



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU-Assistance on curbing Small Arms and light weapons in Cambodia

គំនួយលើករណៈប៉ោនតែងទុកដឹងទូទៅ និង សញ្ញាបុគ្គលិកសាធារណជនកម្ពុជា

EU-ASAC

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**SPEECH BY DAVID DE BEER, EU ASAC PROJECT MANAGER,
AT THE FLAME OF PEACE CEREMONY,
TAKMAO, KANDAL PROVINCE,
20 JUNE 2006**

Venerable monks

Samdach Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Royal Cambodian Government

Excellencies Deputy Prime Ministers

Excellencies

Generals

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Representatives of International Organisations and NGO's,

Representatives of the Press and Media,

National and International guests

People of Kandal

For Kandal province and for EU ASAC this is a historic day. We are grateful to the Governor and the people of Kandal for hosting this large national ceremony at which 5,112 weapons will be destroyed. Many weapons destruction ceremonies have been held throughout Cambodia, both by crushing and Flames of Peace, since Samdach Prime Minister presided at the first weapons destruction on 5 May 1999. But this is the first destruction ceremony to take place in Kandal province. For EU ASAC it is a historic day because it is the last Flame of Peace ceremony before our programme closes at the end of June. And I am grateful to Samdach Prime Minister for your presence here today.



We believe that Kandal and the whole country is now more peaceful than it was several years ago and through this Flame of Peace destruction ceremony the Government is saying to the people of Kandal and elsewhere in the country that the years of war lie far behind. 5,112 weapons that were once used for fighting and killing are no longer needed because the country is at peace. So this ceremony sends a strong message from Cambodia to the international community that the Royal Government is doing its best to fulfil its international obligations on curbing small arms. The twenty-five countries of the European Union, through EU ASAC, are pleased to be able to assist the Royal Government in this.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to once again praise the Royal Cambodian Government for the decision to destroy surplus weapons. Internationally the Royal Cambodian Government can proudly present its policy of weapons destruction. The fact that after today's ceremony more than 198,000 weapons will have been destroyed since May 1999 provides proof of this statement. EU ASAC is pleased to have assisted in the destruction of over 142,000 of these weapons as one step in the development of a Culture of Peace. It can certainly be said that no other country in South-East Asia has such a public policy on weapons destruction.

In 1999 the Royal Government requested assistance from the European Union for assistance in solving the problems caused by the anarchic conditions regarding small arms possession and lack of weapons management in the country. Small arms were then a threat to the development and future stability of the Kingdom of Cambodia. In April 2000 EU ASAC began its work in assisting the Royal Government in its continuing efforts to curb the problem of small arms.

Assistance was given in the field of weapons collection, first in large-scale projects in Kratie and Pursat provinces, and later in seven other provinces in small-scale projects where communities which handed in illegal weapons were given water wells. A project to improve weapons security in the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces was also started. Between 2001 and 2005 all six military regions and the Royal Gendarmerie had all their small arms registered and safely locked up in depots or racks. This year EU ASAC has



just completed a small arms storage project with the Navy and the Air Force. Now all small arms of the Ministry of National Defence and some in the National Police should be registered in a computer database and securely stored. This is a great achievement.

The new Arms Law, for which EU ASAC gave assistance and which was adopted by the National Assembly in April 2005 allows the Royal Government to act more strictly against those illegally owning weapons or lending weapons to others. This is another indication of the Royal Government's increased control of weapons in Cambodia. EU ASAC is pleased to have provided the Royal Government with 122,000 copies of this law so it can be distributed widely and applied effectively. It is now up to the Ministries of the Interior, Justice and National Defence to implement the Arms Law, which is among the strictest in South East Asian countries.

The results of all this work can be seen throughout Cambodian society. The number of crimes which involve the use of weapons has decreased dramatically in the past five years. The number of people admitted to hospital suffering from bullet wounds has also decreased. This has been the combined effect of collecting illegal weapons from the civilian population and making sure that all military weapons are registered and securely locked up. But it has also been important that all weapons which are not needed by the military are destroyed in Flames of Peace ceremonies like this one today. Because the weapons which are not needed by the military are not always safely stored and can be stolen or find their way into the hands of criminals. That is why the Royal Government has decided that all surplus weapons must be destroyed to improve security. So the Flame of Peace ceremony which is taking place this morning is really helping to make your lives, as residents of Kandal Province, and the lives of people throughout the country, safer.

Your Excellency, I mentioned earlier that when EU ASAC began its work in April 2000 small arms were a threat to the stability of society. Now, as EU ASAC prepares to close down, we can say that this is no longer the case. Cambodia is a country at peace, where the level of gun violence is no higher than in most countries and is of a



purely criminal nature. This is a great achievement for the Government and people of Cambodia and the European Union is proud to have assisted in this.

But let me make a few final comments on the challenges still facing Cambodia on the question of small arms and light weapons. Internationally more and more demands are being made on all countries to improve their management and control of small arms and light weapons. There is the United Nations Programme of Action adopted in 2001 which is the subject of a major review conference in New York next week; there is the new Instrument on Marking and Tracing of small arms which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly last year and the United Nations Firearms Protocol came into force one year ago. The Royal Government must remain alert and seek further assistance to meet these new requirements on small arms management.

Another important question relates to the safe storage of ammunition of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and the destruction of ammunition that is old and no longer needed. Your Excellency, at the request of the Minister of National Defence EU ASAC has made a thorough investigation of the problem of ammunition storage. I regret that it has not been in our mandate to assist in this matter, but I am concerned that without rapid assistance, ammunition will pose a threat to the security of the population and possibly even the region if badly stored ammunition were to fall into the hands of irresponsible elements of society. And I would urge the Royal Government to take this problem of ammunition seriously and take quick steps to contain these risks.

Your Excellency, the job of EU ASAC has been completed and I wish, on behalf of the EU ASAC team, to thank the Royal Government for its unfailing co-operation over the last six years. The problem of small arms left over from the conflict has been solved, but the Royal Government is faced with new challenges. I wish you – and the people of Cambodia well – as you now must take the next steps to tackle these problems on the way to creating the Culture of Peace.

I thank you for your attention.