



EUROPEAN UNION

សហគមន៍អឺរ៉ុប

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

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EU-ASAC

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**SPEECH BY DAVID DE BEER, EU ASAC PROGRAMME MANAGER
AT THE FLAME OF PEACE CEREMONY,
KAMPOT, 5 JUNE 2003**

Venerable monks

H.E. Put Chandarith, Governor of Kampot

Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps and International Organisations,

Representatives of the Press and Media,

People of Takeng Koh Sla and other districts in Kampot province

On behalf of EU ASAC I would like to say I am pleased to be here with you all here this morning. This is the first weapons destruction ceremony to be held in this province and it is also a very special ceremony – different to the other Flames of Peace EU ASAC has assisted in organising in the past. EU ASAC has been visiting provinces throughout Cambodia to check whether there were weapons that have been collected from the local population or that are surplus police or military weapons. Where we find weapons, the Governor asks permission from the National Commission for Weapons Management & Reform to destroy these weapons. This is to ensure that the weapons are not stolen or sold illegally to arms smugglers. The Royal Cambodian Government wants these weapons destroyed so that they cannot endanger public safety. Therefore EU ASAC is pleased to assist the Royal Government in destroying weapons publicly.

The weapons we are going to destroy today have a special significance. Since 2001 EU ASAC has been supporting the CHRTF (Cambodian Human Rights Task Force) to inform the people of Kampot province on the dangers of keeping illegal weapons and the benefits that handing in their weapons will bring to the community. The 473 weapons in front of you today were collected in this way. The community leaders who worked with CHRTF and assisted in organising that these weapons were handed in must be praised for the contribution they have made to peace and security in Kampot and the whole of Cambodia. You, the people of Takeng Koh Sla must also be praised because you handed in these illegal weapons as a sign of confidence in the future.



I am pleased that this Flame of Peace ceremony can take place here in Takeng Koh Sla where the weapons were handed in. These 473 weapons are symbols of years of war and resistance that lie in the past. The destruction of these 473 weapons is a symbol that the violent past is behind you and that the future must be one of peace, security and development.

The timing of this weapons destruction is also important. It comes less than two months before the elections for the National Assembly that will be held next month. This Flame of Peace ceremony is therefore also a sign that you, the people of Takong Koh Sla, together with others in Cambodia want weapons to be destroyed so that the elections will be peaceful.

Some of you will ask, "What is EU ASAC?" EU ASAC is the programme set up by the fifteen countries that together form the European Union to help the Royal Cambodian Government in its efforts to solve the problems caused by too many weapons in society. In 1999 the Royal Government asked for assistance and EU ASAC is the result.

EU ASAC assists Cambodia to destroy weapons that have been handed over by the civilian population or that are no longer required by the Ministry of the Interior or the Ministry of National Defence. In this way, the Royal Government can implement its intention to restrict to a minimum the number of weapons in the country and preserve the peace that the country needs to attract development. The fact that over 107,000 weapons have been destroyed since May 1999 provides proof of this statement.

But EU ASAC does more than just destroy weapons. It has been assisting the Royal Government in a wider weapons management programme since it began its work in April 2000:

1. EU ASAC is providing assistance to the Royal Government in drawing up a new Arms Law which imposes strict punishment on the illegal possession of arms. In October 2002 H.E. Hun Sen sent the draft law to the National Assembly. After the election we expect that the National Assembly will pass this law.
2. An important part of EU ASAC's assistance to the Ministry of National Defence is Weapons Registration and Safe Storage. In 2001 and 2002 EU ASAC, in



conjunction with the Ministry of National Defence, built weapons storage facilities for the weapons of the 2nd Military Region in Kampong Cham and the 5th Military Region of Battambang. These weapons were registered in a computer database. In this way, the Ministry of National Defence is developing a centralised database of all the weapons it possesses. This will greatly improve weapons security in the country.

3. This year, in co-operation with the Ministry of the Interior, EU ASAC has begun a similar weapons registration and safe storage project for the Cambodian police. In Phnom Penh, Kampong Speu and Kandal provinces all police weapons are being registered and special racks to securely store the police weapons are being installed in each police post.
4. EU ASAC is co-operating with local small NGO's from nine different provinces, including Kampot, to carry out training and public awareness programmes encouraging villagers to hand in their illegally held weapons. In some cases, EU ASAC has been providing water wells where villagers have handed in many weapons.
5. Two weeks ago EU ASAC signed a Project of Co-operation with the National Commission for Weapons Management & Reform to search for and destroy weapons hidden in weapons caches in the forests and mountains during the decades of war. Next week we expect that the first weapons search under this new agreement will take place.

Let me end by saying that the countries in Europe are watching the progress Cambodia is making in curbing small arms and light weapons. Internationally Cambodia has a good name because of its efforts to curb small arms and light weapons. The flames that will soon destroy these weapons are seen in Europe as a sign of further progress towards security and political stability in Cambodia.

The Government's programme relating to small arms is something that every Cambodian can be proud of. But there are many steps still to be taken down this road. But if we continue our good co-operation I am sure that further progress can be made.

I thank you for your attention.