

The Cambodian Week of Action – EU ASAC Activities in support of the IANSA Global Week of Action

EU ASAC Weapons Destructions

1. Stung Treng Province

On 30 May 2003, EU ASAC assisted the Royal Government of Cambodia in publicly destroying **2535** weapons in a Flame of Peace in Stung Treng; a remote province in the north of Cambodia bordering Laos. All 2535 weapons had been collected from the civilian population by the provincial authorities.

This was the twenty-second Flame of Peace ceremony to be conducted since the programme began in 2001 and brought the total number of weapons destroyed in this way to 71,139. The total number of weapons destroyed by the Royal Government of Cambodia since 1999 was brought to 107,642.

The Flame of Peace was attended by thousands of local people and presided over by the governor of Stung Treng province.

See the attached folder for photographs of the event. All photos by Lt. Col. RNA (ret.) Adriaan Sprangemeijer, EU ASAC Weapons Expert.

2. Kampot Province

Since 2001, EU ASAC has been implementing a Weapons for Development programme in Chhouk district, Kampot province in cooperation with the Cambodian Human Rights Task Force (CHRTF). Large pockets of ex-Khmer Rouge communities still reside in areas such as Ta Ken Koh Sla. These communities have voluntarily handed in **473** weapons to the local authorities in exchange for 20 community-owned water wells.

At 08.00hrs on Thursday 5 June 2003, these **473** ex-Khmer Rouge weapons were publicly destroyed in a Flame of Peace in front of the Ta Ken Koh Sla commune office, Chhouk district, Kampot province.

Since the EU ASAC Flame of Peace programme began in January 2001, the ceremonies have usually been held in provincial capitals with thousands of people attending. This 23rd Flame of Peace (bringing the total to 108,117 weapons) marked a significant departure from this pattern.

The local ex-Khmer Rouge communities have requested that the 473 weapons are destroyed in a small ceremony at the point of collection in order that they may demonstrate to the people of Kampot, Cambodia and the world that the time for violence and isolation has passed.

This Flame of Peace was intended to act as an incentive for ex-KR communities in surrounding areas such as Chum Kiri, Phnom Voar and Dang Tung, to voluntarily hand in their weapons as part of the EU ASAC 2003 Weapons for Development programme.

The Flame of Peace was presided over by the first deputy Governor of Kampot province and was attended by the local civil population and local ex-Khmer Rouge commanders

such as Ta Koul who made a public speech at the ceremony declaring the desire of the surrounding communities to unite for peace, security and development.

The unique nature of the ceremony in Kampot drew considerable media attention with local TV station TVK and local multi-media group FIT Media filming the proceedings, and journalists from the Cambodia Daily, Raksmei Kampuchea and Koh Santepheap, Reuters and Agence France Presse all reporting on the event. The Flame of Peace made the front pages of the local papers and the event was broadcast on local television on the evening of the 5 June.

An EU ASAC team travelled through the surrounding region for the following two days screening footage of the ceremony to assure the local communities that any weapons they would hand in would be permanently removed from circulation.

See the attached folder for photographs of the event. All photographs by Neil Wilford, EU ASAC Weapons for Development Officer.

Awareness and Advocacy through Civil Society

1. Support of the Working Group for Weapons Reduction in Cambodia

EU ASAC has provided financial support to the Working Group for Weapons Reduction in Cambodia to conduct a small arms and non-violence awareness campaign in the run-up to the Cambodian national parliamentary elections scheduled for July 27 2003. Activities to be conducted include provincial level round table discussions and organising peaceful demonstrations with local students.

Working Group for Weapons Reduction: WGWR aims to transform the culture of violence, where the use of weapons to solve problems prevails, to one where problems are solved peacefully; to ensure that Cambodian Civil Society has an accepted and recognised role in local SALW reduction work; and to ensure that the Royal Cambodian Government demonstrates a strong commitment to implement a strategic plan to reduce and manage SALW.