro, or Neay Chi Vansuy used to perform in the border camps.

the rebirth of Cambodian cultural heritage, our soul without which life would be meaningless.

In large camps like Rithysen (Nong Samet) and Nong Chan, markets and trading were allowed to operate, using mostly the Thai currency, the Baht. With the connivance of the Thai authorities at the border, Thai goods entered the camps through Cambodian or Thai traders. At the market, we found all kinds of merchandise: household supplies, meat, fish, vegetables, grocery items, medicine, clothes, soda, beer, whisky, and agricultural tools. In fact, for years the two camps had become the centre of goods smuggling between Thailand and Cambodia. We also found noodle shops or mini-restaurants, as well as exchange stores, which we could recognise by the small-scale display at the gate. At the exchange store, people arriving from inside Cambodia came to sell gold they brought in and to buy Thai baht. Those people would buy the goods they needed and then return clandestinely to the interior.

Smugglers' movements helped form two-way networks of intelligence agents for the military operation. In addition, smuggling activities and other forms of taxation generated

important revenue for the camp leaders, enabling them to finance their own armed groups or private armies that made them almost autonomous, if not independent, from the KPNLF's political authority. When he moved from one location to another within the camp, the chief was always escorted by several bodyguards, riding a dozen Japanese motorbikes. Even though the camp residents were living with UN assistance, the smugglers inundated the market with a significant amount of money.

In the two largest camps, Rithysen and Nong Chan, in addition to the market, people could go to the cinema, which was showing, in a large bamboo-built theatre, Cambodian films dating back to the 1960s or 1970s, or Thai or Hong Kong films dubbed into Khmer by local artists.

I studied the Trey Veth, or the Three Vedas

Most residents were Buddhist. But some turned to other traditional or ancestral beliefs, including superstition, magic, and astrology. During my stay in Ampil in 1982/1983, I met many

battalion commanders who regularly came to chat with me after dinner in my guest house. One of them, Keo Vibol, a skinny, humorous soldier, gained extensive experience in field combat. Vibol kept praising his supernatural power. For years, he had developed amazing power that protected his life during deadly battles, thanks to what he called the "Three Vedas," or the "Three Knowledge."

Vibol strongly believed the Three Vedas originated from Brahman. For him, the power he possessed came from Brahma, the god who has four faces. At that time, I was very curious. I wanted to learn more about supernatural power and the Three Vedas, as I had never believed in any power from another world, paranormal phenomena, or animism. To convince me further, Vibol invited me to meet his master instructor named "Master Meach" or "Kru Meach," who was holding an advisory position in his battalion.

One night, I went to see Kru Meach, or Master Meach, in his hut, located in a quiet section of the camp, close to a score of bamboo trees. Meach was a soft-spoken man with dark skin like a real rustic Cambodian farmer. When preaching, he wore a white

robe, leaving his right shoulder uncovered. At important events, he wore a saffron-coloured robe like a real Buddhist monk. When I arrived, he was busy, teaching many groups of students. In the small compound of his hut, a few of them practised a kind of martial art that looked much like Chinese Kung Fu. Meach greeted me politely and took me inside, where a small oil lamp and a few candles lit the room dimly. At the back, I could see a decorated multiple-stage stand full of Brahma´s effigies in carved wood. But what caught my eye was a large statue of Buddha on top of the stand, under a large golden parasol. It sounded very strange to me to involve the Buddha in such a practice.

Meach explained to me that I could attain an incredible power if I were able to scrupulously observe the five rules of the Lord Buddha´s teaching, which were no different from the five precepts of Sila (discipline): not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to commit adultery or to have unlawful sex, and not to drink alcohol. Another important rule is that any disciple of the Three Vedas should not bow to any symbol of spirit or statue other than the effigies of Brahma or Buddha. The Buddha statue should be

kept strictly in a pagoda, not anywhere else. The final rule is that any disciple should not boast of the power they have attained.

To begin our lesson, the master helped me light three sticks of incense and place them in a pot. Then he ordered me to bow down three times in front of the divine statues. He told me to sit in a meditation position and focus my mind on the preaching he was going to perform. Kru Meach grabbed both my hands, which were joined together in a sign of obeisance (Sampeas), and asked me to repeat after him, first, the recitation referring to Lord Buddha: "Namo Tassa Bhagghavato Arahato Samma Samputh Tassa," three times; second, the three interchangeable magic words: "U Ak Mak, Mak Ak U," one time. Once he had released my hands, I had to keep repeating those words in absolute concentration of mind. If I had a profile as a disciple, an "abstract teacher" would admit me, not Kru Meach anymore.

In practice, Kru Meach is just an initiator. The real teacher is an abstract or unseen power that ranges from locally or nationally known spirits, souls of ancient warriors called Little Teacher to the highest or supreme power of deities such as Hanuman, Rama, Narayana, Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, as well as the power of the

two principal disciples of Lord Buddha, Preah Sariboth (Sariputra) and Preah Moha Mogghalean (Mahamoggallana), called Great Teacher. Only an exceptional disciple who has experienced a long practice may obtain the benediction, the protection, and the teaching from the Great Teacher. With the invocation of Buddha and his disciples into this ritual practice, I was utterly confused about my understanding of Buddhism.

I kept repeating the words, "U Ak Mak" and "Mak Ak U" without distraction for a while. Once the incense sticks had completely burned out, I began to feel something in my arms. When I freed both my hands, which had been joined together for a while, from each other, I felt them become weightless. Without the force of gravity, each arm might be flying. I freed them from me, from my conscience. I let them move freely, as if commanded by an unknown power. The movement repeated itself, forming a gesture of greeting or a kind of benediction. At the same time, the words I was reciting sounded different in a way that was incomprehensible to me. When the session ended, Kru Meach told me I had done well and had to continue regularly to develop my power further, as I had now been accepted by the "teacher." I

did not know who my abstract teacher was. Every day, I devoted at least one hour of my time to deepening my knowledge of the Three Vedas. After three weeks of practice, the magic words I had been reciting became clearer and clearer. I recognised the sound that had passed from the incomprehensible ones to the sounds of the Khmer alphabet: Kor, Khor, Kour, Khour, Ngour, etc. It is amazing to notice that while I was meditating, my five senses were still in action. I did not lose consciousness. No spirit possessed me. I could hear what I was saying. I could feel any movement of my body. With continuous effort, little by little, some words in Pali came out automatically of my mouth when I had finished pronouncing my initial "U Ak Mak" and "Mak Ak U." Later, the few Pali words became a complete sentence of verse called Mantra Katha, a kind of poetry or speech that protects its chanter. It was marvellous that, starting from the three interchangeable words "U Ak Mak" and "Mak Ak U" given by Kru Meach, I now could recite endless verses in Pali. In addition, I could choose my topic of learning at my will. If I chose the topic of protection for my security, I had to supplicate the teachers, both the "Little and Great Teachers," to teach me the topic in question. After that, I

recited my reference to Lord Buddha three times with the formula: "Namo Tassa Bhagghavato Arahato Samma Samputh Tassa," and the magic word one more time. Even though I had not finished the magic word, suddenly my mouth recited a verse of protection that sounded like, "Puttham, Thammam, Sangham, Sappa Yanto, Sokhei, Sokho, Sokha, Sokham, etc., endlessly.

Although I did not have any understanding of the Pali language, I could interpret by instinct the verse I was reciting, as the reference to the power of Lord Buddha, His Teaching, and the Assembly of Buddhist monks, as all divinities were called to bless with the mention "Be in peace," and finally as the conjugation of the verb "Sokha" or "Pacify." The language would change according to the topic. To learn martial arts, the language would be like Chinese, and my arms and legs would make movements like Kung Fu. I never checked with any Chinese-speaking people to see whether the language was genuine. But Kru Meach told me that it was ancient Chinese. To learn the art of courting or dating young ladies, the language would be a mixture of Khmer, Pali, and Cham (Islamic Khmer). In Cambodia, for centuries, the Cham had been known for their power of courting.

I Want to Test My Tree Veda Power

Several of Kru Meach´s students had achieved different powers. Some of them who had obtained the power of the divine eye or clairvoyance would become astrologers. Those who had obtained special powers would become healers by just reciting the endless verses. Equipped with the power of the "Three Vedas," I felt safe, secure, protected, and ultimately fearless, though I did not know what power I had earned. When Ta Maing, one of our commanders, reported that his men had taken control of Banteay Chhmar Castle in Tamar Puok district of Sisophon province, I volunteered to join him in visiting the area. In the one-day and one-night journey on foot, through the jungle, I took Kru Meach with me. I thought he would help avert any potential danger. Finally, we did not encounter any problem, so I did not have the chance to experience the might of our Three Vedas.

Believing in the Power of Three Vedas, We Searched for Hidden Treasure

A few months later, Colonel Keth Reth came to tell me that one of his bodyguards, also a Three Vedas disciple, had a vision that two of his colleagues, who had died some years ago, invited him to search for three cases of treasure they had hidden at the time of the Khmer Rouge, at a site near Rithysen camp, close to Sdok Kak Thom temple. At the time, the temple was on Cambodian soil. Now the Thais have moved the border so that Sdok Kak Thom temple is inside Thailand.

The bodyguard assured us that he knew the exact location of the hidden treasure. We needed to arrange transportation and request Thai authorisation to travel across Thai territory from Ampil to Rithysen camp. This was what I did. When we arrived, Keth Reth and I first met with Chea Chhuth, chief of Nong Chan camp, and later with Liv Ne, chief of Rithysen camp. The two men quickly endorsed our project. We thought our venture would succeed. We planned to share 1/3 of the possible gain with the

KPNLF, 1/3 with the two camp leaders, and the remaining 1/3 with Keth Reth and his men. All the commanders accepted that I was Son Sann's personal representative, with full authority to distribute the treasure, and that I would have to take care of the KPNLF's possible share.

Immediately, Chea Chhuth and Liv Ne deployed more than one hundred soldiers to provide security to a dozen workers searching, an impressive force for such a clandestine operation. Once they located the site, a hillock 1 m 20 high, Chea Chhuth ordered his men to remove it right away. While the workers dug the earth, a Three Vedas disciple took the initiative to practice Samadhi, a deep meditation, using the power of the divine eye to see, in an irrational way, that the search was going well. When we had completely cleared the hillock and dug the earth almost 2m deeper, we still did not find the treasure. Our workers were exhausted. When I asked the fellow disciple why we had not found the treasure, he replied that the spirit, protector of the site, was not happy with us because we had not asked his permission before removing the hillock. The spirit blamed us, the disciple continued, for the use of force that was disrespectful. Although

the spirit could not do anything harmful to us because we were important persons, VIP, the spirit decided to move the treasure to another location. We spent all night in the rain and in the open air on an inconclusive operation.

The next morning, Keth Reth and I went to see a medium in a crowded area called Prey Chan. The medium was a woman in her late 30s. By her look, hairstyle, and dress, she seemed like a modern person, incongruous with the irrational world. We presented her with some offerings as required by the routine rite. She began with a very short meditation, invoking a supernatural power. Suddenly, her body started to shake, a sign that a spirit had come to visit and take possession of her. Through her, the spirit spoke, introducing himself as an octogenarian ascetic man. With a vibrating voice and a gesture of an old man, the spirit said, "Eh, children, I'm Lokta Maha Eyssey (Grandpa Maharishi). How can I help you? I'm very busy. I have to go to Kuala Lumpur to witness the ASEAN meeting in Cambodia." Keth Reth explained our failed venture to Lokta, while I secretly laughed at the news of the ASEAN meeting. I thought Lokta Maha Essey should be part of our delegation to the meeting, as the problem in Cambodia now

mobilised all peace-loving beings, including the supernatural world. In sum, the spirit confirmed what the Three Vedas´ disciple had told us just a few hours before. It was astonishing to acknowledge the similarity of the responses of both the Three Vedas´ disciple and the Lokta Maha Eyssey.

Finally, we abandoned our search, feeling deeply frustrated. I was disappointed that the "Three Vedas" did not prove their power as effectively as I had expected. But Kru Meach later advised me that the power depended on how we observed the five precepts of Sila. If we were not able to apply them or if we missed some of them in our daily life, we would be sure to lose the magic powers. I recognised that, in those days, if I could easily apply the four other rules, abstaining from drinking alcohol was very hard for me to achieve. Even though I was not an alcoholic, I would drink one or two cans of beer or a glass of wine at any reception party, or on some special occasion- the only exception. The good thing about the "Three Vedas" was that it convinced me of the existence of the spiritual world. As a Buddhist, I have learned that Brahma is the highest stage of spiritual development before we reach Nirvana. Brahma's four

heads represent the four sublime attitudes: Metta, loving-kindness; Karuna, compassion; Mudita, sympathetic joy; and Upekha, equanimity. When later in the 1990s, I had to write the principles of Buddhist Liberal Democracy for the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), I was so inspired by the four sublime attitudes of Brahma that I included them in one of the Buddhist principles applied to BLDP, meaning to uphold the values of human beings on the same level as individual freedom, human rights, and democracy.

The Site Two Camp

After the Vietnamese offensives in 1984/1985 that had wiped out almost all of the border camps, the Cambodian displaced persons were regrouped in Site 2, inside Thailand. Their situation had dramatically changed. They were now living in a huge location, completely fenced and guarded by Thai rangers, the "Seua Pran," or "Tiger of the Hunter," in black uniforms. Later, the rangers' unit would be named the Displaced Persons Protection

Unit (DPPU). The DPPU had to authorise the movement of the population in and out of the camp. The United Nations, through its agency named the "United Nations Border Relief Organisation (UNBRO) implemented the same policy as when the displaced persons were on Cambodian soil: only providing relief assistance and avoiding making Site 2 a "magnet" that might attract more displaced persons from inside Cambodia. Although we understood the UN and Thailand's policies vis-à-vis our unfortunate compatriots, we still wanted to provide them with development projects that would enable them to become good and responsible citizens in a future free and democratic country.

Once moved into Site 2, the sub-camp leaders remained divided into two groups, despite several attempts by Son Sann to unite them and his decision to reappoint Gen Sak as Commander-in-Chief of the KPNLAF. Ampil and Rithysen, camp leaders, continued to support Gen Sak. Believing they were on the front lines of the resistance movement, they had to give their full support to the military.

When he visited Site 2 on December 17, 1987, Son Sann convened a meeting of the camp leaders, with the participation of

Gen Sak, Gen Dien Del, and Neang Chin Han, to discuss organising civilian institutions, especially establishing a central administration. During the meeting, Gen Dien Del and his supporters still insisted on placing the administration of Site 2 under the authority of the KPNLF military but, in the end, they were forced to bow to the President's final decision. The meeting was heated, as Son Sann was accused by Dien Del for engaging in the intended sale of the land of the Cambodian Embassy in Tokyo, Japan.

In January 1988, Son Sann appointed me to be his representative in charge of civil administration [135]. Taking advantage of a rare moment of unity within the movement, I organised an election for all camp leaders to choose a central committee whose main task was to coordinate all activities of the whole Site 2 camp. Thou Thon and Ngeth Sophon, respectively, the pro-Gen. Sak, civilian chiefs of Rithysen and Ampil camps, agreed to participate in the election. Finally, Lay Khek was

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[135] Son Sann, Khmer People´s National Liberation Front, Décision no. 88-01/FNL, fait le 31 janvier 1988.

elected as the Chairman of the Central Administration of Site 2. I enjoyed my success in uniting all the camp leaders for a while, until tension between the military and Son Sann arose again when Ngeth Sophon and Thou Thon quit the central administration committee. They ran their two camps under the military's orders, creating competition between Son Sann´s supporters and those of Gen Sak. The competition continued until all people were repatriated to Cambodia.

Human Rights Work of the KPNLF

In the past, some of the KPNLF's armed elements violated human rights; their actions contradicted our principles to safeguard, serve, and defend the Cambodian people. Those elements operated independently of the KPNLF´s political leadership because of their lucrative smuggling activities. In connection with the alleged violation of human rights, in February 1988, four KPNLF high-ranking officials, namely Gen Dien Del, Hing Kunthon, Chea Chhut, and Liv Ne, were removed from the

border area by the Thai military. Without our knowledge, the Thai military transferred them to the Thai Special Forces Base in Lopburi. Gen Dien Del and Hing Kunthon were finally released and allowed to return to their base after 24 hours in Thai military custody, in a guesthouse. A week later, Chea Chhut and Liv Ne were transferred to Bangkok and were assigned to live with us in the compound of our safe house, the Mayalap.

In Site 2, the camp´s residents were generally all civilians and totally separated from the military. To remedy the regrettable misdeeds of the past, the KPNLF took serious steps to advance human rights. In those days, the front was probably the only Cambodian resistance movement to focus on human rights while conducting military actions. First, we created a Bureau of Human Rights in the camp, tasked with reporting any human rights violations to the highest authority, producing and disseminating relevant materials or literature, and educating civilians and combatants about human rights. Thanks to the bureau, we got funding from UNBRO to translate and publish thousands of copies of a booklet on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I was probably among a rare and small number of first Cambodian

nationals, in the post-Khmer Rouge era, to translate the Universal Declaration from English into Khmer. We handed out hundreds of copies of the booklet not only to camp residents but also to the Cambodian population inside Cambodia.

In addition, thanks to friends of the KPNLF in the European Parliament, especially Prince Otto von Habsburg, the KPNLF organised an International Conference entitled "Human Rights for Cambodia: Survey and Prospects" in Strasbourg, France, from December 12 to 14, 1988. The objective of the conference was to inform the international community of the human rights situation in Cambodia, as an aftermath of the Khmer Rouge rule and of the Vietnamese invasion. In his remarks, as one of the key speakers of the conference, Son Sann described the human rights situation in refugee camps, the violations by the Vietnamese aggressors, as well as the violations by the Phnom Penh regime[136]. About the KPNLF camps, Son Sann said, "As regards the camps under the control of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF),

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[136] Son Sann, Speech delivered at the International Conference, Human Rights for Cambodia, Survey and Prospects, Strasbourg, France, December 12-14, 1988.

I have always opened them to investigations into the human rights situation by international organisations for human rights. So far, these organisations have helped clean only one corner of the table. I wish to insistently invite all of these organisations to come immediately to my help in cleaning the entire table, as I have been facing many obstacles in my efforts to fight abuses in the ranks of the KPNLF…″

In fact, Son Sann was frustrated that only his supporters, Chea Chhut and Live Ne, were punished for alleged human rights violations. At the same time, the dissident group remained free from suspicion of any violation. In his remarks, the KPNLF President vehemently attacked the Vietnamese occupation forces and the regime they installed in Phnom Penh for their policy of denying the Cambodian people all fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of movement. He condemned the Vietnamese measures such as K5 and K12 as a subtle form of genocide. Son Sann proposed the creation of a ″Permanent International Commission for Human Rights.″ Human rights had become the fundamental inspiration for our struggle against dictatorship and totalitarianism. We believed that only by

upholding human rights would we be able to prevent our country from the resurgence of brutal regimes like that of the Khmer Rouge. In 1991, when we reached an agreement on a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodian conflict, human rights was one component of the accord, which included electoral, military, civil administration, civilian police, repatriation, and rehabilitation components.

The Justice Committee

Alongside human rights, the KPNLF was also preoccupied with the camp´s justice system. For a couple of years, the justice system in the camp had been neglected, not to say non-existent. President Son Sann blamed former Secretary General Neang Chin Han for failing to establish an appropriate system and introduce basic law into the camp. In fact, establishing a justice system in a territory where we lacked sovereignty was quite complicated. However, when the camps were on Cambodian soil, the chief of each camp reigned as an absolute ruler.

In March 1990, Son Sann appointed me to the Executive Committee in charge of Justice, in addition to my responsibilities as Secretary-General. In Site 2, we finally took the initiative to set up a justice committee instead of a tribunal. The committee received complaints, investigated the cases, held hearings, and tried to reconcile the plaintiff and the defendant before issuing recommendations. As we did not have our own law, I bought a set of Thai penal and civil laws from a Bangkok bookstore and brought them to Site 2. I assigned translators to translate the Thai text into Khmer. We applied parts of them at the site. Although it was not a Khmer law, it was still better than having no law. At one point, I was furious with one translator in Dangrek Camp who not only translated the text but dared to sign the promulgation of the law without my knowledge or authority.

The KPNLF Intellectuals

When I became the KPNLF Secretary General, I was seconded by valuable assistants. Dr Lao Mong Hay, an economics scholar who had decided to leave his family and his comfortable life in England, gave me incredible help, especially when I needed to work in English. Son Sann appointed Dr Lao Mong Hay to the Executive Committee as the member in charge of Economics in March 1990. Penn Thol, the elder brother of my friend Penn Thal and the eldest son of Penn Nouth, who was once Secretary of State for Commerce in the 1960s, also left his family in Japan to join us at our office in Bangkok. Penn Thol helped me with diplomacy and international affairs. Penn Thol was appointed chief of cabinet to the KPNLF president. Later, other colleagues, such as Sieng Lapresse, left their families overseas to join our team in Bangkok. Lapresse was nationally known for his distinctive voice, regularly heard on Voice of America (VOA). Lapresse worked for many years as a news announcer in the Khmer section of American radio.

Our Way of Extending Camp´s Education System

Apart from human rights issues, the KPNLF made tremendous efforts in education. We believed that a good education would enable our people to see new horizons far beyond the bamboo fence of the border camp. Thanks to funding from the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation, even before I became Secretary General, the KPNLF had set up a Buddhist Research Centre to study the benefits that Buddhism had brought to Cambodian society and the causes of the Khmer Rouge's rise to power. The centre would train young Cambodians in traditional arts and foreign languages, especially English.

The chief abbot of the Rithysen pagoda, Venerable Pin Sem, and his deputy, Venerable Heng Monychenda, were instrumental in the creation of the centre. Heng Monychenda was a young, intelligent, and hard-working Buddhist monk. We appointed him as the Director of the Research Centre. With the same funding, we created a technical school to train technical workers in subjects such as car engineering, electrical work, and electro-technician

work, and to provide computer training skills to the camp's residents. The English training courses were very popular. Trainees would find jobs as aides to UN or NGO personnel in the camp or successfully pass English language tests to settle in the USA, the U.K., Canada, or Australia.

The Buddhist Research Centre published a monthly newsletter entitled "Buddhism in Khmer Society", and other research papers such as the guide for citizens, the principles of Buddhist Liberal Democracy, Buddhism and the reconstruction of Cambodia, papers on Buddhism as well as papers on Cambodian history, tradition, arts, etc. The centre reprinted the Cambodian dictionary of Samdech Preah Sanghareach Chuon Nath, the French-Cambodian dictionary. I deeply regretted that all those valuable materials were destroyed by a violent fire in Site 2, just before the repatriation took place. With funding from international NGOs, we expanded the curricula of our elementary schools; we set up several middle and high schools that were not normally allowed by UNBRO and the Thai authorities, because our education system exceeded the authorised framework of general education at only the primary level.

When he arrived at our headquarters, Dr Lao Mongo Hay advised me to create an Institute of Public Administration (IPA) to train the future cadres of civil servants Cambodia would need for her national reconstruction. I discussed the idea with President Son Sann, who endorsed it right away. Dr Lao was willing to take care of the IPA. We appointed him as the director of the institute. But Dr Lao was alone, and the institute needed a faculty of qualified members with adequate educational and academic backgrounds, which we lacked. To address this human-resource problem, I first asked the Thai authorities for help.

I met with the deputy director general responsible for International Organisations of the Thai Foreign Ministry. I asked the Thai government to help implement our higher-education policy. We considered whether to train our students in Thai universities or to send Thai professors to train them at the camp. The Deputy Director General told me straightforwardly, "How do you want your people who are just refugees to attend higher education, when even I have difficulty sending my children to high school, not to mention when the Thai villagers nearby your camp have difficulty sending their kids to elementary school." This was

how the Thai official denied our request for help. But despite this discouraging response, we kept finding ways to implement our policy. Once again, thanks to the funding from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, we hired young graduates from France to be professors of the IPA, with only a low stipend, mostly those who were members of a French association named "Agir pour le Cambodge."

The young professors stayed in the Thai border town of Tapraya, in a house we rented for them. To access the camp, we finally managed to get a pass from the Supreme Command of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, which we renewed regularly, because without it our project could not be implemented. The young French teachers taught subjects ranging from law, economics, finance, and international relations to international trade. We provided Cambodian translators because they could not speak our language. Dr. Lao himself spent much of his time teaching constitutional law, public administration, economics, and international relations. In addition, we invited diplomats and personnel from the UN and international NGOs to deliver

speeches on various international issues to the students. We also organised study tours for students to visit different Thai institutions.

We reserved the first IPA class for KPNLF cadres responsible for the camp's departments. Later, students who successfully finished grade 12 were allowed to attend the 1st year of the IPA class. To get English language training for our staff, we sent them to Bangkok or Singapore. In one special case, I remember sending a young Cambodian from Sok Sann camp, a KPNLF cadet in Trat province, for English language training in Singapore. When he left Bangkok, he did not speak a word of English. But when he came back a year later, he spoke the language of Shakespeare fluently, with the perfect accent of a real Chinese-Singaporean.

Normally, we did not have the right to send our staff for training outside the camp, let alone overseas. Instead, we declared them members of our delegations on our busy trips to many countries, such as ASEAN, Japan, Europe, Australia, and the United States. Once they left the camp, we delivered their Cambodian passports. We applied for visas so they could travel to the country where we wanted them to be trained. Some staff

joined our delegation to the United Nations or other international gatherings. We wanted to train them in international relations in the field. On the way back, they obtained Thai visas and became legally documented visitors for the full duration of their visa, which was normally granted for three months. They were no longer illegal displaced persons, so they no longer feared being arrested by Thai police.

Despite the general conditions of Site 2 confinement, for some categories of people, movement in and out of the camp was still possible, especially for smugglers, political activists, and intelligence agents. In the camp, we prepared our agents before sending them out as underground workers throughout Cambodia. They would join our underground network inside the country, taking with them some propaganda materials. The agents would return a month or two later, carrying information about people's living conditions and the country's socio-economic situation. Some might bring photos as proof of their clandestine activities, meeting with our supporters or visiting different places. Many underground workers were interrogated many times by Thai military intelligence units before they were allowed to join our organisation inside the

camp. Some worked for us while also working with the Thai military.

In Site 2, we set up a group of political workers named "National Mobilisation" or the "Rallying of National Forces," led by Sar Sa Ath. The group would recruit volunteers to work as underground activists inside Cambodia. First, they were instilled with the concepts of human rights and freedom, as well as the KPNLF's program and principles. Several times a month, we would organise conferences on the progress of peace negotiations to keep them updated on the country's situation. Keynote speakers included some of our high-ranking officials, including President Son Sann, and diplomats from friendly countries. The group was very active in supporting Son Sann's actions. Later, many activists who, for years, had been jailed by the Vietnamese occupation forces inside Cambodia would join the group after they were released from prison. Those former prisoners would provide us with detailed information about the conditions of the prisoners held by the Vietnamese. Some preferred to stay with us and continued the fight for national liberation. Others managed to find settlement in a third country.

Weekly Letter from the Secretary-General

Once a month, I published a newsletter entitled "Weekly Letter from the Secretary-General" to inform the public, especially our supporters overseas and inside Cambodia, about the KPNLF's political, diplomatic, and military activities. The information we collected from our political activists and secret agents inside Site 2 provided valuable topics for the newsletter. I usually wrote the editorial on the first page and signed it at the end. But from time to time, President Son Sann replaced the editorial with a message to the Cambodian people on important occasions. The newsletter was very popular among KPNLF's overseas supporters, as it gave them updated news about the progress of our efforts to liberate our country. In fact, I decided to publish the newsletter at the request of supporters who had blamed my predecessor for not keeping them informed about our front's activities. Once they learned what we were doing, fellow overseas compatriots would be more motivated and send more financial contributions to support our cause. The initiative earned

praise, but some critics worried I was building up my cult of personality.

The Camp′s Leaders and the Military Commanders

In general, each civilian camp leader worked closely with their military counterpart in the KPNLAF. When the military needed to prepare their unit for a mission inside Cambodia, the civilian chief helped provide logistical support such as rice, canned fish, and other items, in addition to the support the military got from its high command headquarters. Site 2 served as a springboard before the combatants jumped deep into the jungles of Cambodia. Lay Khek was a close associate of Kho Chhean, the new Commander of the 201 Zone. In fact, Kho Chhean had been promoted to full Commander of this Zone since the death of Ta Maing, who died under a Vietnamese attack in Tonle Sap, when he was leading his troops into the enemy′s-controlled area. I liked working with both men very much because they demonstrated unity and remarkable efficiency in their respective roles, as a

civilian leader and as a military commander. Lay Khek had a reputation as a down-to-earth man, easy to communicate with the population, and with a strong personality that, for example, on one occasion, unarmed, he succeeded in persuading a gunman who was robbing a resident to drop his gun and run away. Later in 1990, we appointed Lay Khek as our deputy delegate in charge of the liberated zone. Kho Chhean was the most successful commander, having liberated numerous villages from Vietnamese forces and allowing the KPNLF to exercise authority in what we called our "liberated zone," stretching from the border with Thailand to the region of Thmar Puok, Svay Chek, and Banteay Chhmar. Since 1989, Kho Chhean has maintained his headquarters just a few kilometres north of Site 2, inside Cambodian territory.

On September 30, 1989, Kho Chhean and his men, as well as other KPNLF units, launched a big offensive against Vietnamese and Heng Samrin forces in western Cambodia. The situation along the Thai border was tense, which made us fear back clashes that might force an emergency evacuation of Site 2. The most vulnerable population, such as the aged, pregnant

women, and disabled persons, were on full alert for imminent evacuation. Ultimately, the situation turned out to be a blessing. Not only did we prevent the evacuation, but we also captured important enemy positions. Kho Chhean displayed the trophies his men brought from the battlefields in his headquarters compound. War weapons and equipment, along with a significant number of enemy troops who had rallied to the KPNLAF, were also present.

Punished for Giving Food to Fellow Cambodians

On October 9, 1989, on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the creation of the KPNLF, Lay Khek organised a solidarity day, collecting food parcels from donations by Site 2′s population to distribute to the fellow citizens who had just joined our ranks and rallied behind us. It was an expression of generosity. Although they had been living on the generosity of the international community, the camp′s residents were enthusiastic to show the same generosity to the more desperate defectors. Unfortunately, the solidarity and the generosity of the Cambodians turned out to

be a breach of the UN rules. In fact, UN assistance was intended only for the civilian residents of Site 2. We could not divert it into logistical supplies for our military operations, including feeding the new defectors. Consequently, soon after, the UN officials imposed sanctions against us for breaching the rule. To tell the truth, we paid little attention to the rule because we were under time pressure. We did what we could no matter what price we had to pay.

I was eager to meet with the defectors. I made a special trip from Bangkok to Site 2, and I crossed the border to welcome them. There were 212 defectors assembled for the meeting. They were not professional soldiers. Most were new conscripts, with very low morale and no determination to fight. Many had been rounded up in their villages and then sent to the battlefields without adequate training for the task. The majority were teenagers. Two or three of them came from my native province of Prey Veng. To all, I introduced myself as the representative of President Son Sann, who was busy traveling abroad, especially busy doing his work at the United Nations. I delivered an improvised speech, welcoming them as our brothers and

nephews. I explained the objectives of our struggle and our determination to liberate our country from the Vietnamese occupation, as well as our resolve to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power.

My First Trip to KPNLF's Liberated Zone

After the meeting with the defectors, I was very much interested in visiting some localities in the liberated zone. In fact, we needed to establish a civilian authority there as quickly as possible, which was crucial to the physical existence of our front, as we were one of the stakeholders in the peace process in Cambodia. Our visit would enable us to assess the situation and to work out ways and means of establishing our real, permanent, and effective authority inside our country. During our visit, we would distribute emergency relief supplies to our people who were affected by the transition from a Vietnamese repressive regime to pure Cambodian, liberal rule. We fixed the date of our visit in secret. We planned a two-day visit in Banteay Chhmar district,

and I was to stay overnight there. I was excited about revisiting Banteay Chhmar Castle and the possibility of getting in touch with the local population. My last visit to Banteay Chhmar was in 1983. At that time, I saw only the castle and two or three abandoned houses, with no sign of their occupants. Last time, we made the trip on foot. This time, we prepared oxcarts because we needed to transport emergency relief supplies for the needy population, too.

On October 28, 1989, in the morning, we set off on motorcycles instead of oxcarts, since we left them loading the relief supplies. We had a party of five bikes, each carrying two persons. Kho Chhean rode on one motorbike with me on the back seat. Lay Khek rode on another with Dr Lao Mong Hay. Other colleagues were with other riders. There was no proper road for motorcycles. We went along an oxcart trail, which was very difficult for motorbike riding because it was muddy, and we often had to cross several deep streams. Consequently, we decided to take another trail, a shortcut trodden by our soldiers. This trail zigzagged through the forest of medium-sized trees and the 80 cm-tall grasses. Everywhere there were trees and grasses. I

thought about our valuable natural resources. From time to time, we rode past a few soldiers of our army walking afoot nearby. At one point, we asked them about the trail conditions. "Good, not bad at all, brothers. You should have no problem," they said. For combatants used to more difficult conditions, the trail was not bad. But for us, we had to find our way countless times to avoid tree trunks or branches that fell across the trail, hidden in the tall grasses. Many times, we had to get off the trail. Because it was still the rainy season, several sections of the trail were muddy, slippery, and waterlogged. Very often, our bikes got stuck in the mud. We had to push them. But when our feet got stuck in the mud too, pushing became difficult. After almost six hours of riding, with about an hour for a snack break, we began to reach some rice fields, a sign that we were getting closer to a village. Soon, villagers came out of their houses at the sound of our bikes to welcome us. Boys and girls, men and women were cheerful. We finally stopped at a house that looked much better than the others. In the house, we rested and spent our first night in the liberated zone, which was totally under our control.

Around 3 p.m., we toured the village and made my first contact with the villagers. We first met a notable who introduced himself as "Mr. Karlemarx," a name Heng Samrin officials gave him when they were posting in the district. The notable had bushy hair and displayed a long grey beard and whiskers. His look reminded the Vietnamese and Cambodian communists of Karl Marx, the father of communism. In fact, his real name was Ta Ra, or Grandpa Ra. He was a good storyteller, giving endless accounts of every political regime he had endured. In his sixties, Ta Ra was fit as a fiddle. Married to two women who lived under the same roof, they had a crowded house full of kids. Greeting us, Ta Ra called out to his ladies to bring cotton thread and tie it around our wrists. Tying the thread around visitors' wrists is an old tradition among villagers in this part of Cambodia. It is a particular sign of respect and a blessing the local people want to show to their guests. In my native village in Prey Veng province, as elsewhere in most of Cambodia, parents and older adults would tie cotton thread around the wrists of both the bride and the groom only at the wedding ceremony to bless them and wish them prosperity and an everlasting marriage. Ta Ra and his family

addressed us as "Ov or Dad," a traditional sign of reverence for people in authority. I listened carefully to the story of their life under the communist Vietnamese-installed regime. When the regime ended, the solidarity group, a kind of collectivist work unit, it firmly controlled commodity prices. The regime fixed the price of rice very low when it wanted to buy it from villagers. If people protested the low mandatory price, the authorities would retaliate by raising the prices of other necessities. Market forces did not determine commodity prices, as the Vietnamese-installed regime monopolised the commercialisation of all goods, including necessities. Ta Ra told us that although the regime allowed Buddhism to be practised, monks had to pay tax and report to the authorities for all religious activities.

After the greetings by Ta Ra's family, we walked hurriedly to see the Banteay Chhmar Castle, as it began to get dark. For me, visiting the castle was always rewarding. Seeing the fineness of our ancestors' architecture, the bas-relief carvings, and the serene, smiling face of Brahma atop the towers made me proud of my nation's glorious past. I felt that any hardship I had endured over the last seven years of my life in the service of the KPNLF

was painless. At the sight of the castle, I felt dignified as a Cambodian, a full-fledged member, and saw myself as equal to anyone on earth. My feeling was in contrast with that of my fellow compatriots-refugees who always had the feeling of being a lower-class world citizen each time we visited them in Site 2 or in other refugee camps. As refugees, we always felt homeless and desperate, bearing in mind a deep psychological sentiment of discomfort. This sentiment ran deeper at the thought of our own country being occupied by foreign forces.

In terms of terminology, Banteay Chhmar could mean the "Small Citadel" or "Citadel of Cats," as Banteay is translated as citadel or fortress, and Chhmar as "Cat." But if Chhmar is pronounced Chhmall, it means "Small" or "Very Small." Until now, no Cambodian scholars have clarified for me which of the two meanings is correct. Certainly, because of frequent wars, foreign invasions, and internal disputes, no historical records have been continuously centralised and preserved in a permanent location. Many records have been scattered throughout continents. In my generation, I learned Cambodian history from textbooks based largely on the extraordinary work of French explorers and

scholars who studied the stone inscriptions of our temples, written mostly in Sanskrit or partly in ancient Khmer that not many Cambodians can read. Other parts of our history appear in Chinese records, as China was the first foreign power to send envoys to Cambodia. That is why we know that, in the post-Angkor period, the Chinese called Cambodia in the first centuries "Founan" and "Chenla." They named the queen who first ruled Cambodia in the early centuries, Liv Yi, and her husband, King Hun Tien, in full Chinese names. Scholars succeeded in translating "Founan" into Khmer "Nokor Phnom" or the "Country of Mountains." Still, no translation for the word "Chenla." To this day, I have kept requesting Cambodian scholars, whoever I meet, to study further what Chenla means in the Khmer language. It is a disgrace that we know the name of our country in the period between 600 and 800 only from Chinese, without any meaning in Cambodian. This shows how difficult our task is: searching for precise terminology related to the early past of our history.

Banteay Chhmar Victimised by Artefact Trafficking

In fact, Banteay Chhmar was built under the reign of King Jayavarman VII, the great king of the Angkor Empire, when Khmer civilisation was at its apogee between the 12th and 13th centuries. Compared to what I had seen in 1983, the castle looked more dilapidated this time. Villagers told us that the Vietnamese had pulled out several precious bas-relief pieces. This ravage caused the walls to crumble. We walked past disorderly piles of stones that fell from the walls. I was shocked by the devastation. I felt less stressed when I saw the inner part of the castle, which remained solid and standing. Banteay Chhmar, like other castles and temples throughout Cambodia, is a priceless heritage our ancestors left behind and has become, from generation to generation, the soul of our nation. Therefore, protecting and safeguarding this heritage is a sacred duty of every Cambodian.

I was very worried that the vandalism and the looting of our castles and temples were the main targets. I begged our army

and people to protect the castle. Six years later, in 1995, as Minister of Information, I visited Banteay Chhmar again. Concerned by the extent of rampant looting and illegal logging, I reminded my audience at a public meeting of the story of Lovek, an old capital city of Cambodia northwest of Phnom Penh.

After the abandonment of Angkor, King Pohnea Yat moved Cambodia´s capital to Phnom Penh. But when King Ang Chan took the throne, he moved the capital to Lovek, where he found its terrain more defensible. The King ordered bamboo trees to be planted around the city as a protective wall against enemy incursion. In the 16thcentury, when the Thais first invaded Cambodia, they were stopped by the natural bamboo wall. They eventually retreated when they were running out of supplies. A few years later, the Thais invaded Cambodia again. This time, they changed their tactics. Recognising that the bamboo wall was the main obstacle that caused their failure in the first invasion, they spared no effort in demolishing it. Ultimately, the Thais bombarded the wall not with bullets or firepower but with money called "Prak Duong." Probably because they were living in poverty after decades of war, local inhabitants rushed to clear the wall so

they could collect the money, giving the invaders an easy way to enter and seize the capital. It was a painful episode of our history. Now we are facing the same problem, I said to the audience. Our statues, bas-reliefs, and other invaluable works of art, not to mention the priceless castles and temples, have been bombarded with dollars or Thai baht so that some unscrupulous Khmers and their foreign accomplices would loot them and sell them off. When all of our heritage perishes, our soul will vanish, so please protect Banteay Chhmar at all costs, I concluded.

In the Liberated Zone, I Told the Villagers to Wait and Watch our National Flag

The next morning, I presided over a ceremony to distribute emergency relief supplies to the civilian population, which gave me the opportunity to deliver my first public remarks in the liberated zone. I emphasised the tireless efforts we were making to free Cambodia from foreign occupation and to establish a regime that would uphold values of freedom, democracy, and

human rights, as well as the values of our national tradition and culture. Pointing to the Cambodian flag flying over us, as I had several times in the past at Site 2, I said, "Once this flag with blue and red colours and a white symbol of Angkor in the middle reaches Phnom Penh, the whole Cambodia will be in peace." In fact, the KPNLF had adopted the same flag as one when Cambodia was a peaceful country under then Prince Sihanouk. This flag became the national flag again after the constituent assembly, elected by the people of Cambodia in 1993, adopted the new constitution. Somehow, my remarks on the flag sounded prophetic.

I left Banteay Chhmar with a strong sentiment of happiness despite the hardship of our trip. In fact, our journey was 1/3 riding, 1/3 on foot, and 1/3 behind or in front of our bikes, pushing or dragging them. The video footage showing our motor riding across the jungle and our direct contact with the liberated zone made a dramatic impact on our public relations and propaganda efforts. The footage stimulated stronger support from the Cambodian overseas community for the KPNLF. It gave them hope that one day they could return to a free Cambodia. But the

visit's most effective impact was the undeniable evidence of a pro-Son Sann army operating inside Cambodia. In fact, since the dissidence took place in December 1985, there had been constant doubts about the fighting capabilities of our combatants. My presence in the liberated zone, as his representative, helped boost Son Sann's image, as his detractors had labelled him a nominal leader of an exiled resistance group with no connection to any army operating inside Cambodia. According to the dissident group´s propaganda, only Gen Sak commanded the KPNLAF. In fact, Gen Sak was the Commander-in-Chief, but field commanders like Kho Chhean worked diligently in their own ways to gain freedom and independence in the terrain. Instead of organising the visit for his hierarchical superiors in the military chain of command, Kho Chhean did it for me. Finally, I realised that my friendship with the field commanders and our dedication to the people of Cambodia had paid off. Later, when I told war veterans like Colonel Keth Reth about my motorbike ride to the liberated zone, they blamed me for being too "intrepid," since career military commanders would wait until the terrain had been cleared of all land mines before making such an adventure.

If living in the border camps was restricted to a limited freedom, living under communist and foreign occupation rules was an absolute negation of all freedom. People were forced to leave their homes, their villages, and their beloved ancestral lands, travelling hundreds of kilometres in a difficult and dangerous situation at the risk of their lives before they reached the border areas. They did so not because they enjoyed leaving, but certainly because they were denied their rights and freedom, since they could not endure repeated human rights violations and inhuman repressions committed by the regimes. As a political organisation with a sacred mission to serve the Cambodian people, the KPNLF made tremendous efforts to do whatever was possible to alleviate the suffering of our compatriots living in the camps. Our policies aimed to make camp residents feel free, safe, secure, and normal, as in ordinary peaceful times, while waiting for D-Day, when peace and political stability would arrive. Thanks to the generosity of the international community and the good cooperation from the Royal Thai Government, we had successfully initiated and implemented numerous programs to revive our culture, art, customs, and tradition, to provide primary

and secondary education to our children, and to train professional skills to adults, not to mention other social services to support the elderly residents of the camps. In the end, Site 2 became a reserve of potential human resources to meet the needs of a future peaceful Cambodia. From Site 2, we prepared our foothold in the liberated zone. Site 2 was our useful springboard, which enabled us to jump into the heart of Cambodia.

Chapter 9

On the Tortuous Path to Peace

(the 1980s-1990s)

Since the KPNLF was announced on October 9, 1979, I have always remembered that this front army was just one component of the joint strategy to end the conflict in Cambodia. The existence of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces, or KPNLAF, showed that our group was resolved to fight to liberate the country, enable it to regain democracy, and prevent the genocidal regime from returning to power. In truth, we did not know whether our armed forces were capable of driving the Vietnamese troops out of our soil or not. We could only hope to resolve the Cambodian problem through negotiation and international intervention, specifically through the United Nations.

On the contrary, the Khmer Rouge troops, fully backed by China and Thailand, tried to reinforce their forces after sustaining heavy damage under an attack launched by the Vietnamese

troops and the armed forces of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (KUFNS). The troop reinforcement and increase in military dominance on the battlefield over the other partners in the Khmer Rouge's coalition government reinforced our understanding that the Khmer Rouge had opted for a military solution to end the war in Cambodia. If they were still unable to topple the Phnom Penh government and chase out the Vietnamese troops straightaway, the Khmer Rouge was prepared to continue a long-term war of attrition that was nothing but prolonging the Cambodian people's suffering for a long period. As for the Vietnamese troops and the armed forces of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation at that time, after chasing Pol Pot out of power, they tried to dismantle the Khmer Rouge's political and military organisations, while also seeking ways to strengthen the Phnom Penh government's power and gain international recognition.

In that era, I saw that a military solution was the best strategy shared by both Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge to end the conflict. However, exceptional efforts were made to arrange a

meeting between Prince Sihanouk and Phnom Penh government leaders, even though the prince had already joined the Tripartite Coalition Government under Khmer Rouge domination. At the time, I was convinced that any negotiations on the international stage could mark the beginning of recognition of the Phnom Penh regime.

Two Aspects of the Cambodian Problem Certainly Correct

In that epoch, there was an interpretation that the conflict in Cambodia had two aspects: 1. an international aspect associated with the presence of Vietnamese troops and their withdrawal from Cambodia, and 2. the aspect related to reconciliation and compromise among the Cambodian conflicting parties. The Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting held by the end of 1987 began to pave the way for the next step of national reconciliation, thus resolving the first aspect of the conflict in Cambodia.

In the 1980s, our group in the resistance movement was not really happy with Prince Sihanouk's change in political position. Under Son Sann's leadership, our group consistently saw the prince as too frivolous or inconsistent. In particular, while we were busy organising troops and setting up a front to counter Vietnamese troops, the former king not only remained inert but also tried to do the opposite of what we should have done, such as holding talks with Hanoi leaders. According to Son Sann, the KPNLF was established for the prince. In early 1979, in New York, he did not meet Prince Sihanouk personally; instead, Son Sann told the prince he was about to set up an anti-communist resistance movement acceptable to all Cambodian people.

In that era, we young people constantly believed what Son Sann told us. However, later, through analysis, I understood that Prince Sihanouk refused to join Son Sann for his own reasons. After he was free from Pol Pot's rule, the prince adopted a position that, as a former king revered by the Cambodian people, he should remain in a situation where he was able to hold talks with anybody, a kind of bridge that links all factions. Besides, he might

have known Son Sann better than anyone else, since Son Sann was his colleague or adviser for years while he was still in power. Prince Sihanouk may also have known that Son Sann was a veteran politician. The prince may have seen that politicians sometimes did things differently from what they said. Therefore, it was very hard for Prince Sihanouk to accept Son Sann's offer of KPNLF leadership because some key KPNLF leaders, such as Gen Dien Del, were republicans who had overthrown his regime and were still hostile toward him.

I still remember that in July 1982, when Prince Sihanouk paid his first visit to the Son Sann group's camp of Ampil, the camp leaders, mainly General Dien Del and Hing Kun Thon, did not want to come out to greet him and his consort. As I wrote in the previous chapters, in 1981 Prince Sihanouk finally created his political movement, FUNCINPEC. Therefore, two non-communist resistance movements were created separately. Son Sann led the KPNLF, and Prince Sihanouk led the FUNCINPEC. Son Sann started big but finished small, while Sihanouk started small but finished big. The rivalry between the two non-communist

resistance movements also gave the Khmer Rouge a window to reorganise its political and military apparatus for a while, before it vanished totally by the end of 1998, thanks to Prime Minister Hun Sen's win-win policy.

Since January 7, 1979, both the Khmer Rouge and the non-communist resistance movements, as well as their backing countries, failed to dissect the two aspects of the Cambodia problem mentioned above. They regarded the collapse of the Pol Pot genocidal regime as Vietnam´s aggression against Cambodia´s sovereignty. Under this strategy, the only appropriate solution to the conflict was the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. The KPNLF adhered to a stance of fighting foreign aggressors, through a solution involving the United Nations´ supervision of those foreign troops and then the organisation of a free and fair election to select a regime and national leaders in accordance with the wishes of the Cambodian people. During the transitional period, the KPNLF requested that a quadripartite government be formed, with participation from all Cambodian parties, including the Phnom Penh government.

KPNLF Adopts the Same Position as the Khmer Rouge

It was interesting that before joining the tripartite government, the KPNLF was the deadliest opposition to the Khmer Rouge. However, in the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (three-party), the KPNLF became a vehement advocate for this government's position, which was largely influenced by the Khmer Rouge. The KPNLF adopted the same position as the Khmer Rouge: it would categorically refuse to hold talks with the Phnom Penh government. If there were talks, they should be only with Hanoi. This stance mirrored the Khmer Rouge's hardline position. As regards Prince Sihanouk, despite being the Democratic Kampuchea President and top leader of the tripartite coalition government, he constantly sought ways to hold talks with either the Hanoi or Phnom Penh Governments.

As we saw in previous chapters, although Prince Sihanouk tried hard to maintain his independence from the Khmer Rouge, he also needed aid for his movement, especially FUNCINPEC. That was why he joined the Khmer Rouge and Son

Sann in the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea. In fact, if the prince had his own contrivances to conduct political activities himself, or if any of the Western powers, or a superpower aside from China, provided him with the means, he would definitely leave the Khmer Rouge. The prince decided to request permission from the US and French governments to live in both countries. However, after receiving no positive answer from either country, and after an insistent request from Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in January 1979, he returned to China. In the end, after many tactical manoeuvrings, he finally chose to join the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea as its leader.

Prince Sihanouk had tried to contact Hanoi leaders to find ways to resolve the Cambodian problem through negotiations. Still, he had been strongly criticised by the Khmer Rouge and Son Sann's faction. In addition, the prince also tried, through his extensive contacts on the world stage, to negotiate with Phnom Penh government leaders. According to Prime Minister Hun Sen, the first tentative Sihanouk-Hun Sen talks were scheduled in France in 1984, but were delayed because of the unfavourable

situation. At the time, both China and the ASEAN countries maintained that Vietnamese troops should withdraw first before talks could take place.

Son Sann′s Faction Criticises Prince Sihanouk

In 1984, supporters of Son Sann and the KPNLF vigorously attacked Prince Sihanouk through many criticisms, whether public or private, that the prince was responsible for the Khmer Rouge′s ascension to power in 1975 and that he continued to serve communist China′s and the Khmer Rouge′s policies. To respond to the criticism hurled by the Son Sann faction, Prince Sihanouk published a question-and-answer document dated November 10, 1984 and a memorandum dated November 15, 1984, counter-attacking that if Son Sann and the KPNLF had really hated the Khmer Rouge, why had they been willing to join the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea with this group and why had Son Sann consented to act as the prime minister of the Democratic Kampuchea? In that document, Prince Sihanouk also

revealed that he had asked to step down as president of Democratic Kampuchea for months. Still, ASEAN, China, and other partners in the coalition government had asked him to continue holding the position. Expressing his views, the prince said he was waiting for their green light to quit. Prince Sihanouk reproached Son Sann, saying he had violated the tripartite agreement reached in Kuala Lumpur[137] by launching an attack on him, with the most ruthless and contemptible words, in the presence of international press. The prince aimed at the KPNLF groups in France and in the United States, in particular at Mrs Suon Kaset, Dr Chhay Hancheng (Son Sann's son-in-law), the group of Cambodians in (Minnesota) the United States[138], and so forth.

The KPNLF faction was disappointed with France's position and attempted to arrange a Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting in 1984. The KPNLF perceived that French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson seemed strongly in favour of Vietnam and the Phnom

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[137] Norodom Sihanouk, Memorandum, New York, November 15, 1984.

[138] Norodom Sihanouk's Replies to Son Sannian Accusations and Questions in Minneapolis, November 10, 1984.

Penh government. Notably, whenever he was prepared to negotiate with Phnom Penh government leaders, Prince Sihanouk always resorted to the pretext of asking for the resignation of the Democratic Kampuchea presidency.

In July 1984, Prince Sihanouk proclaimed publicly that the Khmer Rouge troops had attacked his army. He threatened to relinquish the post or walk away from the three-party alliance. His public proclamation, which was like "killing two birds with one arrow," was a warning to his partners in his tripartite government that, should there be pressure on him, be it military or verbal, he would not be afraid to break away from those partners. It also signalled to Vietnam and the Phnom Penh government that he kept the possibility open of holding talks with them at all times. It should also be noted that since new French President François Mitterrand of the socialist party came to power in 1981, France had tried to encourage direct talks between the two Cambodian rival parties: the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea, or the tripartite government, and the Phnom Penh government.

From 1982 to 1985, meaning since the formation of the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea, the troops of this government had intensified their constant attacks on the Vietnamese troops and the Heng Samrin government forces. Nevertheless, since 1985, Vietnamese and Heng Samrin troops had launched counterattacks vigorously. In the end, the two forces won, pressuring the tripartite forces to give up their military positions on Cambodian soil along the Cambodian-Thai border. Following the breakup, military commanders of the KPNLF, specifically former army generals of the republican regime, such as Gen Sak Sutsakhan, proclaimed publicly that their group had changed conventional war tactics to guerrilla ones. Therefore, stationary military positions were no longer needed.

International Community Accepts New Universal Morality

The military clashes, growing larger and larger, had caused enormous humanitarian disasters. The Cambodian people, who had been victimised by the genocidal regime unprecedented in

Cambodia´s history, were further beset by the fallout of the war. To escape the war, hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees had fled to seek shelter in border areas. Many of them crossed the border to seek refuge in Thailand. They had received food supplies, shelters, and protection from the United Nations. They had brought along their own stories about the cruel crimes committed by the Pol Pot regime when it was still in power. The whole world was more clearly aware of the true nature of the genocidal regime. With the refugee crisis, the international community seemed to accept a new universal conscience and morality; that is, the search for an urgent end to the sufferings of the Cambodian people. The main superpowers appeared to realise that the Cambodian conflict should be resolved through peaceful means, in which there should also be the prevention of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge regime´s return to power and the absolute respect for human rights in Cambodia.

This international current made the Khmer Rouge better understand that its future would disappear from the face of the earth if it failed to reinforce its military forces on the battlefield

firmly. The Khmer Rouge's future lay in military supremacy. Therefore, the most important and easiest tactics were to boost military supremacy over its two other non-communist partners, the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC. With them, the Khmer Rouge maintained only a political alliance. They were unafraid to attack the two partners militarily. As such, clashes then took place between the Khmer Rouge troops and the forces of the non-communist movements. In that era, to the Khmer Rouge, only the military forces could ensure its survival and its presence at the negotiating table at any time to come.

Each Party's Position on Waging War

Vietnam too was under stronger pressure from the international community to pull its troops out of Cambodia. Along with that, national reconciliation among the Cambodian parties also became the key to the political settlement. The Vietnamese leadership used to proclaim that if all the Cambodian parties, after being reconciled and reunited, asked Vietnam to withdraw, it

would pull its troops out of Cambodia straightaway. At that time, the Cambodian parties were still unable to reconcile, specifically the two major parties: the Phnom Penh government and the Khmer Rouge. The Phnom Penh government side took the position of going to war to free the Cambodian people from the genocidal regime. As for the Vietnamese troops´ presence in Cambodia, it was indispensable to help bring down the Pol Pot genocidal regime and prevent this barbaric and cruel regime from returning to massacre the Cambodian people anew. Therefore, the Vietnamese troops were allied forces coming to help protect the Cambodian people, not foreign troops invading Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge party and its other two partners maintained the position that they would wage war to liberate Cambodia from the Vietnamese aggressor troops. With these contrasting positions, reconciliation was certainly extremely difficult. Anyway, countries that wanted to help find solutions to the Cambodian problem raised the idea of reconciling the Cambodian parties.

Ceausescu Advises Khieu Samphan

To Reconcile with Heng Samrin

In August 1982, Prince Sihanouk and Khieu Samphan visited Romania, which was still a communist country at that time, but had good relations with Vietnam and the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea. At a meeting with these tripartite government leaders, the Romanian President advised Khieu Samphan to be reconciled with the Heng Samrin side; otherwise, the Cambodia problem could not be settled. The Romanian president did not believe that the Khmer Rouge could achieve victory through military means. The recommendation was, however, unacceptable to the Khmer Rouge, because its position was to force the Vietnamese troops to pull out of Cambodia first. The Khmer Rouge perceived that if there were no Vietnamese troops, the Heng Samrin regime would definitely collapse[139]. The

[139] Résumé des paroles du président Nicolae Ceauşescu de Roumanie prononcées lors de son entrevue avec Norodom Sihanouk et Khieu Samphan, à Bucarest, en août 1982.

Khmer Rouge was convinced that the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia would clear the way for them to return to power.

In truth, the Khmer Rouge had only followed China´s strategy. China demanded that Vietnam withdraw its troops from Cambodia before there was an international conference on Cambodia. Since October 1982, China and the Soviet Union had been negotiating to normalise their relations. The Sino-Soviet talks opened a new perspective on international diplomacy. Nonetheless, the talks caused some concern to us within the KPNLF, as we were militarily weak. We were also concerned about the red solution to the Cambodia problem. In other words, if the two communist giants, China and the Soviet Union, were in harmony, they could share interests by expelling non-communist groups from Cambodian politics. Along with this concern, we used this so-called red solution in Cambodia as a theme for political propaganda and as a pretext to seek more support from the West.

Hun Sen Says, "Fight, Fight, Talk, Talk"

In 1985, Hun Sen, deputy prime minister and foreign minister of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (Phnom Penh government), assumed the prime minister's position. Immediately, the new prime minister presented conditions for ending the conflict in Cambodia by stressing the need to attack and topple Pol Pot's political and military organisations and to reconcile with groups or individuals who accepted the framework of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Prime Minister Hun Sen (33 years old at that time) certainly conceived that the main enemy of his regime was the Khmer Rouge. If the Khmer Rouge were destroyed, it would be easy to either bring down the other opposition groups or be reconciled with them. The young and new Cambodian leader also unambiguously realised that the major obstacle preventing the People's Republic of Kampuchea from being recognised by the international community was the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia.

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Hun Sen maintained a steadfast position that Pol Pot had committed genocide against the Cambodian people and that if there had been no genocide, there would have been no uprising by the Cambodian people to oppose Pol Pot. The Vietnamese troops had not come to invade Cambodia; they were volunteer troops coming only to help the Cambodian people topple the genocidal regime. If there had been no genocide, there would have been no presence of these Vietnamese troops either.

In principle, the use of military forces to occupy a country was a violation of international law; then, genocide was also a crime that was no less serious than the crime against humanity. That is why Prime Minister Hun Sen used the clear-sight strategy to gain international recognition, standing firmly on the legitimate position against the Khmer Rouge genocide. Moreover, this young Cambodian prime minister linked the Vietnamese troop withdrawal with the perpetual overthrow of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge group. In addition to using military forces to fight Pol Pot, the Phnom Penh government also launched a campaign to seek negotiations in the

style called "fight fight, talk talk"; that is, attacks are attacks mounted to resist or destroy the Khmer Rouge, while talks are talks held to gain recognition. In that epoch, the Phnom Penh government was the only party that could gain most advantages in every session of the negotiations.

Vietnam Refuses to Accept UN, but Agrees To Hold Talks With ASEAN

Since 1979, Vietnam has refused to implement the resolutions adopted by the United Nations at all its General Assembly sessions. Nonetheless, this country had opted for regional forums to hold talks to end the conflict. Hanoi asked ASEAN countries to negotiate with the Indochinese group (Cambodia under the Hun Sen government, Laos, and Vietnam). The ASEAN grouping had not accepted this proposal, as it had avoided recognising the Hun Sen government. Generally, ASEAN had stuck to the United Nations' resolution pressuring Vietnam to

pull its troops out of Cambodia, but it had not completely closed the door to negotiations. ASEAN let one of its members, Indonesia, hold talks with Vietnam. In that epoch, Indonesia played an active role in the quest for peace and stability in the region.

It should be recalled that since the 1960s, Indonesia had lost China′s trust after President Suharto had come to power, following the rooting out of communist networks in the country. Since then, Indonesia has consistently sought to curb China′s influence in the region. Indonesia′s frequent contact with Vietnam initially worried us in the KPNLF, because we thought Indonesia′s initiative seemed inclined toward Vietnam. Therefore, we, KPNLF, were constantly alert to every session of talks between Indonesia and Vietnam.

Usually, every session of talks constituted an opportunity and raised hopes for peace. However, each party used them to advance its strategy and gain an advantage. For the Hun Sen government, the main goal was to gain international recognition at all costs. As this government already had a foothold in Cambodian territory, what was lacking was universal recognition

from the international community. This recognition was indispensable to ending diplomatic and economic embargoes.

As regards the opposition groups, especially the groups of Son Sann and the Khmer Rouge, they continued to maintain the hardline stance; that is, they refused to negotiate with the Hun Sen government, arguing that the Cambodia problem had stemmed from Vietnam's invasion. Therefore, the war in Cambodia was a war of aggression between Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea (the Khmer Rouge), not a civil war between Cambodians and Cambodians. The anti-Vietnamese group perceived that if talks were held with the Hun Sen government, it would be tantamount to Cambodia having two governments: that is, the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea) and the Hun Sen government, which could split Cambodia in two. That was why the coalition government insisted on holding direct talks with Vietnam. Nevertheless, Vietnam definitely could not talk with the coalition government either, because if it talked, Vietnam would have to accept that it had invaded Cambodia, not come to help topple the genocidal regime at the request of the Kampuchean

United Front for National Salvation. As the two sides´ positions were absolutely contradictory, it was difficult to adjust them, anyway.

Since the end of 1985, the KPNLF had been implicated in a critical internal rift, depriving the movement of the possibility of taking part in any further political initiatives. Son Sann had spent much time and energy mounting counter-attacks against the faction of Gen Sak Sutsakhan and Gen Dien Del to wrest back KPNLF leadership. The generals accused Son Sann of dictatorial leadership and nepotism, as well as reluctance to join hands with Prince Sihanouk's movement.

As for me, I (Ieng Mouly) also spent a great deal of time strengthening Son Sann's influence and leadership by organising networks of direct contact with military commanders and refugee camp chiefs to secure their support. In sum, the KPNLF lost almost all self-reliance. Every time he met with representatives of donor countries, Son Sann offered no ideas, only beseeching aid donors to help restore his military power.

Actually, at meetings of foreign ministers, both the Indochinese countries (Vietnam, Laos, and the Hun Sen government) and their ASEAN counterparts presented their own peace proposals. At their 12th conference on January 23-24, 1986, in Vientiane, Laos, the Indochinese ministers underscored two aspects of the Cambodia problem[140]. They included the internal aspect, which required talks between the Cambodian parties on the grounds of overthrowing the Pol Pot genocidal group, without interference from other countries, to achieve an agreement on a general election to be held following the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops. On the external front, it required that the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops be linked to the cutoff of foreign aid to all Cambodian parties. The three Indochinese countries welcomed the continuation of talks between Vietnam and Indonesia; however, they requested that all future talks be directly between the Indochinese countries and ASEAN. The three countries announced to the world that Vietnam would withdraw its

[140] Douzième Conférence des Ministres des Affaires Étrangères du Cambodge, du Laos et du Vietnam tenue à Vientiane, Laos, du 23 au 24 janvier 1986, Points à retenir.

troops completely from Cambodia in 1990. Because the Cambodian problem was split into two aspects, Prime Minister Hun Sen could resolve each aspect separately, without letting one interfere with the other and hinder a comprehensive solution. Besides, with the indication of a clear time-frame for the complete withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia (starting in 1986 and ending in 1990), the Indochinese countries even eased off the pressure of the international community.

ASEAN also proposed a formula for ending the conflict. In general, the formula introduced by those countries supported the principles specified in the declaration of the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK) with key points such as a ceasefire to allow foreign troops to pull out of Cambodia under UN supervision and monitoring; the organisation of free elections, or the exercise of self-determination under UN supervision; reconstruction; respect for independence, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and neutrality of Cambodia; a program to help rebuild the Cambodian national economy, and the socioeconomic development of the regional countries.

ASEAN Asks Tripartite

To Strengthen Unity and Solidarity

In that era, the ASEAN grouping recommended that the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea strengthen its military capability, avoid internal clashes, increase consultation, expand cooperation in all fields, coordinate activities on the battlefield, and, especially, expand psychological warfare activities broadly. ASEAN anticipated that, for 18 months starting in 1986, if the tripartite forces could withstand or counterattack Vietnamese and Hun Sen troops, Vietnam would agree to negotiate a withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia. At that time, ASEAN's position was more flexible than the Khmer Rouge's and China's because the grouping did not demand that Vietnam pull out all of its troops first, before talks.

The important points of the ASEAN formula at that time were as follows:

- Phased withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and ceasefire, starting from the Thai-Cambodian border area;
- Together with the complete troop withdrawal, all of the Cambodian armed forces had to lay down their arms;
- Safe havens should be set up in areas where troops pulled out;
- Repatriate Cambodian refugees under the supervision of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);
- Establish demilitarised zones on Cambodia's border areas between neighbouring countries and along the seaside; and
- Establish an international control commission to monitor all aspects of the political settlement implementation.

During the transitional period, the ASEAN country grouping proposed creating a provisional government of national reconciliation[141] under the leadership of Prince Sihanouk. This provisional government would serve as a provisional administration,

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[141] Secret document, ASEAN Suggested Modalities for Political Settlement of the Kampuchean Problem, February 3, 1986.

replacing the tripartite coalition government and the Hun Sen government in Phnom Penh. In this government, each party in the tripartite coalition government and the Heng Samrin/Hun Sen party had an equal number of members.

In light of this proposal, ASEAN accepted the Phnom Penh government as a party to the talks to seek peace for Cambodia. ASEAN also did not openly state that the provisional government was quadripartite, but rather a provisional government. This meant that, if the Cambodian parties agreed, this government would not even need the Khmer Rouge.

ASEAN asked to strengthen unity and solidarity within the tripartite coalition government because it was badly divided: the Khmer Rouge had seized military supremacy over its two other partners, and there was an internal rift between the two non-communist fronts.

On February 6, 1986, Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Arun Phanupong[142], accompanied by Thai Ambassador Chavat, met with representatives of the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea, consisting mainly of Khieu Samphan and Son Sen (Khmer Rouge representatives), Neang Chin Han, Boun Say, and Son Soubert (KPNLF representatives), and Chak Sarik and Pen Dareth (FUNCINPEC representatives) and asked the Cambodian parties to accept the ASEAN settlement formula for consideration and to present their views before ASEAN introduced it for good. At the meeting, Thai Ambassador Chavat asked both the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC to try to end their internal dispute quickly to prevent outside circles from perceiving our struggle as futile.

At that time, I did not fully understand the internal dispute within FUNCINPEC. However, I could guess from the press that Prince Norodom Ranariddh, a son of Prince Sihanouk and the supreme commander, and Gen Tiep Ben, the chief of staff of the

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[142] Secret document of the KPNLF, Compte rendu de la Réunion au Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Bangkok, le 6 février 1986.

Sihanoukist Army (ANS), or FUNCINPEC Army, were in disagreement. We, around Son Sann, thought FUNCINPEC's problems were no different from the KPNLF's internal conflict. We believed Thai army generals planned to place the Sihanoukist army command solely under Gen Tiep Ben so it would be easier for Thai military leaders to control this army.

As he used to have internal disputes with Gen Sak Sutsakhan, who attempted to place the KPNLF army out of Son Sann's leadership, Son Sann sent a message dated February 8, 1986,[143] to Prince Sihanouk, informing him of bad experiences in the KPNLF and his belief that the prince was able to settle the FUNCINPEC or Sihanoukist Army's internal problem. In addition, Son Sann also expressed his gratitude to the former king for his support to him in the KPNLF's internal dispute.

On February 12, 1986, perhaps to show ASEAN that the tripartite coalition government had maintained good solidarity,

[143] Son Sann, Télégramme à Son Altesse Royale Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk, le 8 février 1986.

Khieu Samphan and Son Sen, on behalf of Democratic Kampuchea, issued a statement voicing support for Prince Sihanouk and another for Son Sann, who was facing the same internal issue. As regards FUNCINPEC,[144] the Khmer Rouge proclaimed that, at present, they accepted Prince Norodom Sihanouk as president of Democratic Kampuchea and, in the future, as president of Cambodia. Besides, in that proclamation, the Khmer Rouge also asserted to the national and international public that Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge) would exert efforts to achieve great national solidarity within the framework of capitalism and parliamentarism, contrary to the genocidal regime in power between 1975 and 1979.

As for the support for Son Sann and the KPNLF, the Khmer Rouge, through Khieu Samphan and Son Sen, briefly

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[144] Khieu Samphan, Son Sen, Statement By The Democratic Kampuchea Party concerning its Position vis-à-vis the Present and Future Role of Samdech Norodom Sihanouk and the National United Front for an Independent Neutral Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), Democratic Kampuchea, February 12, 1986.

proclaimed[145], "The Democratic Kampuchea party regarded the Khmer People's National Liberation Front and its president as a national force both at present and in the future." While the Khmer Rouge fully supported Prince Sihanouk, their support for Son Sann was more ambiguous. They said, "they supported the KPNLF and its president," without clearly naming Son Sann as president, even as Gen Sak Sutsakhan made every effort to replace him. They could support either Sak Sutsakhan or Son Sann as president. This was perhaps because the Khmer Rouge did not want to clash with Thai army generals. In its statement, the Khmer Rouge group neither mentioned its support for Son Sann as prime minister of the tripartite coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea nor voiced its views on Son Sann's future role.

The KPNLF's internal problems were more complicated than FUNCINPEC's because, in FUNCINPEC, neither individuals nor groups dared to infringe on or challenge Prince Sihanouk's

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[145] Khieu Samphan, Son Sen, statement of the Democratic Kampuchea party on the present and future roles of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front and its leader, Democratic Kampuchea, 12 February 1986.

leadership, no matter what. In contrast, within the KPNLF, Gen Sak Sutsakhan and his friends tried to topple Son Sann's leadership and demanded that he serve only as honorary president. The most difficult issue to resolve was that even though Son Sann had removed Gen Sak Sutsakhan from being commander-in-chief of the Khmer People's National Liberation Armed Forces, ASEAN, specifically Thailand, still recognised the general as the top military leader of the KPNLF.

On February 12, 1986, Son Sann, accompanied by Boun Say, Neang Chin Han, and Son Soubert, held a working meeting with Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Arun Phanuphong to exchange views on the solution formula proposed by ASEAN[146]. At the meeting, Son Sann first said that Vietnam did not want to negotiate. Therefore, Son Sann understood that friends were seeking tactics to press Vietnam into coming to the negotiating table. Afterwards, Son Sann took the opportunity to ask Thailand to help restore the

[146] Secret document of the KPNLF, Meeting at the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, February 12, 1986.

KPNLF′s military power. KPNLF President Son Sann said that 18 months was very short and that they were wasting valuable time on an internal crisis. Son Sann told the Thai deputy minister that he had always kept the door open for solutions to the internal dispute. Still, he demanded that, as KPNLF president, he should have the right to political, administrative, and financial affairs. Besides, on February 1, 1986, Son Sann issued a decision stating that General Sak Sutsakhan′s Provisional Committee, called PCCS, was an illegal structure. Responding to Son Sann, the high-ranking Thai diplomat said that, as friends, they could not interfere in a friend′s internal affairs. At every later meeting with donor countries, Son Sann used the forum to ask them to help him regain control of the KPNLF′s military forces, but he always failed.

On February 17, 1986, ASEAN met again with representatives of the tripartite coalition government, or CGDK, to gauge their reactions to the proposed formula for resolving the Cambodian

problem[147]. At the meeting, the Democratic Kampuchea side was represented by Khieu Samphan and Son Sen, FUNCINPEC by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, and the KPNLF by Neang Chin Han, Boun Say, and Son Soubert, without Gen Sak Sutsakhan or his representative present. Responding to ASEAN′s question, Khieu Samphan said that there was no definite answer yet due to the absence of Prince Sihanouk and Prime Minister Son Sann. However, Democratic Kampuchea′s position was that any meetings should be held between Vietnam, the aggressor, and Democratic Kampuchea, the victim. The Khmer Rouge wanted to hold direct talks with Vietnam. They believed the means to pressure Vietnam into talks should be intensifying military activities, in close cooperation with the other two partners in the coalition government. As for the KPNLF, it announced its intention to join ASEAN in seeking solutions to end the war through talks at an international conference, within the framework of the UN General Assembly′s resolution and in accordance with the statement of the

[147] KPNLF document. Compte rendu de la réunion entre les parties du CGDK et les « Senior Officials » des pays de l′Asean, à l′Hôtel Ambassador, Bangkok, le 17 février 1986.

International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK) in July 1981. However, the KPNLF maintained that all talks should avoid recognising what was established by Vietnam's aggression. All in all, the positions of both the Khmer Rouge and the KPNLF had not changed in the least.

On February 26, 1986, ASEAN met with the representatives of the non-communist resistance (NCR) movements, KPNLF and FUNCINPEC[148]. At that meeting, although Son Sann had dismissed him, Gen Sak Sutsakhan was invited to attend and serve as the military leader of the non-communist movements, alongside Prince Norodom Ranariddh. Both Gen Sak Sutsakhan and Prince Norodom Ranariddh spoke about the progress each army had made throughout the country. Gen Sak Sutsakhan described the strong battlefield cooperation among the three armies of the coalition government (Khmer Rouge, FUNCINPEC, KPNLF). At the same time, Prince Norodom Ranariddh mentioned the assistance

[148] KPNLF document. Compte rendu de la réunion entre les parties du CGDK et les «Senior Officials» des pays de l'Asean, à l'Hôtel Ambassador, Bangkok, le 17 février 1986.

and some cooperation from the Phnom Penh government's troops to the Sihanoukist Army. At that time, the ASEAN representatives advised them to intensify propaganda as well as political and diplomatic pressure. Through this meeting, ASEAN clearly showed its support for Gen Sak Sutsakhan despite Son Sann's efforts to dismiss him.

Tripartite's Eight-Point Peace Plan

Son Sann travelled with Khieu Samphan from Bangkok to Beijing to meet Prince Sihanouk from March 15 to 21, 1986, to exchange views on a proposal for a political settlement for the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea. On March 17, 1986, in Beijing, the leaders of the coalition government, or CGDK, agreed to issue an Eight-Point Peace Plan[149] in reference to the

[149] Khieu Samphan, Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, Son Sann, Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea's Proposal for A Political Settlement to the Problem of Kampuchea, Beijing, March 17, 1986.

UN General Assembly's resolution and in line with the International Conference on Kampuchea's 1981 statement. Notably, the coalition government did not demand the total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops as before. This time, the tripartite leaders asked the Hanoi government to hold direct talks with the CGDK to discuss withdrawing Vietnamese forces in two phases. After reaching an agreement on the troop withdrawal, a ceasefire would allow Vietnam to pull out its forces in accordance with that agreement. UN observers should directly supervise the troop withdrawal and ceasefire. Another new key point was that the CGDK, which had previously refused to negotiate, now agreed to hold talks with the Phnom Penh government of Prime Minister Hun Sen. However, the talks to set up a quadripartite coalition government of Cambodia, with Prince Sihanouk as president and Son Sann as prime minister, should only be held after Vietnam withdrew its troops in the first phase. This quadripartite coalition government of Cambodia would hold elections under the supervision of UN observers.

In the blueprint for setting up the government, the posts of president and prime minister were also arranged (because of the president's existence, the prime minister was not a head of government with full rights as usual). The key point was that the Khmer Rouge party should be part of the quadripartite coalition government, which the ASEAN formula did not clearly specify. Besides, in the ASEAN proposal, there was no mention of Son Sann′s future role, but only that the provisional national government would be under the leadership of Prince Sihanouk. The Eight-point Peace Proposal issued in Beijing was intended to further confirm the CGDK partners′ support for Son Sann′s leadership role, which Gen Sak Sutsakhan′s faction was undermining. Therefore, this proposed Eight-point Peace Plan, including the quadripartite coalition government, showed unity to the world.

Remind China about the KPNLF Internal Rift

In Beijing, the leaders of the CGDK, namely Prince Sihanouk, Son Sann, and Khieu Samphan, presented the Eight-point Peace Proposal to Chinese leaders. At a meeting with him, Hu Yaobang[150], Secretary-General of the Communist Party of China, lauded Prince Sihanouk and his partners for their good cooperation, which had gone so far as to issue the Eight-point Peace Proposal. This historic brainchild could help settle the Cambodian conflict politically and normalise the situation in Southeast Asia. However, he added that the conditions for settlement were not enough because the Cambodian problem was an international one. In turn, Son Sann did not raise the Eight-point Peace Proposal as a key issue, but instead revealed internal problems within the KPNLF. Son Sann mainly said that since

[150] Khieu Samphan, Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, Son Sann, Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea's Proposal for A Political Settlement to the Problem of Kampuchea, Beijing, March 17, 1986.

December last year, following his successful visit to friendly China, he had faced internal disputes within the KPNLF, causing a great loss of time and energy.

In response, Hu Yaobang said it was most difficult to talk about or comment on internal problems. Nevertheless, China could highlight two points: 1. China recognised His Excellency Son Sann as a patriot and a nation-loving resistance fighter, and 2. China noted that His Excellency Son Sann was an old friend and a good friend of China. China never changed this second point. As for Prince Sihanouk, he tried to reassure and reaffirm that there was no major problem within the CGDK, except for some insignificant or minor issues that Cambodians could resolve among themselves. He asked the Chinese leader not to worry about the unity and solidarity of all the parties in the CGDK.

The next morning, Son Sann and the KPNLF delegation met with Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Liu Shuqing. At the meeting, Son Sann openly protested that the Thai military was using the KPNLF internal problem as a pretext to exert direct control over the

KPNLF army[151]. He also informed the deputy foreign minister that, while waiting for the conflict settlement, the Thai military had already convened a meeting of 10 KPNLF army commanders to set up a military committee called the "10 Commander-Committee" to lead the KPNLAF under the control of a Thai colonel named Colonel Vishu[152]. The KPNLF President feared this action might allow the Thai military to use the KPNLAF to carry out other activities contrary to the aspirations of the CGDK or the spirit of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration. He added that the Thai military had also ceased providing his party with Chinese financial assistance.

In his reply, the Chinese deputy foreign minister asked Son Sann to settle the internal problem quickly, in accordance with the advice of Gen Chavalit, who had already divided responsibility with Son Sann, as prime minister, for diplomatic and political affairs,

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[151] Notes d'entretien politique entre S.E. Son Sann, Premier ministre du CGKD et S.E. Liu Shuqin, vice-ministre A.E. de la RPC, Beijing, le 19 mars 1986.

[152] Some of our Cambodians called Vishu, while the others Visnu. This name was secret, while the real one was Surayuth Chulanond. In 2006, Surayuth Chulanond assumed the post of Prime Minister following the military coup that ousted Thaksin Shinawatra from power.

and Gen Sak Sutsakhan as army commander. In fact, both Son Sann and Gen Sak Sutsakhan confirmed that they had accepted Chavalit's advice. However, they still disagreed over how to manage military funding and control refugee camps. As movement president, Son Sann believed he should be responsible for all expenses, including military ones. Moreover, the president also needed the power to "control" refugee camps because his political support came from there. With refugees' support in those camps, Son Sann could claim that the "Cambodian people" supported him. In fact, control of those refugee camps meant he could receive only political support, since the Thai authorities and the United Nations effectively and directly controlled the camps. Gen Sak Sutsakhan also needed power to "control" the refugee camps because he could recruit combatants there to serve the army. Moreover, camp chiefs could take food or material aid left over from distribution to refugees to support political or military activities, depending on their own tendencies, even though they were under the control of Thai and United Nations authorities.

In that era, China provided three kinds of aid to the KPNLF aside from its diplomatic support to the entire CGDK. These included military aid—weapons, ammunition, and material aid — and diplomatic aid. The Thai military received the Chinese military aid and delivered it to the KPNLF at the latter´s request. The material aid consisted mainly of canned food, hoes, spades, office supplies, and clothes. With Thai military authorisation, the Chinese delivered this aid to the KPNLF. For diplomatic support, the Chinese Embassy provided a secret fund directly to Son Sann to carry out the diplomatic mission. China kept this secret fund from everyone, including the Thais, except Chinese embassy officials in Bangkok. In 1985-1986, the material aid China gave to the KPNLF was worth one million yuan.

At the meeting with Liu Shuqing, Son Sann asked China to give the one million yuan in cash to help create a new special army that he intended to place under Gen Thach Reng's command. Nevertheless, the Chinese side disagreed with the proposal, as it might create further problems with the Thai military group, which

had decided not to allow Son Sann to get involved in military affairs. Therefore, the plan to set up the special army for Thach Reng failed to materialise as he desired. As for the secret fund for diplomatic missions, it was USD 200,000 in cash a year. Whenever Son Sann needed the fund, he could assign an official to get it directly from the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok at any time.

First Overt US Aid

The conflict between Son Sann and Gen Sak Sutsakhan took place just as the United States was preparing to provide its first overt aid of about USD 5 million a year to the non-communist movements. The aid was non-lethal, meaning it did not consist of weapons or ammunition for killing people. In fact, even though the United States had not yet emerged from the nightmares about its fiasco in the Vietnam War in the 1970s, it timidly introduced a strategy to help promote the non-communist movements as reliable movements that the Cambodian people could choose to replace the communist groups. The key idea was to unite Prince

Sihanouk's movement and Son Sann's into a nationalist army under a single command, independent of the Khmer Rouge. Gen Sak Sutsakhan might recognise this new political direction of the United States. The General's faction might believe that Son Sann was no less than a Khmer Rouge dependent.

The joint command of the two non-communist armies might symbolise the establishment of a new group of forces having no connection whatsoever with the Khmer Rouge. The Thai military authorities strongly backed this joint command. Thai army generals' support for Gen Sak Sutsakhan as commander-in-chief of the combined forces gave weight to his struggle for leadership against Son Sann. At that time, Gen Sak Sutsakhan asserted that he fostered a close relationship between the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC, unlike Son Sann, who was accused of obstructing cooperation between the two non-communist movements. Anyway, I am sure that if Prince Sihanouk were allowed to choose whether to cooperate with Son Sann or Gen Sak Sutsakhan, the prince would definitely select Son Sann. On his homepage, found a few

years later, Prince Sihanouk[153] wrote personally about the KPNLF internal conflict in that epoch, saying mainly that the internal conflict between the Son Sann faction and that of Dien Del, Gaffar Peang Meth, and Sak Sutsakhan was not actually caused by the proponents or opponents of cooperation with the Sihanoukist party. The Gaffar Peang Meth faction positioned itself as pro-cooperation between the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC, while portraying Son Sann as anti-Sihanouk. In fact, the Gaffar Peang Meth, Dien Del, and Hing Kunthon faction opposed Sihanouk more strongly than Son Sann did. However, it made use of this pretext because it was easy and gave advantages to the Gaffar faction, and because its sponsors, especially the United States and ASEAN, wanted to see good cooperation between the two non-communist parties.

[153] Norodom Sihanouk, Ce "rift" entre le clan de Son Sann et celui de Dien Del-Gaffar Peangmeth-Sak Sutsakhan… a handwritten note (undated) www.norodomsihanouk.info.

I told a US Official, "With or Without US Help, We Will Still Fight"

According to his handwriting, Prince Sihanouk identified one ringleader of the rebel faction against Son Sann as Gaffar Peang Meth, as I already recounted earlier. Prince Sihanouk also understood that these opponents were all members of the republican regime that had ousted him from power in 1970. As for the Thai military, it also had its own reason for supporting Gen Sak Sutsakhan, because all aid to be provided to this new army should go through the Thai Army. All aid to the Cambodian armed forces, both new and old, should pass through Thailand, no matter what. If Son Sann had good relations with the United States at the political decision-maker level in Washington, D.C., the Sak Sutsakhan faction would also have maintained good connections with the US Embassy in Bangkok, thanks to Gaffar's regular work.

As for myself, in that era, I also had some connections with the US Embassy, but only at a lower level; that is, at the Second or Third Secretary level. Among those secretaries was an official

named McCormick. Often, I asked him to help forward our request for US aid to officials higher than him. One day, fed up with the US Embassy's indifference to our request, I told McCormick that we needed your aid, but, with or without it, we would continue our national liberation struggle, for it is our duty as Cambodians. Several months later, I learned through friends in Washington, D.C., that what I had told McCormick in Bangkok had reached the US Department of State.

Son Sann Signs on Paper,

But Money Hand to Someone Else

Agitated to know whether US aid to the non-communist Cambodians would be given through which groups, the KPNLF (of the Son Sann faction) sent a memorandum to Gaston Sigur[154], US

[154] Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Memorandum presented to His Excellency Mr. Gaston Sigur, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, March 26, 1986.

assistant secretary of state (of the rank equal to a deputy minister). The memo informed him that the KPNLF was prepared to present US officials with a formula for aid utilisation once it received an official note from the United States on the aid provision. In the memorandum, the KPNLF underlined that the reasons the United States should assist the non-communist movements were: 1. To respond to Vietnam′s negative reaction to the CGDK's Eight-Point Peace Proposal; 2. To offer encouragement and reward to the CGDK for its military progress on the battlefield and in the international arena. However, in fact, if there were infiltration of armed forces into the country, most of them would be the strongest Khmer Rouge forces, while the non-communist troops were unable to move far away from the border. The memorandum also stressed that we had to resort to guerrilla tactics. In conclusion, we asserted that if the non-communist forces remained weak, the Khmer Rouge would win the war, and the non-communist groups would vanish from Cambodia's political arena. These were the reasons the KPNLF presented to the US Department of State to persuade the United States to provide military aid to the non-communist resistance forces.

The United States eventually provided non-lethal aid. At that time, the Thai authorities asked Son Sann′s representative to sign acceptance documents. However, we only signed the papers, but the cash fell into other people′s hands. In fact, the working group had decided on the cash withdrawal in accordance with Gen Chavalit′s advice. Therefore, the real recipients of the aid were the military led by Gen Sak Sutsakhan, which took a large part, and FUNCINPEC, represented by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, which received another chunk. Simply put, the US aid called Solarz Aid did not fall into the hands of Son Sann′s faction at all. In 1988, Son Sann[155] sent a letter to US House Representative Stephen Solarz protesting that no aid had been seen at any time. He wrote that "military aid was used without being accountable to me and without letting me know of anything. Every year, they ask me to sign to accept documents for cash withdrawal." In fact, as we received funds directly from the Thai military, we were not clearly

[155] Khmer People′s National Liberation Front, Memorandum presented to His Excellency Mr. Gaston Sigur, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, March 26, 1986.

aware of the exact amount of the US funds, how much the United States gave us, how much it gave the Sak Sutsakhan-led faction, and how much Thai army generals kept for themselves.

In a letter dated June 22, 1988, Son Sann also protested that while the KPNLF′s President and staff did unpaid work and while the ordinary soldiers received an allowance of less than USD 5 a day, senior military officers, including those in the office of the KPNLAF High Command led by General Sak Sutsakhan, divided the monthly allowance, with each pocketing from USD 800 to 6,000.

To my knowledge, Son Sann′s faction received one million baht, or USD 40,000 in cash a month, from the Thai military. After that, they cut the fund to 800,000 baht, or USD 32,000, a month in 1985. In 1988, they reduced the fund to just 500,000 baht, or USD 20,000. Finally, they trimmed the fund down to 449,000 baht, or USD 17,960. The Thais claimed that they cut the fund from Son Sann′s faction to give to Sak Sutsakhan′s. News analysts estimated that US aid to the non-communist movements was about USD 12 to 18 million a year.

For years, Washington had tried to find ways to provide aid to the non-communist Cambodian resistance fighters; for some members of the US House of Representatives and Congress, specifically Stephen Solarz, perceived that this aid could help bring further pressure on Vietnam to pull its troops out of Cambodia. Nonetheless, those US politicians did not want to see the Vietnamese troop withdrawal replaced by the Pol Pot genocidal regime′s return to power either. Some US senators were of the view that the holding of power by the Heng Samrin-Hun Sen Phnom Penh government was better than the return to power of the Pol Pot genocidal regime. Therefore, since 1986, an increasing number of US politicians had asked the US Government to begin thinking about improving relations with Vietnam. Such a shift by the United States caused stronger concern among non-communist Cambodian groups about the US's unexpected volte-face in relations with Vietnam.

United States Wants Relations with Vietnam

In 1987, Congressman Peter Kostmayer proposed an amendment to the law on US-Vietnamese relations, called the Kostmayer Amendment. In general, some politicians in Washington sought to improve US-Vietnamese relations, especially the idea from the House and Senate to open a technical office and exchange bilateral relations between the United States and Vietnam. This idea caused us in the KPNLF to feel concerned about the change in the United States' policy toward the Cambodia problem, as it used to assert that as long as Vietnam did not withdraw troops from Cambodia, the United States would refuse to normalise relations with Vietnam.

On May 1, 1987, Son Sann sent a letter to President Ronald Reagan[156] and another to Stephen Solarz[157] to express KPNLF

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[156] Son Sann, [Letter] to His Excellency President Ronald Reagan, The White House, May 1, 1987.

[157] Son Sann, [Letter] to The Honorable Stephen J. Solarz, May 1, 1987.

concern. Son Sann wrote that any small sign to Vietnam of an intention to improve US-Vietnam relations could be regarded as an important step, because Vietnam might perceive that Washington was no longer too adamant; that is, it no longer demanded that Vietnam withdraw its troops from Cambodia. Son Sann requested that US President Ronald Reagan and Congressman Stephen Solarz oppose the idea of improving relations with Vietnam while the Vietnamese troops still occupy Cambodian territory.

As regards this concern, Frank Carlucci, security adviser at the White House,[158] responded mainly on behalf of President Ronald Reagan that the United States was still concerned about the tragedy in Cambodia and that the United States would normalise relations with Vietnam only in the context of an acceptable solution to the Cambodian problem, including the Vietnamese troop withdrawal. Carlucci added that the government of President Reagan would oppose sending any signals to Vietnam

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[158] Frank C. Carlluci, [Letter] to Mr. Son Sann, President, Khmer People´s National Liberation Front, June 15, 1987.

that might lead to the misunderstanding that the United States no longer demanded the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia.

As for Congressman Stephen Solarz, he replied that he too would not change his political position[159]. He still believed that the Vietnamese troop pullout of Cambodia remained a precondition for the normalisation of relations between Washington and Hanoi. Solarz promised to get the United States to offer further aid to the non-communist movements. Nevertheless, Solarz conceded that he would not close the door completely to relations with Vietnam, for almost all countries had embassies in Hanoi. Solarz supported relations with Vietnam at the "people-to-people" level, such as cultural exchanges or visits for mutual scientific research, which he regarded as a channel of communication. In light of this attitude, it could be seen that the United States was considering

[159] Stephen J. Solarz, [Letter] to Hon. Son Sann, President, Khmer People's National Liberation, Washington, DC, June 3, 1987.

both normalising relations with Vietnam and providing aid to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power.

Hun Sen and Keat Chhon in Secret Contact

The Cambodia problem also affected this country's membership in the Non-Aligned Movement. The Non-Aligned Movement was formed in the early 1960s, and its key founding members were Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, President Sukarno of Indonesia, President Nasser of Egypt, Prime Minister Nehru of India, and President Nkrumah of Ghana. In the 1960s, our country, Cambodia, under the leadership of Prince Sihanouk as chief of state, also played an active role in the movement until 1970, when Cambodia fell into the flames of war.

The Non-Aligned Movement brings together countries that position themselves outside both the communist bloc, led by the Soviet Union, and the free bloc, with the United States as its ringleader. Some communist countries, such as China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, and Cuba, are key members of this movement. In

1979, two Cambodian delegations left to attend the 6th Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Havana, Cuba. President Heng Samrin led the Phnom Penh delegation, accompanied by Foreign Minister Hun Sen, while the Khmer Rouge delegation was led by Khieu Samphan, accompanied by Keat Chhon. The two delegations were, however, not permitted to participate in the meeting because the conference had decided to leave the Cambodian seat vacant until after the Cambodian conflict had been settled definitively. Anyway, despite not being able to attend the summit, Foreign Minister Hun Sen took that opportunity to contact Keat Chhon secretly[160].

Cambodia has returned to the Non-Aligned Movement seat since the Paris Peace Accord came into being in 1991.[161] When there was still no solution to the Cambodian problem, the Non-

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[160] In an interview with Samdech Techo Hun Sen by a group of history researchers led by HE Ieng Mouly and Son Samnang on March 16, 2010, Samdech Techo said he had sent a confidential letter to Keat Chhon.

[161] The delegation led by Prince Sihanouk, President of the Supreme National Council [SNC], attended the 10th Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, from September 1 to 6, 1992. I (Ieng Mouly) had the honor of being chosen as a Member of the Cambodian delegation to attend the Summit.

Aligned Movement, at its 6th Summit in Havana, Cuba, and 7th Summit in New Delhi, India, decided to leave Cambodia´s seat vacant and appealed for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Southeast Asia and continued the search for a political solution through negotiations. This movement included the Cambodia issue among Southeast Asia's problems and endorsed all efforts aimed at speedily building a region of peace, freedom, and neutrality.

In a letter dated March 26, 1986, to the foreign ministries of the Non-Aligned Movement member countries, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach asked this movement to leave Cambodia´s seat vacant further in the 8th Summit, to be held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in September 1986, reasoning that it was to avoid differences within the movement. Nguyen Co Thach also asked the summit to continue adhering to the same positions on the Cambodia problem and on the Southeast Asian region as in the previous summits[162]. In the same letter, the Vietnamese

[162] Nguyen Co Thach, Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Letter to Foreign Ministers of Non-Aligned Countries, Hanoi, March 26, 1986.

diplomacy chief also made known that the Indochinese countries represented by Vietnam and the ASEAN countries represented by Indonesia had already started talks. Bilateral negotiations had also begun between Vietnam and Malaysia and between Malaysia and Laos. Through these activities, Vietnam had persevered in having regional-level talks in which any demands for the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces from Cambodia should be linked with the withdrawal of all foreign troops from other countries in Southeast Asia, such as the pullout of the US forces from the Philippines, to turn this region into a region of peace, freedom, and neutrality. Along with this public stance, in which Vietnam linked the Cambodian problem to regional issues to avoid being accused of aggression against Cambodia, the Vietnamese leader also tried to push for talks beforehand between the Cambodian parties, meaning the CGDK and the Phnom Penh government.

Vietnam Asks Prince Sihanouk

To Organize Two-Phase Talks

At 10:30 PM on the night of October 24, 1986, Prince Sihanouk summoned the ambassadors of the CGDK at the United Nations, namely Um Sim, representing the KPNLF; Prince Sisowath Sereirath, FUNCINPEC; and Tiuonn Prasith, the Khmer Rouge, to see him the next day at 12:30 at the Helmsley Hotel in New York, in a working meeting and convey information to their respective leaders. With Khek Sysoda present, Prince Sihanouk informed the ambassadors that, at 11:30 AM on October 24, he granted an audience to Austrian Ambassador Karl Fischer for a working meeting.

At the meeting, the Austrian envoy informed the prince that Vietnam had asked, through Austria, for two-phase talks. The first phase was called the national phase, in which Prince Sihanouk, together with a KPNLF representative and a Khmer Rouge representative (except Pol Pot), was requested to hold talks with Heng Samrin and Hun Sen in Vienna, Austria. The second phase,

called the international phase, would involve Vietnam, together with other superpowers, meeting with the Cambodian parties if the first phase were successful to endorse the agreement among those Cambodian parties[163]. Regarding this proposal presented by Vietnam, the prince informed the Austrian ambassador that, as he was clearly aware of his partners' positions in the CGDK, it was impossible for the Cambodian parties to meet in Vienna. The prince was well aware that the CGDK maintained the stand of only holding direct talks with Vietnam, because the present war was between Vietnam, the aggressor, and Democratic Kampuchea, the victim, not a civil war between Cambodians and Cambodians; nonetheless, should Vietnam agree to hold talks with the CGDK, the party in Phnom Penh could also be part of the Vietnamese delegation. Prince Sihanouk told the three CGDK ambassadors this was just his personal view, because he believed that at that time, Vietnam could not accept the CGDK stand, even though the country was facing many problems and seeking ways to resolve

[163] Um Sim, Propositions vietnamiennes pour une négociation en deux phases, une note sur la réunion de travail, à l´hôtel Helmsley, New York, le 24 octobre 1986.

them. Before closing the meeting, Prince Sihanouk advised the three CGDK armed forces to intensify their military activities to pressure Vietnam into coming to the negotiating table with them.

In response to successive diplomatic initiatives by Vietnam and the group of Indochinese countries, the Khmer Rouge and China, backed by the Thai military, tried to project tripartite armed forces´ hermetic unity by pushing for a meeting of the commanders-in-chief of the three parties. On November 18, 1986, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, as Prince Sihanouk´s representative and Commander-in-Chief of the Sihanoukist Army, chaired a meeting, attended by Son Sen of the Khmer Rouge side and Sak Sutsakhan of the KPNLAF, after which a joint declaration was issued.

The main points of the joint declaration included [164] : expressing pleasure with the military successes in the 8th rainy season; expressing pleasure with the better cooperation of the three armies; agreeing with the military activities in the 9th rainy

[164] Norodom Ranariddh-Son Sen-Sak Sutsakhan, Press Release, 18 November 1986.

season; and trying to strengthen and expand the cooperation and solidarity among the three parties′ armies.

The key point of the meeting was that, aside from showing photos op about unity, solidarity, and good cooperation of the three-armed forces, the presence of Sak Sutsakhan, who was in the process of claiming his independence from the leadership of Son Sann, signaled that the Thai military and the countries supporting KPNLF still recognised the general as the KPNLAF commander-in-chief, regardless of whether Son Sann agreed or not. In truth, as I have already written in previous chapters, by the end of 1986, the Thai military pressured Son Sann to reconcile with Sak Sutsakhan again. That said, on January 11, 1987, Son Sann issued a decree appointing Gen Sak Sutsakhan as KPNLAF commander-in-chief, under some conditions imposed by the president. In fact, Gen Chavalit issued an ultimatum to Son Sann's faction and Gen Sak Sutsakhan to end their internal dispute once

and for all by the end of 1986[165]. In a letter dated December 18, 1986, to the KPNLF president, Sak Sutsakhan pointed out that Chavalit's spokesman had warned that in another two weeks, if there were no compromise, the KPNLF would vanish, come hell or high water.

Ceausescu Asks Sihanouk

To Strive to Find Political Solutions

At the beginning of 1987, Prince Sihanouk went to Romania again. At a two-hour meeting in Bucharest on January 12, 1987, Prince Sihanouk and President Ceausescu exchanged views on the Cambodia problem. The prince, the Democratic Kampuchea president, said that every point on the battlefield had favoured the resistance movements. However, the Romanian president replied

[165] Sak Sutsakhan, (letter) to His Excellency Son Sann, KPNLF President, December 18, 1986.

that, on the international arena, the situation favoured a peaceful and equitable political solution. He told the prince that Vietnam had proposed Bucharest as a venue for a meeting between Sihanouk and Heng Samrin. Prince Sihanouk answered that the holding of such a meeting would be impossible because his partners in the CGDK, namely the Khmer Rouge and Son Sann, would object[166]. The Romanian president further told the prince that Vietnam would reject the charge that it was the aggressor of Cambodia. He said it was reasonable for the CGDK to form a quadripartite government with the Heng Samrin party to demonstrate the national reconciliation. Ceausescu further said that this national reconciliation government would then ask Vietnam to withdraw all its troops from Cambodia in two phases, as the CGDK had proposed. Vietnam would certainly pull its troops out as proposed. Although Prince Sihanouk did not immediately accept the proposal to meet directly with the Phnom Penh party,

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[166] Norodom Sihanouk, mon compte rendu succinct de mon entretien politique, d´une durée de 2 heures, avec Son Excellence Monsieur le Président Nicolae Ceauşescu de la République socialiste de Roumanie, Bucarest, lundi 12 janvier 1987.

subsequent events confirmed that the prince had not relinquished the idea of direct talks with Phnom Penh.

Moreover, the Romanian president's proposal strongly impressed the Khmer Rouge. On January 18, 1987, Khieu Samphan wrote a letter to Prince Sihanouk in the sense that he wanted to discuss Ceausescu´s proposal or ask for the prince´s opinion on whether it was appropriate to meet with this Romanian president in Bucharest.

On 25 January 1987, Prince Sihanouk sent back a telegram advising both Khieu Samphan and Son Sann that they didn't have to go to Romania or come to meet him, since he had already reached a solution with President Ceausescu at the request of Democratic Kampuchea; that is, there would be no direct talks between the CGDK and the Phnom Penh government[167]. In the telegram, Samdech Sihanouk seemed to want to insinuate to his two partners that if they continued to adhere to the hardline stand,

[167] Norodom Sihanouk, Télégramme à Son Excellence Khieu Samphan, Vice-président du Kampuchea démocratique, c/o S.E. Ambassadeur Chan Youran, Pékin, 25 janvier 1987.

they would not need to waste their time worrying about the Romania solution, since he clearly realised that Hanoi would definitely refuse to hold direct talks with the tripartite coalition government, with the Khmer Rouge as its backbone.

As regards the KPNLF, after ending its internal dispute, the front, especially Son Sann, took a new political initiative straightaway to establish the Angkor region as a demilitarised zone of international culture. However, the reconciliation at that time between Son Sann and Gen Sak Sutsakhan was only in appearance, not a genuine compromise, since each faction continued to maintain its initial stand. Gen Sak Sutsakhan continued to manage military affairs alone, without consulting Son Sann or seeking his prior consent, as specified in the annex to the decree appointing the commander-in-chief. As evidence, Gen Sak Sutsakhan immediately promoted KPNLAF officers to the rank of general without the KPNLF president's knowledge. This led to a reminder from Son Sann[168].

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[168] Son Sann, KPNLF President, sent to General Sak Sutsakhan, 22 February 1987.

Son Sann Proposes

To Create an Angkor Neutral Region

Based on the appeal launched by former Austrian Foreign Minister Willibald Pahr as Chairman of the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK) in 1984, Son Sann issued a memorandum on the Angkor cultural region, a demilitarised and neutral zone, to allow international experts to help repair and restore the Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom Temples[169]. The key point was that UNESCO had initiated a proposal to establish international cultural zones endorsed by member countries, especially European countries, including Romania and Yugoslavia. As for India, with its experts already on site, it could also help achieve this initiative. The memo mentioned that, after all had accepted this idea, UNESCO would internationalise the Angkor

[169] The Office of the Prime Minister of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, Memorandum on the conception of an Angkor cultural zone from all the presence of the armed forces, February 26, 1987.

cultural region and be responsible for all kinds of support. In this sense, the airport in Siem Reap town would be open for experts' free entry and departure, and authorisation would be granted for the shipment of materials and supplies to the cultural region, which would be open for visits by tourists from all parties. Nevertheless, the memo also set a condition that no talks on establishing this cultural region should lead to recognition of the Phnom Penh government before any agreement on national reconciliation. The initiative was introduced because Angkor's cultural heritage, which had been damaged, needed urgent repair and should not be under the control of any disputed parties. Internationalising the area could free Angkor-Siem Reap from the Phnom Penh government's control.

In a letter to Prince Sihanouk and Khieu Samphan, Son Sann recalled that the CGDK leaders had supported him as prime minister and had written a letter of support to Willibald Pahr, who announced the request to set up this cultural region in 1984. However, Khieu Samphan appeared strongly concerned about this initiative. In his reply to Son Sann, Khieu Samphan recalled that

the CGDK had discussed this issue under the chairmanship of Prince Sihanouk and that everyone understood that every step of the initiative should be handled with the highest vigilance and should not, in any case, lead to the international recognition of the Phnom Penh regime [170]. Khieu Samphan asked for clearer information for consideration; specifically, the Khmer Rouge wanted to know which friendly countries Son Sann claimed had supported this idea.

In fact, the Khmer Rouge had also intended to capture and occupy this region; therefore, they had no interest whatsoever in declaring it as the international cultural zone. As for Son Sann, he believed the international community could pressure Vietnam and the Phnom Penh government to establish the Angkor-Siem Reap region as an international zone that should not be under the control of any party. This was because the Angkor temple was of enormous cultural value, and its repair and restoration could not

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[170] Khieu Samphan, Vice-Président du Kampuchea Démocratique chargé des Affaires Étrangères, à S.E. M. Son Sann, Premier Ministre du Gouvernement de Coalition du Kampuchea Démocratique, le 24 avril 1987.

be objected to or opposed. If the memo was reviewed, it provided no details for feasible implementation. That was why on June 15, 1987, from Paris, France, Son Sann issued a statement specifying the cultural region as follows[171]:

1. Foreign troops and the armed forces involved in the dispute should withdraw from a 50 km radius of the Siem Reap-Angkor region;

2. Representatives of all the parties were permitted to come and meet freely to discuss the technical procedures regarding the repair and restoration of the temples of Angkor that would not lead to the legal recognition (of the Phnom Penh regime) to bring in international assistance, such as UNESCO aid, and so forth; and

3. Cambodian and UNESCO international technicians were permitted to enter or leave this region, under the security ensured internationally.

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[171] Son Sann, Déclaration de Son Excellence Son Sann, Premier Ministre du Gouvernement de Coalition de Kampuchea Démocratique (GCKD), Président du Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmers (FNLPK), Paris, le 15 juin 1987.

On July 4, 1987, UNESCO Director General Amadou-Mahtar M′Bow responded to Son Sann's proposal[172], saying that UNESCO had paid attention to the preservation and protection of the Angkor Temples and that he had raised this issue for discussion several times at the UNESCO Executive Council′s meetings. The director general promised to do everything in UNESCO′s power to achieve this goal. This political initiative to turn the Angkor-Siem Reap region into an international cultural zone, a neutral zone, and a demilitarised zone devoid of armed forces yielded no fruitful results because all parties to the dispute lacked support. The Phnom Penh party, in seeking international recognition, would definitely reject this idea, as the Phnom Penh leaders could also see the immense value of the Angkor temples and use issues related to the temple area as a subject matter for their struggle to seek international recognition. Therefore, it was an attempt to bypass the Phnom Penh government, which led to a fiasco. However, Son Sann intended to show the international community that he had

[172] Amadou-Mahtar M′Bow, le Directeur général de l′UNESCO, (à) S. Exc. Monsieur Son Sann, Premier ministre du Kampuchea démocratique, Paris, le 4 juillet 1987.

paid more attention to maintaining and protecting the Angkor temples than other leaders. Besides, Son Sann wanted to demonstrate that the KPNLF also intended to have talks among the Cambodian parties, even though his initiative was unrealistic.

In Europe, I Conduct a Propaganda Campaign Again

In February and March 1987, I was assigned a mission in Europe to conduct propaganda to drum up support among Cambodian refugees for the KPNLF, specifically for Son Sann, after the announcement that the internal dispute had already ended. My mission at that time aimed to strengthen support for KPNLF members in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Germany. The main theme focused on Son Sann's leadership attributes and outlined his conditions for reappointing Gen Sak Sutsakhan as commander-in-chief. Actually, the war of words between the two people had continued as always. My activities were limited to responding to the propaganda conducted by the Sak Sutsakhan-led faction, with Yem Sarong, Dr You Kim Yean, Sam Sok, and

others as activists. My propaganda activities vigorously whipped up support among refugees and KPNLF members, making Pong Kim Koan, chief of the KPNLF Information Office in Paris, very proud. On March 16, 1987, Pong Kim Koan sent a letter in French to Son Sann, reporting to him the positive results of my mission[173].

We Do Not Know What the Prince Does on His Trip to Pyongyang

On April 16, 1987, President Li Xiannian and Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang of China sent letters of congratulations on the 12th anniversary of Democratic Kampuchea, with Prince Sihanouk as President, reiterating that the Chinese government and people would continue to provide firm support to the Cambodian people in their sacred cause of struggle against Vietnam´s aggression to

[173] Pong Kim Koan, le Chef du Bureau d´Information du FNLPK, à Son Excellence le Président du FNLPK et Premier Ministre du GCKD, Paris, le 16 mars 1987.

defend the motherland[174]. On the same day, Prince Sihanouk replied, from Pyongyang, that brotherly China and Cambodia were in solidarity and would further their solidarity forever, for they were inseparable comrades-in-arms[175].

In Bangkok, we were unaware when the prince had gone to Pyongyang. It was his past habit that, if he intended to undertake any political activities that would displease Chinese leaders, Prince Sihanouk would leave the country to stay elsewhere, especially in Pyongyang, North Korea, where he had President Kim Il-sung, his close friend, who supported him unreservedly. Before leaving Beijing, Prince Sihanouk sent a telegram to Son Sann asking for a list of names of the KPNLF delegation members who would join

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[174] Li Xiannian, Président de la République populaire de Chine, et Zao Ziyang, Premier ministre du Conseil d'État de la République populaire de Chine, à Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, Président du Kampuchea démocratique, Son Excellence Son Sann, Premier ministre du Gouvernement de coalition du Kampuchea démocratique, et Son Excellence Khieu Samphan, Vice-président du Kampuchea démocratique, Beijing, le 16 avril 1987.

[175] Norodom Sihanouk, Président du Kampuchea Démocratique, à Son Excellence Monsieur LI XIANNIAN, Président de la République Populaire de Chine, et à Son Excellence Monsieur Zao Ziyang, Premier Ministre du Conseil d'État de la République Populaire de Chine, Pyongyang, le 16 avril 1987.

the official CGDK delegation on its visit to China in August 1987. In that telegram, the prince asked for the names of some members of the faction of Gen Sak Sutsakhan as well, not just those from the Son Sann group, in the list of that delegation for the sake of the "supreme interest of the national resistance movement[176]." That is why Son Sann included General Sak Sutsakhan as the fourth member f the KPNLF delegation, after Son Sann, Im Chhoodet, and Boun Say, for the CGDK leaders' visit to China in August 1987[177].

[176] Norodom Sihanouk, Président du Kampuchea Démocratique, à S.E. Son Sann, Premier Ministre du CGDK, Beijing, 11 mars 1987.

[177] Son Sann, Prime Minister, Coalition Government Democratic Kampuchea, Son Altesse Royale Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk, Président du Kampuchea Démocratique, le 27 avril 1987.

Sihanouk Suspends CGDK Presidency

Because of Khmer Rouge Violation

A few years later, in the 1980s, the Khmer Rouge had frequently fomented armed violations against its non-communist partners in accordance with its stratagem to gain battlefield supremacy. The violations included the killing of the KPNLAF combatants, such as the gunning down of a KPNLAF battalion commander named Prum Chamroen in Puok district, Siem Reap province, on February 12, 1987, prompting the KPNLF to issue a written protest. In the letter of protest, Son Sann, as prime minister of the CGDK and president of the KPNLF, warned Khieu Samphan that such an action was deliberate and premeditated and asked the Khmer Rouge to end it immediately for the sake of preserving the solidarity of the CGDK′s armed forces[178]. Aside from the armed

[178] Son Sann, president of the KPNLF and prime minister of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, to His Excellency Khieu Samphan, vice president of Democratic Kampuchea in charge of foreign affairs, March 16, 1987.

violation, the Khmer Rouge also snatched the opportunity to serve its self-interest by attending international conferences or meetings alone, without informing the other two partners, through the firm control of foreign affairs, for which Khieu Samphan was responsible in the coalition government.

In the letter of protest, Son Sann asked the Khmer Rouge to help reinforce the spirit of cooperation within the CGDK in line with this government's common principle[179]. Moreover, the Khmer Rouge also committed violations against Prince Sihanouk's armed forces. This abuse by the Khmer Rouge had caused sufficient reason for Prince Sihanouk to disassociate himself from the coalition and find ways to hold direct talks with the Phnom Penh regime. On May 7, 1987, in Pyongyang, Prince Sihanouk issued a declaration through the international press that he had decided to suspend his duty as Democratic Kampuchea president from May 7, 1987, to 7 May 1988, under the pretext that the Khmer Rouge had

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[179] Son Sann, prime minister of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, to Vice President Khieu Samphan, Vice President of Democratic Kampuchea in charge of foreign affairs, May 7, 1987.

launched attacks on his army.[180] Later, the prince threatened to suspend his function as president of Democratic Kampuchea every 12 months, until the Khmer Rouge changed its policy by ceasing its attacks on his army and ending all kinds of human rights violations in the border refugee camps under their control.

The KPNLF team in Bangkok, which learned of Prince Sihanouk´s decision only through the international press, was taken aback and deeply concerned about the CGDK´s stability. In his message to Prince Sihanouk, Son Sann told him he still hoped the news was untrue, and reiterated that the KPNLF continued to fully support the prince as Democratic Kampuchea's president, with a life-or-death role in the national liberation struggle[181].

Moreover, the KPNLF leader, in his capacity as the prime minister of the CGDK, sent another letter to Khieu Samphan, asking the Khmer Rouge to end this crisis rapidly and begging

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[180] It meant that during these 12 months, Prince Sihanouk ceased playing his official role as the President of Democratic Kampuchea.

[181] Son Sann, À Son Altesse Royale Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk, Président du Kampuchea Démocratique, Pyong Yang, le 14 mai 1987.

Prince Sihanouk to desist from taking such a decision that might cause adverse consequences to the CGDK, in particular for the cooperation of the three armies of the resistance movements. Along with that, Son Sann also recalled that armed clashes occurred between both the Sihanoukist and KPNLF Armies. Especially, Son Sann recalled a killing that the KPNLF had protested to Khieu Samphan through a letter dated March 19, 1987, that had remained silent since then[182].

Khmer Rouge Fears Losing Seat

In Washington, growing demands for the trial of the Pol Pot clique for genocide that had gained more support from many US politicians, in particular from Congress members, were a cause of concern for ASEAN. The Khmer Rouge was strongly anxious about Prince Sihanouk's attitude. They requested to see the prince at

[182] Son Sann, prime minister to His Excellency Khieu Samphan, Vice President of Democratic Kampuchea in charge of foreign affairs, May 14, 1987.

any time. According to news published in Bangkok, Khieu Samphan and Son Sen sent a letter asking the prince to reconsider his decision because the Khmer Rouge feared losing the CGDK′s seat at the United Nations. They promised that they would agree to pay cash compensation to the families of the prince′s fallen combatants[183]. Moreover, Khieu Samphan hinted that he did not believe that Prince Sihanouk had decided to retreat due to the Khmer Rouge′s unfriendly activities. This idea aligned with analyses by some observers who interpreted the Prince′s decision as a political tactic to demonstrate his flexibility and freedom to seek possibilities for direct talks with Hanoi or Phnom Penh[184].

Some diplomats in Bangkok told The Bangkok Post, in a June 5, 1987, article, that Vietnam had agreed two weeks earlier to negotiate with Prince Sihanouk after the prince arrived in

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[183] The Nation, Khmer Rouge Appeal to Sihanouk, June 1, 1987, p. 5.

[184] Nayan Chanda, The Prince Makes Waves, Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 136, No 25, June 18, 1987, p. 48.

France[185]. Nonetheless, in a telegram sent to his son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh in Bangkok, Prince Sihanouk charged that only his detractors could fabricate the story that he had criticised the Khmer Rouge only as a pretext to hold direct talks with Vietnam and the Heng Samrin-Hun Sen government. The prince also pointed out that he had no contact whatsoever with Hanoi, Phnom Penh, or Moscow, and no intention of establishing relations with those capitals. However, he did not completely reject any future meetings, saying, "If the other party asks to see me on any day in the future, I will not forget to inform the public." As regards Khieu Samphan's request for an audience, Prince Sihanouk refused, pretexting that he was having a mental crisis that had grown serious with each passing day.

It was true that Prince Sihanouk would certainly be unable to establish direct contact with the Phnom Penh government if he continued to carry out his official function as president of Democratic Kampuchea. This was because China and the Khmer

[185] Bangkok Post, Sihanouk denies he'll talk with Phnom Penh, June 5, 1987.

Rouge, as well as some countries in ASEAN, had all adopted a position of negotiating with Vietnam on the Vietnamese troop withdrawal first, before talking with the Phnom Penh leaders. As for Prince Sihanouk, his retreat from Democratic Kampuchea and his status as a former king gave him the freedom to pursue his own politics.

Son Sann Leaves for Romania

To Gauge the Country's Stance

Meanwhile, Son Sann led a KPNLF delegation to Romania between June 17 and 19, 1987, even though Prince Sihanouk had advised him that there was no need to meet President Ceausescu, as described above. Nonetheless, the KPNLF leader argued that the purpose of the visit was to thank President Ceausescu verbally for his endeavour to seek a solution to the Cambodian problem

and to ask Romania to help seek all kinds of measures to end the sufferings of the Cambodian people[186].

The purpose of the delegation's mission at that time was to exchange views, because Son Sann, as Prime Minister of the CGDK, had adopted the political stance of demanding talks with Vietnam on troop withdrawal first, before negotiating with the Phnom Penh government. At the same time, Romania recommended reconciliation with Phnom Penh first. The mission to Romania offered me the opportunity to join the delegation as a member. Romania was the first communist country I had visited. Aside from political duty, as I have mentioned above, I was very impressed by the country's protocol. The Romanian protocol official was very strict about timing and seating: where to sit, where to stand, whether to be in front or behind, when guests would be served food simultaneously, and so forth. For instance, when the Prime Minister arrived, how many steps the head of our

[186] Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, Office of the Prime Minister, Communiqué de Presse, Bucarest le 17 Juin 1987.

delegation should advance and how many steps their prime minister should take before shaking hands.

In the delegation, I was granted the rank of Cabinet Minister. A Son Sann´s confidant, who was older than me, told the Romanian protocol official that he had the rank of Ministre d´Etat, or State Minister, if it is translated word by word from French into English. In the French system, a state minister (Ministre d´Etat) ranks higher than a minister. The correct English translation is "Senior Minister," but in French, it is Ministre d´Etat. The word Ministre can be translated as Minister and État as State; so, Ministre d´Etat translates as State Minister, which, under the federal system, ranks below a Minister. The Romanian protocol official might have thought that Son Sann's confidant had only the rank of State Minister; that was why they seated me next to Son Sann, which made him feel strongly disappointed.

Talks Planned Under Different Forms

Since 1985, although the military armed forces fought each other vigorously, the initiative for talks between the adversaries had been taken successfully under various forms, such as the proximity talks and cocktail parties. On May 7, 1987, Son Sann, as prime minister of the CGDK, issued a joint communique congratulating Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar Kasumaadmaja on the initiative to host a cocktail party in Jakarta. This approach allowed the opponents to meet, since it was an informal meeting. Without this approach, it would not have been easy for the adversaries to meet, because their political positions were opposed. In a declaration at the event, Son Sann said they would be very pleased if Vietnam also agreed to attend. In other words, Son Sann intended to reaffirm that the current dispute was between Cambodia and Vietnam, not a civil war between

Cambodians and Cambodians[187]. This position was completely contrary to Vietnam´s stance. Despite support from several countries, the cocktail party idea eventually failed. That said, the KPNLF and Son Sann wanted to appear to show that Prince Sihanouk was not the only one seeking a solution through talks; he was also trying. However, Son Sann had not yet dared to hold direct talks with Phnom Penh as Prince Sihanouk did.

As already pointed out in the previous chapters, the Phnom Penh party had certainly reaped more benefits from holding direct talks with Prince Sihanouk. Therefore, Phnom Penh leaders, especially Prime Minister Hun Sen, should continue this mission to succeed. The most important interest was to topple the genocidal Pol Pot regime once and for all. As for Prince Sihanouk, he had clearly seen the major obstacles to finding a political solution to end the war in Cambodia, but he had resolved to try, regardless of what the solution looked like. Moreover, as he had already clearly

[187] Statement of H. E. Son Sann, Prime Minister of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, May 8, 1987.

assessed the true nature of the Khmer Rouge regime, the prince realised that he had to find ways to eliminate them. It was true that he could revoke the alliance, provided that peace could be built and Cambodia liberated from the Khmer Rouge.

Friendship between Yasser Arafat and Prince Sihanouk

In Pyongyang, away from China′s eyes, it was certainly easy for Prince Sihanouk to carry out some diplomatic tasks in accordance with his own political stance. In Pyongyang, the Prince also trusted a diplomat who could serve effectively as his spokesman or as a mediator between him and the other party. The spokesman, or go-between, was the Palestine Liberation Organisation′s ambassador to North Korea, Sapharini[188]. Because he backed the Palestinian struggle while still in power during the Sangkum Reas Niyum era, Prince Sihanouk became a close friend

[188] Hun Sen, 10 Years of Cambodia Process, 1979-1989, p. 168, Printing Education Publication House, Nop Bophan printing house.

of the late Palestine Liberation Organisation Chairman Yasser Arafat. I (Ieng Mouly), lucky to be included in a high Cambodian delegation to the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1992, led by Prince Sihanouk, President of the Supreme National Council, had witnessed the close friendship between the two leaders. During a recess in the meeting, held in a grand hall, I saw Chairman Yasser Arafat, in a camouflage uniform with a pistol at his waist and wearing a scarf that was his symbol, walk past a crowd of heads of state and government toward the Cambodian seat to hug and kiss Prince Sihanouk most intimately.

Back in Pyongyang, some rumours indicated that Prince Sihanouk was ready to meet with Prime Minister Hun Sen in June 1987. However, following a meeting between the Chinese Premier and Neak Moneang Monique,[189] the prince´s wife, the plan was cast aside.

[189] Prince Sihanouk´s wife.

The Khmer Rouge Criticises Sihanouk for Falling into Vietnam´s Trap

At the time, we in Bangkok knew nothing about the planned talks. We learned of this only later, through international press. Moreover, we had no official documents related to this planned meeting either. In Beijing, the Khmer Rouge´s ambassador was carrying out diplomatic activities at various embassies to explain the inappropriate political behaviour of Prince Sihanouk. This aimed to convince the diplomatic corps that Prince Sihanouk´s decision to suspend his job as Democratic Kampuchea president was not the Khmer Rouge´s fault, but the prince´s adoption of a new stance, leading the Khmer Rouge to accuse him of falling into Vietnam´s trap. The Khmer Rouge ambassador's activities upset Princess Monique, the prince´s wife, who was deeply disappointed

and warned that the relationship with the Khmer Rouge would be cut off in the future, unlike before[190]

As for Prince Sihanouk, he still appeared to have distanced himself from the Khmer Rouge and was no longer working with them. Still, he also took care not to upset China either. From Pyongyang, the prince gave instructions to another Khmer Rouge Ambassador Chan Yuran in Beijing to be implemented when he returned to China next August, to lead the high Democratic Kampuchea delegation on its official visit to China, as follows:

- Not to give any interview to newspaper, radio, or television reporters;
- Request permission from Chinese leaders for him not to give any interview to newspaper, radio, or television reporters, including Chinese newspaper, radio, and television reporters as well as Xinhua;
- He would not chair any meetings of the CGDK cabinet;

[190] Monique Sihanouk [letter], Chang Sou On, 22 juillet 1987.

- During his stay in Beijing, the prince could grant a private audience, without the presence of any newspaper, radio, and television reporters, to His Excellency Khieu Samphan and another to His Excellency Son Sann if either of them wanted to hold political discussion with him;
- At the conclusion of the delegation´s visit, he would not take part in a news conference, but he could read the text of the joint communique of the CGDK, text drafted by Khieu Samphan and the Khmer Rouge party and agreed to by Son Sann[191].

China Says Not Yet Time to Hold Talks

In light of the diplomatic activities in the third quarter of 1987, the initiative to hold talks moved forward steadily. Nonetheless, the

[191] Norodom Sihanouk, Note pour S.E. Chan Youran, Ambassadeur du Kampuchea Démocratique en R. P. de Chine, Pyongyang, le 11 juillet 1987.

superpowers, which played a key role in the Cambodia problem, believed the time was not yet ripe. In August 1987, the Thai Foreign Minister, Siddhi Savetsila, stated publicly that he had met with Chinese leaders in China and that, at a meeting with Deng Xiaoping, this Chinese leader advised ASEAN that, as Vietnam had not yet changed its stance, any too-hasty activities might lead to more complicated problems[192].

According to the international press, Siddhi Savetsila accused Vietnam of destroying ASEAN's cocktail party formula, which they had already agreed to in principle. However, Vietnam denounced that ASEAN's proposal at that time was aimed at exhibiting the picture of Hanoi as the aggressor of Cambodia [193]. These developments led to the failure of the diplomatic manoeuvres at the time.

In addition, Siddhi Savetsila said that at a meeting with Prince Sihanouk in Pyongyang, he received the elated news that the

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[192] Bangkok Post, ASEAN Told Not to Rush Peace Bid, August 26, 1987.

[193] The Nation, Phnom Penh Echoes Hanoi, Quoted Kuala Lumpur Times, August 26, 1987.

prince would travel to New York in September, even though the prince would not lead Democratic Kampuchea′s delegation at the United Nations. Only the prince′s presence in New York could boost the morale of the Cambodian resistance group, because his prestige was priceless for the cause of the CGDK. When he arrived in Beijing at the end of August, Prince Sihanouk said he could say "no" to what Khieu Samphan and Son Sann had proposed, but he could not say so to China, his great friend[194]. In reality, the countries backing the CGDK, specifically ASEAN led by Thailand and China, had been concerned about the support for Democratic Kampuchea′s UN seat, which could tumble down without the presence of Prince Sihanouk. Therefore, news that the Prince would travel to New York was good for Siddhi Savetsila and his loyal friends.

In September 1987, Prince Sihanouk arrived in New York as planned, but he did not lead the Democratic Kampuchea delegation to attend the UN General Assembly as in previous

[194] The Nation, Sihanouk Arrives for China, August 30, 1987.

years. In 1987, the CGDK prepared a speech for Prince Sihanouk as Democratic Kampuchea President, but Prime Minister Son Sann instead read it at the UN meeting. In light of his trip to New York, it was reported in Bangkok that the prince would not meet with Prime Minister Hun Sen. Nevertheless, aside from the big headline on the first page, it could be understood that Prince Sihanouk did not completely reject the possibility of meeting, because the prince stated that he would not meet unless there were a request from Phnom Penh[195].

Image Shows of Solidarity While Being Divided

As part of the diplomatic campaign at the United Nations, representatives of the three CGDK armies intensified public relations operations by organising a meeting in Bangkok to voice support for the CGDK's position under Prince Sihanouk's

[195] The Nation, Sihanouk Assures Bangkok: He Won't Meet Hun Sen, September 1, 1987.

leadership. The purpose of the three armies' meeting was to show images that the armies of the resistance movements continued to be united and well cooperated[196].

Attending the meeting were Son Sen, representing the Khmer Rouge, and Tuon Chay, representing Prince Norodom Ranariddh, Commander-in-Chief of the National Sihanoukist Army. As for the KPNLF, it was Son Soubert and I (Ieng Mouly) representing the army. Actually, according to a documented plan, Sak Sutsakhan was slotted to sign the press communique.

Despite reconciliation, and even though General Sak Sutsakhan had been officially appointed commander-in-chief, Son Sann and the military faction had not compromised. As commander-in-chief of the KPNLAF, Sak Sutsakhan had not consulted Son Sann on several major issues, including the appointment of Dien Del and Pok Sam-an as deputy commander-in-chief and chief of staff, respectively, as laid down in Sak

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[196] Son Sen, Ieng Mouly, Son Soubert, Brig. Gen. Tuon Chay, Press Communiqué, 27 August 1987.

Sutsakhan's conditional appointment. Son Sann raised the lack of consultation in appointing Dien Del and Pok Sam-an when he met Gen Suchinda Kraprayoon on April 28, 1987.[197] Since that time, Son Sann and Sak Sutsakhan had performed their duties separately, political on one side while military on the other, without close cooperation any longer. The rift continued until two separate political parties were formed to contest the 1993 general election.

The Prince Eventually Asks Elders To Help Arrange the Meeting

Following the failed attempt to hold a meeting in Pyongyang, Prince Sihanouk wrote a letter on July 18, 1987, to Cambodian elder dignitaries in France, namely Nhiek Tioulong, Chau Sen Kosal Chhum, Huy Kanthoul, Chhean Vam, Nong Kim Ny, Thonn

[197] Brief translation of the conversation between His Excellency the President and General Suchinda Kraparyoon on April 28, 1987.

Ouk, and Duong Sam-ol, asking them to help arrange a meeting among the Cambodian parties in dispute[198].

On this point, I recalled that in the Sangkum Reas Niyum era in the 1960s, when he was firmly in power, Prince Sihanouk consistently reasoned that, based on petitions presented in demonstrations or national congresses, he would decide to conduct political activity. That being the case, this time, he cited the intervention of the seven Cambodian elders, former military chiefs, former ministers, and former prime ministers, as a valid reason to go ahead with the meeting and negotiate with the Phnom Penh leaders. Of the seven dignitaries, Huy Kannthoul, Chhean Vam, Nong Kim Ny, and Thonn Ouk were members of the Council of Elders (Conseil des Sages) of the KPNLF, which publicly announced revoking confidence in Son Sann in 1985. Those dignitaries might perceive that the flexible stance of Prince Sihanouk could be more effective than Son Sann's position.

[198] Hun Sen, 10 Years of Cambodia Process, 1979-1989, op. cit., p. 171.

Since the end of 1985, Huy Kannthoul and Thonn Ouk had actively participated with General Sak Sutsakhan in opposing Son Sann′s KPNLF leadership. On September 4, 1987, the seven dignitaries wrote a letter to the Phnom Penh government, appealing for a meeting.[199] Regarding this Hun Sen-Sihanouk meeting, the Phnom Penh leader sent a letter to the prince in Paris before he left Pyongyang. However, the letter did not reach the prince, according to Prime Minister Hun Sen. The prime minister said, "The prince′s entourage and bodyguards" created all kinds of conditions and dared to go so far as to make decisions on his behalf. To ensure direct contact with Prince Sihanouk, the Phnom Penh leader decided to send a telegram to the Prince through Prince Norodom Ranariddh, his son and his representative in Bangkok. Prince Ranariddh then took the telegram to Paris and presented it to Prince Sihanouk in person. The prince replied to Phnom Penh straightaway, thanking Hun Sen and agreeing to meet him. The prince let the Phnom Penh

[199] Hun Sen, 10 Years of Cambodia Process, 1979-1989, op. cit., p. 172.

party pick up a meeting date[200]. He opted for France as the meeting venue because he had already received reassurance from the French Government. For the Phnom Penh leaders, they might consider the prince's concurrence to negotiate in France a golden opportunity they should not lose. Phnom Penh selected December 2, 1987 for the talks. The selection of December 2 was not made by chance, but also taking into consideration the historic significance of Pol Pot's collapse, for December 2, 1987 was the 9th founding anniversary of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation, formed in 1978 in Kratie province's Snuol district to muster forces to bring down the genocidal regime.

The planned Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting in France did not impress the KPNLF at all, because it was believed that if China and ASEAN were unsupportive, the meeting would absolutely fail. In contrast, those close to Prince Sihanouk expressed optimism and congratulated the meeting. In his best-wishes letter in French to the prince on his 65th birthday, Nhiek Tioulong mainly said that

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[200] Hun Sen, 10 Years of Cambodia Process, 1979-1989, op. cit., p. 173.

the prince's past actions had achieved fruitful results. At the end of the letter, he wrote that all Cambodians, inside and outside the country, pinned their only and last hope on the prince´s father, the father of Cambodia´s independence.[201] As for Prince Norodom Ranariddh, he wrote a greeting letter in French to his father, meaning as follows: "The 65th birthday anniversary of Papa is the most important turning point (le grand tournant) of the Cambodia problem, and this has ensued from your just and unremitting efforts in the search for an honourable and most correct solution for our so fortuneless country.[202]" The optimism matched up with the policy of the Phnom Penh government, which was resolved to dissociate Prince Sihanouk from the alliance with the Khmer Rouge successfully, in line with the strategy of toppling the Pol Pot genocidal regime, even though it had to offer a top post, like the chief of state position, to the prince.

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[201] Nhiek Tioulong, [A] Son Altesse Royale Samdech Norodom Sihanouk du Cambodge, Sucy-en-Brie, le 27 octobre 1987.

[202] Norodom Ranariddh, [lettre] datée de Bangkok, le 23 octobre 1987.

Sihanouk-Hun Sen Meeting at Fere-en-Tardenois

According to documents we had obtained, we could analyse that Prince Sihanouk would make use of his status as the former King to meet one of his subjects, while Phnom Penh would perceive that the Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting was an encounter between adversaries, on an equal footing, to seek a solution to ending the conflict in Cambodia[203]. Despite the different views on the meeting's formality, the meeting was eventually organised at Fere-en-Tardenois, France, on December 2, 1987. Prince Sihanouk promised not to conceal anything from any meeting he held with the Phnom Penh leader by providing us in the KPNLF with cassette tape recordings of the meetings. So, I, who was staying in the Bangkok office, prepared to listen to the tapes closely.

A few days later, I received the cassette tapes as promised through Voice of Khmer´s radio working group. I spent several

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[203] Hun Sen, 10 Years of Cambodia Process, 1979-1989, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

hours listening to all the discussions recorded on the many cassette tapes. It should be pointed out that on December 4, the last day of the meeting, the two sides issued a four-point joint communique as follows: 1. The Cambodia problem requires a political solution, not the use of military forces; 2. The Cambodian people themselves should resolve the Cambodia problem through negotiations; 3. To bring back peace and national reconstruction and create a political system of independence, democracy, sovereignty, neutrality, and non-alignment; 4. The next meeting will be held in January 1988.[204] These could be considered the meeting's positive points. As for Prince Sihanouk, he disseminated to the public the significance of the Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting, saying mainly that the meeting between him and Prime Minister Hun Sen was genuine talks to try to resolve the Cambodia problem. Cambodian compatriots inside and outside the country congratulated the meeting, except those associated with the Khmer Rouge, the demagogic Blue Khmer (the prince directed

[204] Ek Sam Ol, Aide-Mémoire on the process of talks for a comprehensive political solution to the Cambodia problem.

this at us, the KPNLF, or at Son Sann), and some foreign governments with vested interests in continuing the conflict in Cambodia. As regards Prince Sihanouk, he accepted the meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen as an encounter with the representative of Hanoi or Moscow. Nonetheless, the prince voiced disappointment with Hanoi for its failure to send an envoy to hold direct talks with him on the Cambodia-Vietnam problem, although among the Cambodian resistance movement heads, he was the only leader who had avoided talking in a wild manner as Son Sann and other people did, saying, "Vietnam invaded Cambodia" and categorically demanding direct talks between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the CGDK[205].

Prince Sihanouk called Prime Minister Hun Sen a young fox, jeune renard in French, in a note distributed to journalists at a FUNCINPEC global seminar held in France on December 20, 1987. He also raised several points that he needed clear-cut answers from Hun Sen when they met again in January 1988, as follows: in

[205] Norodom Sihanouk, Note pour la Presse, Roissy-en-France, le 20 Décembre 1987.

case a quadripartite national reconciliation government was formed, would Hun Sen agree to place the quadripartite government under the juridiction of a new Cambodian state that would be neither the People's Republic of Kampuchea of the Phnom Penh regime nor the Democratic Kampuchea regime of the Khmer Rouge. In other words, the prince sought a new regime[206]. It is true that Prince Sihanouk demanded independence from France in the 1950s. Still, he was certainly faced with difficulties returning to Cambodia in the presence of Vietnamese troops in the country. However, the forces had assisted in liberating Cambodia from Pol Pot. Besides, it would certainly be difficult for Prince Sihanouk to distance himself from Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge), which secured the United Nations recognition, if there were no acceptable new legal formula for, at least, the country's name, national flag, anthem, and so forth.

In the note distributed to the journalists at the FUNCINPEC global seminar, Prince Sihanouk wrote that when they met again

[206] As referred to above.

in January 1988, if Prime Minister Hun Sen failed to answer clearly the points he raised above, his wife, Princess Monique, FUNCINPEC Second Vice Chairman, would object to his signing a joint communique with Hun Sen as previously. As for the third Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting scheduled for April 1988 in Pyongyang, it would be postponed as well[207].

Prince Sihanouk Asks to Change Cambodia's Name, National Anthem, National Flag

In preparation to meet with the Phnom Penh leader, Prince Sihanouk issued an announcement specifically directed at the CGDK and its sponsor countries, as well as to its friends, saying his holiday absence from the Democratic Kampuchea presidency was not just limited to May 7, 1988, but indefinite so long as the Khmer Rouge (the Democratic Kampuchea party) and the blue

[207] As referred to above.

Khmer (KPNLF), his two partners in the CGDK, still disagreed to change the name of the state, national anthem, and national flag and so long as the Khmer Rouge and the blue Khmer continued to violate the people's human rights. For the KPNLF, the prince launched two attacks on it: 1. he used the term blue Khmer that had previously been used with the pro-Son Ngoc Thanh Cambodian rightist, republican traitor in addition to the word demagogic; 2. he also accused the KPNLF of human rights violations. In that period, some nongovernmental organisations accused leaders of the KPNLF-controlled Nang Chan and Ritthisen camps of human rights violations. However, this did not mean that the other Cambodian refugee camps, including the Khmer Rouge camps and the camps under the control of Sihanoukists, were immune to the human rights violations either. Prince Sihanouk lodged a protest with the EU Parliament over the charge that all resistance movements, including his, had committed human rights violations. The prince responded that the charge was unjust and

asked the EU Parliament to send an envoy to investigate the Site B refugee camp and the Phnom Sruoch base[208].

In reality, because they did not personally live in refugee camps, political leaders could not ensure effective camp management, as real power lay with Thai army officers who also controlled the leaders of Cambodian refugee camps. Political leaders had mostly moral and cultural influence. Therefore, the prince´s attack on the KPNLF was just political pressure that he skillfully employed to fight back against his opponents.

Along with announcing his resignation as President of Democratic Kampuchea, Prince Sihanouk also set another condition for his two partners to accept: changing Cambodia´s name, national anthem, and national flag. He asked that the name of Kampuchea in Cambodian, Cambodge in French, and Cambodia in English be selected. As for the national flag, it should be the pre-war one, with blue and red colours and the white

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[208] Norodom Sihanouk, Télégramme, Au Parlement européen, Strasbourg, France, published on www.norodomsihanouk.info on 2 September 2004.

picture of the three-steeple Angkor Wat Temple in the middle. For the national anthem, use the second verse of the Nokor Reach melody, used by Cambodia in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, starting with the sentence, "the stone temple hidden in the middle of the jungle...,"

Son Sann Does Not Attend Meeting, but Secretly Seeks to Get in Touch with Hun Sen

To prove that the KPNLF was neither an obstacle nor an opposition to the Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting in December, the KPNLF issued a press release clarifying an Agence France-Presse article published in the Bangkok Post on December 9, 1987. The press release said that Prince Sihanouk and Prime Minister Son Sann held many meetings to discuss the planned Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting in Paris and New York at every UN General Assembly meeting. Prime Minister Son Sann told the prince he supported any measures aimed at ending the suffering of the Cambodian

people, thereby supporting the prince's initiative now and in the future[209]. The press release added that Prime Minister Son Sann had never refused to join the peace-seeking initiative to withdraw Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and organise a free general election to move toward national reconciliation. The press release also said that Prime Minister Son Sann regularly held discussions with people in the camps and KPNLF cadres (a term locals used at the time). Nonetheless, regarding participation in the subsequent second Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting in January, the press release did not clearly state whether Son Sann would definitely attend, saying the prime minister was currently engaged in scores of works and could not promise to accept more new assignments[210]. At that time, Son Sann's position seemed very ambiguous. On the one hand, he dared not take any action that deviated from China's position and that of some ASEAN countries led by Thailand. That position demanded that the Vietnamese

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[209] Office of the Prime Minister, Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, Press Communiqué, December 9, 1987.

[210] As referred to above.

troop withdrawal or talks with Vietnam take place first. On the other hand, Son Sann did not want to see Prince Sihanouk always lead the initiative to negotiate with Phnom Penh or seek peace.

In a statement issued on December 21, 1987, Son Sann said he would join the Cambodian parties′ meeting (the Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting) as a private person, not as the prime minister of the CGDK, if Vietnam also attended. The statement, however, pointed out that if, for any reason, Vietnam were unable to attend the Cambodian parties′ meeting right away, Prime Minister Son Sann would ask it to issue a solemn statement (copies of which would be sent to the UN Secretary-General, in particular to the five superpowers, members of the UN Security Council) ahead of the Cambodian parties′ meeting, pledging that it would pull all its forces out of Cambodia most speedily, following the Cambodian quadripartite meeting[211]. In brief, Son Sann wanted to join Prince Sihanouk′s meeting if Vietnam pledged to withdraw its forces from

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[211] Son Sann, Statement of H E Son Sann, Prime Minister of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea and President of the Khmer People′s National Liberation Front, December 21, 1987.

Cambodia in writing, in the presence of the United Nations, specifically of the five giant countries, permanent members of the UN Security Council.

On the Vietnamese troop pullout, the People's Republic of Kampuchea government said Vietnam had already withdrawn 20,000 troops in November 1987 and would continue to withdraw. Nevertheless, Phnom Penh linked the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia to the cessation of military assistance to all parties in dispute, as specified in the five-point appeal of October 8, 1987[212]. Anyway, although he apparently took a hardline stance in the talks, not different from that of the Khmer Rouge, Son Sann assigned his confidant, General Thach Reng, to secretly contact Phnom Penh, without letting us in Bangkok know in the least. In a document in the style of an appointment that we discovered several years later, Son Sann issued a special decision on November 23, 1987, appointing Gen Thach Reng as the KPNLF

[212] Ek Sam-ol, aide-mémoire on the process of talks for a common political solution to the Cambodian problem, op. cit.

president's personal representative to seek a solution to the Vietnamese troop withdrawal and national reconciliation[213].

I understood that the KPNLF president may have acted secretly on Thach Reng's idea, since the latter had contact with a French secret agency that might have advised the KPNLF to contact Phnom Penh directly for talks. Nevertheless, Thach Reng's mission did not achieve any success because Prime Minister Hun Sen had refused to meet him. In an aide-mémoire to Son Sann, Gen Thach Reng reasoned that the reason Hun Sen had refused to meet was that he had received a letter from an opponent of the KPNLF President in France belonging to Gen Sak Sutsakhan's faction. The letter presented an ugly report about the KPNLF and specifically about Son Sann, prompting Hun Sen to decide not to meet with the KPNLF president's representative. In the aide-mémoire, Thach Reng reported that Hun Sen was resolved to do everything to sweet-talk Prince Sihanouk into cooperating with

[213] Son Sann, Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, Décision n° 87/SPECIAL/FNL, le 23 décembre 1987.

Phnom Penh and that Hun Sen had rejected Son Sann, but had made known that if Son Sann wanted to join the next Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting, he could do so. The aide-mémoire also reported that leaflets had circulated in the country demanding Prince Sihanouk´s quick return to Cambodia and that the KPNLF's voice had never been heard. Finally, Thach Reng opined that the struggle should continue, but the problem was how much ASEAN countries, China, and the United States would support the KPNLF[214].

After negotiating with Prince Sihanouk from December 2 to 4, 1987, Prime Minister Hun Sen wrote a letter to the seven elders, including Nhiek Tioulong, Chau Sen Kosal Chhum, Huy Kanthoul, Chhean Vam, Nong Kim Ny, Thonn Ouk, and Duong Sam Ol, thanking and calling on them to help try to invite the parties of Son Sann and Khieu Samphan to join the later meetings[215]. That said, Prime Minister Hun Sen intended to hold talks with all Cambodian

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[214] Thach Reng, Memorandum, (date illisible) février 1988?

[215] Hun Sen, 10 Years of Cambodia Process, 1979-1989, op. cit., p. 180.

parties. Still, he should be careful to avoid anything that would diminish the importance of the Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting, which had just come into being. It could be argued that Hun Sen's refusal to meet the KPNLF president´s representative had two reasons. If the meeting were granted, it would appear as letting Son Sann exploit too much benefit, for Son Sann and the KPNLF had all along been regarding the Phnom Penh regime as illegal and as Vietnam´s lackey or puppet. In other words, the meeting should not be held secretly, as Son Sann could both meet and curse. Besides, if Son Sann were met, this could lead Prince Sihanouk to conceive that he was not that useful for Phnom Penh. On this point, Prince Sihanouk said at a meeting with ASEAN envoys on December 11, 1987, in Fere-en-Tardenois, France, that Hun Sen needed Son Sann and Khieu Samphan more than Sihanouk[216].

Son Sann and his confidants had completely covered up their secret attempt to contact the leaders in Phnom Penh. We young

[216] As referred to above.

people staying in Bangkok at the time were convinced there was no bid for any secret contact. We believed Son Sann was not someone who would say this but do otherwise. Besides, we were never aware that Son Sann had officially appointed Thach Reng as his representative to contact the Phnom Penh leaders secretly. The secret of Son Sann was leaked when Prince Sihanouk held the second talks with Prime Minister Hun Sen at Saint-Germain-en-Laye on January 20-21, 1988, because at that time Hun Sen informed Prince Sihanouk of Son Sann′s attempts to contact him secretly through Thach Reng. Prince Sihanouk then disseminated this news widely in his report on the second Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting.

On January 19, 1988, one day ahead of the second Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting, Son Sann saw Prince Sihanouk to reiterate the same position that he would join a meeting if Vietnam′s representative were also present at the encounter or if Vietnam sent a letter to the UN Secretary General, pledging to pull

all its troops out of Cambodia following that meeting[217]. A press release on the meeting issued by the office of Prime Minister Son Sann in Paris did not mention the secret attempt to meet with Hun Sen. However, on January 23, 1988, shortly after Prince Sihanouk published the news about Son Sann's bid to make the secret contact, the KPNLF office in Paris, where Son Sann was currently staying, issued another press release vehemently rejecting the news about Son Sann's attempt to seek secret negotiations directly with Hun Sen, claiming that the news was untrue and purely cooked up by Hun Sen. The press release further said that as the prime minister of the legitimate government recognised by the United Nations, Son Sann did not have the idea of meeting anyone of the illegal Phnom Penh regime.[218] In addition, we in Bangkok also helped reject the news about Son Sann's secret attempt, asserting that it was false.[219] More than that, I (Ieng

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[217] Office of the Prime Minister, Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, Communiqué de Presse, Paris, le 19 janvier 1988.

[218] Le Bureau d'Information du FNLPK à Paris, Communiqué, Paris, le 23 janvier 1988.

[219] Khmer People's National Liberation Front, Press Release, January 26, 1988.

Mouly), as an assistant to the KPNLF president, also wrote to the Bangkok Post editor to clarify an article by Jacques Bekaert that said, "KPNLF President Son Sann has made a secret attempt to hold talks with Hun Sen" and that "this attempt has led to vigorous criticism by the ASEAN country grouping[220]." In my letter, I rejected the baseless news because I was convinced that Son Sann did not have a plan, as he often proclaimed, to meet with Hun Sen without the presence of Vietnam's representative, in accordance with the CGDK's political line. Besides, I wrote the denial because I was unaware of the secret affairs Son Sann conducted in Paris with Thach Reng and his family members.

Second Meeting at Saint-Germain-en-Laye

At the second Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting, Prince Sihanouk wanted Prime Minister Hun Sen's answers about the Vietnamese

[220] Ieng Mouly, Letter to the Editor, Bangkok Post, Bangkok, January 29, 1988.

troop withdrawal and the creation of a new state that was neither the People's Republic of Kampuchea nor the State of Democratic Kampuchea of the Khmer Rouge. Prince Sihanouk imposed conditions on Khieu Samphan and Son Sann to change Cambodia´s name, national flag, and national anthem of the Khmer Rouge, respectively, to Kampuchea in Cambodian, the pre-war national flag, and the national anthem, if he was still willing to cooperate further. Concerning this point, Khieu Samphan, on the Khmer Rouge´s behalf, sent a letter to Son Sann, asking him not to relinquish the Democratic Kampuchea State, which was legal and recognised by the United Nations. Khieu Samphan wrote, "We need to stand firm on the status of Democratic Kampuchea, the sole legitimate state of Cambodia." What was laughable was that this Khmer Rouge leader asserted that the "Democratic Kampuchea State was born from the National Assembly elected by the general, direct, free, and secret election in February 1976" (Khieu Samphan failed, however, to indicate the day when the Khmer Rouge election was held in February 1976). At that time, the Khmer Rouge still persistently rejected Prince Sihanouk's proposal, while the KPNLF had no problem accepting it.

At the second meeting at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Prime Minister Hun Sen asked Prince Sihanouk on what legal basis the new regime would be created, for the prime minister was convinced that only the People's Republic of Kampuchea was endowed with solid forces to topple the Pol Pot genocidal regime, preventing it from returning to power again. At the previous meeting last December, Hun Sen asked Prince Sihanouk to allow the two parties to cooperate to settle the Cambodia problem; that is, the prince should return to lead the People's Republic of Kampuchea while his forces would be offered an important role in national construction[221]. In reality, the Phnom Penh leader had a clear-cut strategy and tactics in the talks: 1. preserve the achievements born from the January 7, 1979 victory, and 2. dismantle the genocidal regime, including its military forces and political structure.

[221] Keo Baphnom, (in Khmer) Samdech Hun Sen and Historic Declaration, Aide Memoire, Phnom Penh, 2010, p. 77.

Also, at the second meeting in January 1988, Hun Sen gauged Prince Sihanouk′s view to see how he would conceive a secret Hun Sen-Son Sann meeting if Son Sann asked for it. According to the Phnom Penh leader′s assessment, Sihanouk did not want to let Son Sann join the Hun Sen-Sihanouk meeting, meaning he did not want the Son Sann party to meet its Phnom Penh counterpart.[222] While Prince Sihanouk reported that Son Sann intended to meet secretly with the Phnom Penh party, Prime Minister Hun Sen also disclosed to reporters the letter of representation Son Sann had given to Thach Reng to contact him. Hun Sen′s action was to resist Son Sann and support Prince Sihanouk. Hun Sen assured the prince that cooperation between the two parties was important and should continue to make headway, despite the other two parties′ refusal to join. Moreover, the disclosure of the secret meeting proposed by Son Sann was meant to show Prince Sihanouk that, although his partners in the

[222] As referred to above.

coalition government did not come out to negotiate with Phnom Penh, some had secretly asked for a meeting.

On February 20, 1988, from Beijing, Prince Sihanouk issued a message to his Cambodian compatriots, read by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, his son and his representative in Bangkok, to explain the process of the talks he had recently had with Prime Minister Hun Sen. Prince Sihanouk offered the reason that, due to Hun Sen′s refusal to dissolve the People′s Republic of Kampuchea and his intransigence in disbanding the Democratic Kampuchea regime, he was still unable to return to the country. In that message, Prince Sihanouk also attacked the other parties, saying they did not think of national interests but only of their own. He called Khmer leaders in Phnom Penh, Khmer Viet Minh, the Khmer Rouge, Khmer communists, and the KPNLF Blue Khmer or Khmer Serei republican. Nonetheless, Prime Minister Hun Sen drew an optimistic conclusion about the second Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting in France, saying that although no joint communique was issued at the end of the meeting, the two parties agreed it

was another progressive step toward a genuine solution to the Cambodia problem. They also agreed to meet again.

I wish to end the first part of the tortuous path to peace in Cambodia here, but I will continue with the second part in another book. In the peace process, the Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting was the key solution to the Cambodian problem, which had two separate aspects: national and international.

In the national aspect, Prime Minister Hun Sen emphasised national reconciliation based on the dismantling of the Pol Pot genocidal regime, including its military forces and political structure. The prime minister was sure that no parties would oppose the policy of toppling Pol Pot. The Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting broke an impasse and initiated national reconciliation, a major factor in peacebuilding and Cambodia's survival. During his talk with Prince Sihanouk, Hun Sen firmly defended the gains and achievements of the January 7 Victory. This meeting also showed that Cambodians themselves made tremendous efforts to seek a solution to the crisis in Cambodia. The move by both Prince Sihanouk and Prime Minister Hun Sen pressured all stakeholders

to re-examine their strategies. The Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting could not have happened without the dauntless resolve of the two main actors in Cambodia′s modern history. The valiant Prime Minister Hun Sen led the sharpest fight to overthrow the genocidal regime, no matter the sacrifice. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, whose every activity was connected to the faith of the Cambodian nation, was determined to do everything possible; even he had to face any obstacle, provided that the suffering of his people -his children and grandchildren- could be brought to an end.

Conclusion

In general, the fate of people is always linked to the nation′s destiny. The nation′s destiny depends on the quality or ingenuity of its leaders and on the way it is governed. Between 1960 and 1970, Cambodia was in a context in which the superpowers used their own forces to compete for influence over small and weak countries. One bloc waged war in the name of communist ideology to liberate humankind from colonialism and capitalism by building

a progressive, clean, and equal society, while the other waged war to protect human rights, freedom, and dignity. In that era, Cambodia chose the middle path, adopting a neutral line that normally did not lean toward either bloc. Moreover, Buddhist ideology was combined with socialist ideas to create a national ideology called "Buddhist Socialism." Nonpartisan politics had brought about peace for a while, but in the end, they had been unable to prevent the flames of war from setting Cambodia on fire. For nearly three decades, our country had been exposed to devastation, leading to the death of millions of Cambodians.

Most people who survived the war can appreciate the real meaning of peace and how peace, especially peace in freedom, is valued. They will certainly acknowledge that peace that brings about human rights, freedom, and dignity is of immense and inestimable value. This peace in freedom is what every Cambodian desires.

Among those who survived the war, some used their intelligence, acumen, and knowledge of time and place to survive. Others survived by relying on gods and faith in their destiny in

previous lives, leaving themselves to be led by predestination, meaning they left everything in their lives for the gods to decide. All those people have accumulated experiences that future generations of Cambodians should learn from.

What we can understand through past political events is:

- Cambodia's neutrality from 1957 to 1970 could have avoided war if the country had genuine unity and solidarity, and if neighbouring countries had also been at peace with us. In addition, our internal policies lacked overwhelming support from all political quarters. In truth, the Sangkum Reas Niyum Movement aimed to achieve national unity, but Cambodian politicians were split into different categories: the Khmer Rouge, Blue Khmer, Pink Khmer, and so forth. Besides, even though we declared that we adhered to an unwaveringly neutral policy, the United States still found fault with and accused Cambodia of being a sanctuary for Vietcong forces, who were carrying out a national liberation war against the United States. Therefore, the Vietnam War was spreading to Cambodia.

- China played a key role in the Indochinese War and was strongly involved in the Cambodia dispute. China unreservedly supported Prince Sihanouk in all circumstances that no other superpower could match. Nevertheless, at the same time, China was also the closest ally of Pol Pot′s Democratic Kampuchea regime. This served China′s interests in containing other superpowers' influence in the region.
- Throughout his life, Prince Norodom Sihanouk played a historic role and tied his fate to the destiny of the entire Cambodian nation. When talking about post-World War II Cambodia, one cannot forget Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The prince was crowned king in his youth in the French protectorate era. Later, he conducted a royal crusade to obtain Cambodia's independence from France. He transferred the throne to his father, an unprecedented move, to engage in politics. During the Khmer Republic, he suffered untold insults and contempt. He lived under the Pol Pot regime, which imprisoned him, slaughtered his relatives and denounced the regime in the Sangkum Reas Niyum era as a

feudal one. Thanks to the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime by Vietnam′s forces and the troops of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation, the prince was able to survive and later free himself from the Khmer Rouge′s control. He had the ingenuity to maintain the Cambodian people's unbreakable love and loyalty. The former king, or king-father or king-grandfather, showed high-calibre ability to protect his political life across eras, no matter how tremendous the obstacles. He survived and returned to political leadership, ultimately achieving a peace agreement that no other Cambodian politician has managed.

- The Khmer Republic regime of Lon Nol, born from the events of March 18, 1970, used the momentum of Cambodian nationalism against Vietnam, especially among most Cambodian city dwellers and intellectuals, to gain legitimacy and support from the Cambodian people. Nonetheless, the leadership′s incompetence and corruption that ravaged society in the Khmer Republic era turned this regime into the weakest, forcing it to depend entirely on United States aid.

This regime could no longer survive, no matter how much aid it received.

- The Khmer Rouge Pol Pot regime exploited the overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk by the Lon Nol group in 1970 to use the prince′s name and popularity to set up a national united front, waging a war of attrition to seize power. Militarily, at first, the Pol Pot force made use of communist Vietnam′s troops as a vanguard to attack and decimate the Khmer Republic army, but later it waged war against the Vietnamese, prompting them to return to Vietnam. Pol Pot practised deception, abused human rights, and committed indiscriminate and extrajudicial killings as a means of holding on to his power—this manner of governing turned into unforgivable genocide and crimes against humanity. The uprising resistance movement against Pol Pot emerged in various forms, as internal movements and as resistance movements along the Cambodian-Thai border. Nevertheless, owing to Pol Pot′s arrangement for the masses to live in a cooperative style, eating together and working together, the

provision of supplies to the uprising resistance movements in the interior was extremely difficult. Therefore, if there were no exterior forces in a timely fashion, although the people in general detested it the most, the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime would take longer, which might allow the clique to continue massacring tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands more people. Anyway, because of the lack of support from the people, the Pol Pot regime could survive only three years, eight months, and 20 days, shorter than Lon Nol's republic regime.

- The Vietnamese troops, which used to fight shoulder to shoulder with the Khmer Rouge at the beginning of the war against Lon Nol, finally were obliged to help Phnom Penh to topple the Khmer Rouge Pol Pot regime on January 7, 1979. Nonetheless, the presence of the Vietnamese troops in Cambodia was accused of being an act of aggression, which became the motive for the setting up of nationalist movements against Vietnam by many Cambodians, specifically overseas. This was because the Cambodian

people in general were always imbued with the perception of their history that every intervention by Cambodia's neighbours had been an invasion to nip at and swallow Cambodian territory. Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge exploited this nationalistic sentiment, and Prince Norodom Sihanouk and former Prime Minister Son Sann joined them to form an anti-Vietnam front in the form of the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea. However, the great tragedy the Cambodian people suffered under the genocidal regime led to stronger global condemnation of the Khmer Rouge. This tendency was in agreement with the policy of dismantling the Khmer Rouge genocide regime, which Prime Minister Hun Sen constantly maintained and led its implementation effectively.

- In the epoch when our country fell into the abyss of devastation, a young Cambodian leader emerged, born into an authentic Cambodian peasant family. He was resolved to attack and topple the genocidal regime at all costs to free the Cambodian people from slavery, regardless of whether he

needed to seek assistance from foreign forces. The young Hun Sen employed the successful strategy of overthrowing the genocidal regime to counter the economic and political embargo until he became an indispensable partner in all Cambodian peace talks. Once seen as Vietnam's puppet, Prime Minister Hun Sen sat on an equal footing at the negotiating table with Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The first Sihanouk-Hun Sen meeting at Fere-en-Tardenois broke the stalemate, paving the way for the opposing sides in Cambodia to talk directly. This was a significant step toward a peaceful solution for the Cambodian people and Cambodia.

- Charting the history cycle, my life went on like that of other Cambodian compatriots, reaping the benefits of peace borne of the consequences of war. For a while, I became a refugee, living alone far from my homeland in a free country that could help assiduous, life-struggling people achieve success. Nevertheless, as a Cambodian, nobody could distance themselves from and not feel agitated with grief at the sufferings and pains endured by the Cambodian people in

Cambodia. My political life began with adventure, but this political lifeline followed the path of patriotism and true love for Cambodian land and fellow Cambodian compatriots. Every success was achieved through all-out physical and moral effort, but it was not easy.

Acronyms

ANS	Armée Nationale Sihanoukiste
AGKE	Association des Khmers à l´Étranger
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CDL	Comité de Liaison
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
COMEX	Comité Exécutif
DPPU	Displaced Persons Protection Unit
FUNK	Front Uni National du Kampuchea
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FUNCINPEC	Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant Neutre Pacifique Et Coopératif
FUKSANA	Front Uni Khmer pour le Salut National
GRUNK	Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchea
GOUPECIN	Gouvernement Provisoire de l´État du Cambodge Indépendant

HEC	Hautes Études Commerciales
ISOC	Internal Security Operation Command
IPKF	International Peacekeeping Forces
ICK	International Conference on Kampuchea
KPNAF	Khmer People´s National Liberation Armed Forces
KPNLF	Khmer People´s National Liberation Front
NCR	Non-Communist Resistance
PERMICO	Permanent Military Committee for Coordination
PCCS	Provisional Central Committee for the Salvation of KPNLF
SNC	Supreme National Council
SCF	Société de Comptabilité de France
UNBRO	United Nations Border Relief Operation

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- Télégramme à Son Altesse Royale Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk, Président du Kampuchea Démocratique, c/o Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Beijing, 8 février 1986.
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- Décision du Président du Front National de Libération du Peuple Khmer, n° 87/Special/FNL, le 23 décembre 1987.
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Thach Reng

- To General Chavalit Yontchayut, (A kind of Memo) Bangkok, 28 December 1982.
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Resources in Khmer

កែវ បាក្ដំ

- សម្តេច ហ៊ុន សែន និង ពាក្យសន្យាជាប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រ, ឯកសារជំនួយ ស្មារតី ភ្នំពេញ ២០១០ ។

ក្រុមស្រាវជ្រាវ ឆយ យីហ៊ាង, ប្រែង ពិសិដ្ឋ, លេង ណៃគីម, ម៊ុល វាសនា, កិន ណារ៉ុង, ម៉ម សារិត, ជា មុនីឫទ្ធិ, គិន ភា

- សម្តេចអគ្គមហាសេនាបតីតេជោ ហ៊ុន សែន, នាយករដ្ឋមន្ត្រី ប្រសូតពីត្រកូលកសិករ, រោងពុម្ពពន្លឺពេជ្រ, ភ្នំពេញ ២០០៧ ។

ខៀវ សំផន, សុន សេន

- សេចក្តីថ្លែងការណ៍របស់ភាគីកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ ចំពោះតួនាទីបច្ចុប្បន្ន និង អនាគតរបស់រណសិរ្សជាតិរំដោះប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរ និងប្រធានរបស់ខ្លួន, កម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ, ថ្ងៃទី ១២ កុម្ភៈ ១៩៨៦ ។

ចាយ ធុល, ឈាន វ៉ែម, ហ៊ុយ គន្ធុល, លិម គ្រី, នង គិមនី, ជុន អ៊ុក, ស៊ឹម វ៉ា

- ឯកសារគ្មាចំណងជើង, ប៉ារីស, ១៥ មិថុនា ១៩៨៥ ។

ទ្រឿង មាលី

- អគ្គលេខាធិការ ស.ខ.ប (ទូលថ្វាយសម្តេច នរោត្តម សីហនុ), ប៉ារីស, ថ្ងៃទី០៨ សីហា ១៩៧៩។

ជៀន ដែល

- សំបុត្រផ្ញើរដៃជូនលោកប្រធាន, បន្ទាយអំពិល, ថ្ងៃទី ១៧ តុលា ១៩៨២។
- សំបុត្រផ្ញើរដៃជូនលោកប្រធាន, បន្ទាយអំពិល, ថ្ងៃទី ១៩ តុលា ១៩៨២។

នេត គុណ និង សាយ បូរី

- សេចក្តីកត់ហេតុនៃការិយាល័យរៀបចំបោះឆ្នោតជ្រើសរើសគណកម្មការនាយកសម្រាប់ឆ្នាំ ១៩៧៩-៨០ ថ្ងៃទី ៨ មេសា ១៩៧៩ ។

នរោត្តម រណឫទ្ធិ, សុន សេន, សក់ ស៊ុតសាខន

- សេចក្តីប្រកាសព័ត៌មាន, ថ្ងៃទី ១៨ វិច្ឆិកា ១៩៨៦ ។

សក់ ស៊ុតសាខន (ឧត្តមសេនីយ)

- សេចក្តីសម្រេច, គណកម្មាធិការបណ្តោះអាសន្ននៃអគ្គសេនាធិការ នៃកងទ័ពជាតិរំដោះប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរ, អំពិល, ថ្ងៃទី ៨ វិច្ឆិកា ១៩៨២ ។
- លិខិតសម្ងាត់ផ្ញើរខ្លួនផ្ញើជូនឯកឧត្តម សឺន សាន ប្រធានរណសិរ្សជាតិរំដោះប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរ ថ្ងៃទី៥ ធ្នូ ១៩៨៥ ។
- លិខិតជូនឯកឧត្តម សឺន សាន ប្រធាន រ.ជ.រ.ប.ខ., ថ្ងៃទី ១៨ ធ្នូ ១៩៨៦ ។

ស៊ន សំណាង

- អនុសញ្ញាពាណិជ្ជកម្ម និង សាសនា ថ្ងៃទី ១៨ តុលា ១៨៥៦ នៅក្នុង ទស្សនាវដ្តីរាជបណ្ឌិតសភាកម្ពុជា លេខ១ ត្រីមាសទី១, ភ្នំពេញ, ២០០២ ។

សឺន សាន

- ប្រសាសន៍ថ្លែងក្នុងឱកាសមហាសន្និបាត នៃប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរ នៅសហ រដ្ឋអាមេរិក, ព្រឹត្តិបត្រ រ.ជ.រ.ប.ខ ខែកក្កដា ១៩៨១ ។
- សេចក្តីប្រកាសចំពោះមុខសារព័ត៌មាននានា, ព្រឹត្តិបត្រ រ.ជ.រ.ប.ខ ខែ កញ្ញា ១៩៨១ ។
- សេចក្តីអំពាវនាវរបស់លោកប្រធានរណសិរ្សជាតិរំដោះប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរ អគ្គមេបញ្ជាការនៃកងទ័ពជាតិរំដោះប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរ, អំពិល, ថ្ងៃទី ១៨ ខែតុលា ១៩៨២ ។
- លិខិតប្រធាន រ.ជ.រ.ប.ខ.ផ្ញើជូនលោកឧត្តមសេនីយ សក់ ស៊ុតសាខន, ថ្ងៃទី ២២ កុម្ភ: ១៩៨៧ ។
- លិខិតប្រធាន រ.ជ.រ.ប.ខ. និងជារដ្ឋមន្ត្រីទី១នៃរដ្ឋាភិបាលចម្រុះកម្ពុជា ប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ ជូនឯកឧត្តម ខៀវ សំផន អនុប្រធានកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ ទទួលបន្ទុកកិច្ចការបរទេស, ថ្ងៃទី ១៦ មីនា ១៩៨៧ ។

- សេចក្តីបកប្រែសង្ខេបពាក្យសន្ទនារវាង ឯ.ឧ. ប្រធាន ជាមួយឧ. សុជិន្តា ក្រាប្រយង្គ កាលពីថ្ងៃទី២៨ មេសា ១៩៨៧ ។
- លិខិតរដ្ឋមន្ត្រីទី១ នៃរដ្ឋាភិបាលចម្រុះកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យជូនឯកឧត្តម ខៀវ សំផន អនុប្រធានកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យទទួលបន្ទុកកិច្ចការបរទេស, ថ្ងៃទី ៧ ឧសភា ១៩៨៧ ។
- លិខិតរដ្ឋន្ត្រីទី១ ជូនចំពោះឯកឧត្តម ខៀវ សំផន អនុប្រធានកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យទទួលបន្ទុកកិច្ចការបរទេស, ថ្ងៃទី ១៤ ឧសភា ១៩៨៧ ។

សុន សេន, អៀង មូលី, សឺន ស៊ូបែរ្ត, ឧត្តមសេនីយ៍ត្រី ទួន ចាយ

- សេចក្តីប្រកាសព័ត៌មាន, ថ្ងៃទី ២៧ សីហា ១៩៨៧ ។

ហ៊ុន សែន (សម្តេចតេជោ)

- ១០ ឆ្នាំនៃដំណើរកម្ពុជា ១៩៧៩-១៩៨៩, គ្រឹះស្ថានបោះពុម្ពផ្សាយ អប់រំ, រោងពុម្ពណុប បូផាន់, ភ្នំពេញ, ១៩៨៨ ។
- បទសម្ភាសន៍សម្តេចតេជោផ្តល់ជូនក្រុមស្រាវជ្រាវប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រដឹកនាំដោយ ឯ.ឧ.អៀង មូលី និង ស៊ន សំណាង កាលពីថ្ងៃទី ១៦ មីនា ២០១០ ។

អ៊ុន តាំ

- ឆ្នាំខួបទី៥ នៃរដ្ឋាភិបាលចម្រុះត្រីភាគី និងសម្តេងក្នុំពេញ, ទស្សនាវដ្តីនគរខ្មែរឆ្នាំទី៩ លេខ៩៨ មិថុនា ១៩៨៦ ។

អេង-សុត

- ឯកសារមហាបុរសខ្មែរ - ផែនដីព្រះអង្គឌួង-ភ្នំពេញ ១៩៦៩ ។

ឯក សំអុល

- ជំនួយស្មារតីពីដំណើរការចរចាដើម្បីដំណោះស្រាយនយោបាយរួមនៃជម្លោះកម្ពុជា, ថ្ងៃទី ២ ធ្នូ ២០០៩ ។

ឱក សិរីសោភក្តិ

- លិខិតជូនលោកប្រធានរណសិរ្សជាតិរំដោះប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរ, សមរភូមិមុខ, ក្រៃតេយ៍ ថ្ងៃទី ១ មេសា ឆ្នាំ ១៩៨២ ។

អៀង មូលី

- អត្ថបទសរសេរដៃគ្មានចុះថ្ងៃខែ ។

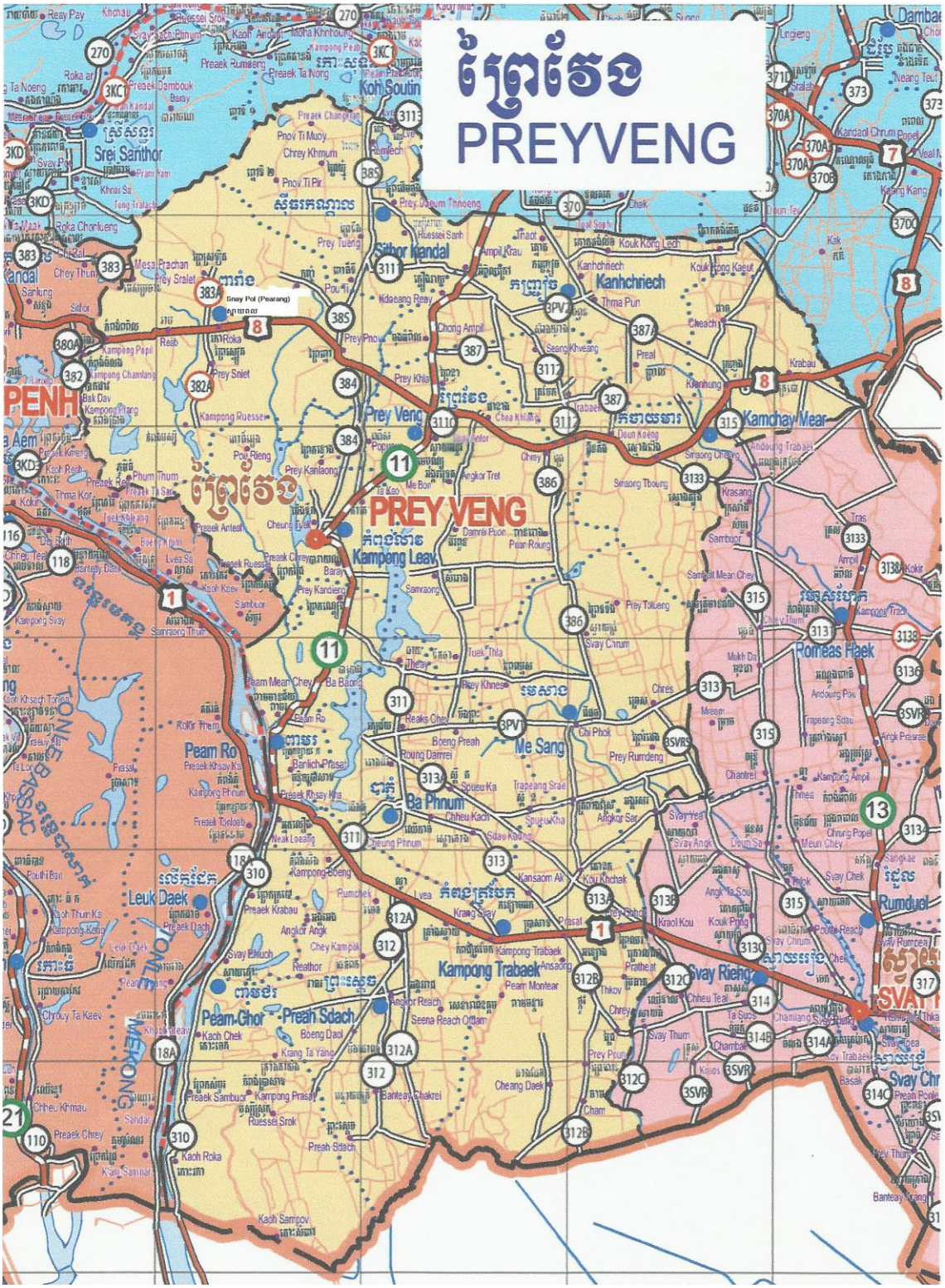


Ieng Mouly

On the Tortuous Path to Peace



Photo of the front cover, from left to right: Khieu Samphan, Im Chhun Lim, Ieng Mouly, Hun Sen, Dith Munty and Prince Norodom Sihanouk, at a meeting of the Supreme National Council in Phnom Penh Royal Palace in 1992.



Map of My native province PREY VENG