

Talking Points
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During
The Australian Embassy UNTAC 30th Anniversary Speaker Series
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- H.E. Pablo Kang, Ambassador of Australia to the Kingdom of Cambodia
 - Distinguished Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
 - Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen
- 1- I am indeed honor to be invited to speak at the Australian Embassy special speaker series to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of UNTAC, an event that should not be forgotten among younger generation of Cambodia.
 - 2- I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to H.E. Pablo Kang, Ambassador of Australia to Cambodia for his kind invitation and congratulate him warmly for reviving this watershed event that have made such positive impact on the rebirth of the second Kingdom of Cambodia.
 - 3- In the next 20 minutes, I will share my personal reflection on an unforgotten historical UN operation that was designed to guide Cambodia out of desolation and devastation toward a vibrant, stable and peaceful country today.
 - 4- More specifically, I will trace back how the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia was set up from the beginning and elaborate on the success story of UNTAC and highlight what the UN operation had done beneficially for Cambodia. In addition, I will also deliberate on the failure of UNTAC and highlight the limitation of the UN blue helmets to deal with the unforeseen situation and discuss the ramification left by UNTAC that affect peace building and the path toward real democracy in Cambodia afterward.
 - 5- Before discussing UNACT, please allow me to say a few words about an important UN framework that created UNACT.
 - 6- Thirty years ago last year, thanks for the large part to the Australia's middle power effective diplomacy, the Agreements on a Comprehensive

Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict were signed on 23 October 1991 by 19 different governments who were the signatories to the Agreements which gave the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) full authority to govern Cambodia from March 1992 to September 1993.

- 7- It was the Australian peace proposal announced by the Honorable Gareth Evans in November 1989 proposing that the United Nations to actual govern Cambodia during the transitional period, allowing the major powers to have face-saving exist to withdraw their supports to the Cambodian factions.
- 8- Of all the proposals taken to resolve the Cambodian conflict, it was the remarkable initiative taken up more vigorously by the Honorable Foreign Minister Gareth Evan who was the chief architect of a 'framework document' setting out the key elements of a comprehensive political settlement to the Cambodia conflicts based on an enhanced UN role, exhibiting skillful and judicious balance of the various interests involved in engaging all key players including the Five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, the Paris Conference Co-Chairmen – France and Indonesia, the UN Secretary General, ASEAN, and members of the Supreme National Council (SNC) comprising of all the four Khmer factions under the Chairmanship of the His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk.
- 9- Let us now focus on UNTAC. Although 30 years have now passed today, it is important to understand what is the *raison d'être* behind such a colossal undertaken and why the UN assume such a complex operation in Cambodia?
- 10- Cambodia is a country known to have been overly caught up by dreadful effects of the Cold War and the Cambodian-Vietnam War which intern brought the country into chaos and destruction from the early 1970s to late 1980s. The so-called Cambodian problems were very complex and seen as intractable conflicts.

- 11- the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was therefore established by Security Council resolution 745 of 28 February 1992, to carry out the implementation of the Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, signed in Paris on 23 October 1991.
- 12- The settlement gave UNTAC full authority to govern Cambodia from March 1992 to September 1993 and committed the Cambodian parties and those supporting them to a permanent ceasefire, repatriate the displaced Khmer along the border with Thailand, disarm and demobilize the factional armies, prepare Cambodia for free and fair elections, and adopt a new democratic constitution.
- 13- The mandate given to UNTAC included aspects relating to human rights, the organization and conduct of free and fair general elections, military arrangements, civil administration, the maintenance of law and order, the repatriation and resettlement of the Cambodian refugees and displaced persons and the rehabilitation of essential Cambodian infrastructure during the transitional period.
- 14- UNTAC operation in Cambodia is much more than the typical and traditional peacekeeping functions. These include the verification of the withdrawal of foreign forces and the supervision of the ceasefire - plus other functions being assumed by the UN, such as repatriation of refugees and involvement in elections. However, in Cambodia, the concept of peacekeeping was much expanded, to include comprehensive efforts towards institution building and social reconstruction as integral parts of the package designed to secure a lasting end to armed conflict and a genuine transition to democracy.
- 15- From this understanding, one should be mindful of the intricacy and sheer size of the operation with very difficult tasks to be accomplished. It is therefore important when we evaluate the performance of UNTAC. We should form a balance views when we want to know to what extend have UNTAC done for Cambodia?
- 16- H.E. Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Cambodia once said that there are different view about UNTAC, and such divergence of views is inevitable; it arises from degrees of prior expectations, varied estimates regarding the capacity of the United Nations to deploy and implement a complex peace-keeping

mandate as well as the degree to which a UN intervention could make a serious impact upon the socioeconomic and political structure of a country within a limited time span. (Please try to keep this in our mind as I go forward with my talk)

- 17- To begin with, we must acknowledge the humongous tasks assumed by UNTAC. The overall UNTAC plan called for 15,900 military personnel, 3600 civilian police and 1020 administrative personnel with 34 nations contributed to the military operation and 45 to the peace keeping exercise overall.
- 18- On 15 March 1992, the first UNTAC units arrived in Cambodia accompanied by the Secretary-General's Special Representative, H.E. Mr. Yasushi Akashi, and the Australian commander of the military component, Lieutenant General John Sanderson.
- 19- It was incredible that UNTAC had succeeded in establishing an effective administrative structure, both civilian and military components, in dealing with Cambodia which had just exited prolong internal conflict where weak tradition in human rights, without effective democratic governance, and the rule of law and democracy were absent.
- 20- With proper administration in place UNTAC had begun a step by step process of constructively engagement with the different Cambodian factions through the process of grass-root education as well top-level consultations with the Khmer leaders, as well as appealing to NGOs to deliver good public service to meet the needs of the Cambodian society.
- 21- **On a positive note**, one can say without exaggeration that the UN Blueprint for Cambodia succeeded where previous attempts – confrontational approach and the use of military forces – had failed primarily because the international community including regional bloc such as the ASEAN and domestic Cambodian parties were supporting of a negotiated peace settlement. Hence, the Paris Peace Agreements gave rise to a political solution instead of the military one which warrants a prospect of national reconciliation and a Cambodia that is free from external domination.

- 22- UNTAC has been able to achieve many of its main goals. One of the most important objectives was to organize national election. It was a remarkable exercise taken by UNTAC to organize from ground up nation-wide voter registration and general elections in which 90 per cent of the electorate participated in the free and fair general elections in atmosphere of a neutral political environment.
- 23- The national election in May 1993 which known to be free and fair elections, was a considerable success. A new constitution based on the Constituent Assembly in 1993 was adopted to create a new government and restore Cambodia toward the path of peace and democracy. In this sense, UNTACT had played an indispensable role in bringing to birth a new Cambodia polity, based on unity it had carefully cultivated among the major Khmer factions with the exception of the Khmer Rouge.
- 24- **On a negative note**, while the peace-keeping operation in Cambodia produced positive results, the subsequent peace-building phase was not entirely satisfactory, since the threat from the Khmer Rouge remained eminent and some opportunities to reform the Cambodian state were missed.
- 25- There are those who believe that the task of UNTAC under the Paris Peace Agreements was too ambitious and therefore, was an impossible one to implement. The cease-fire was not honored. The demilitarization was not achieved. UNTAC was too passive vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge resistance. Some observers said that the most serious UNTAC failure was its inability to “bring about the disarmament and demobilization of the Khmer Rouge”.
- 26- One cannot dispute the failure of UNTAC to deal with the refusal to disarm and demobilize the 40,000 strong armed forces of Democratic of Kampuchea (NADK). This letdown and the inability of the UN blue helmets to break open Cambodian territory under the Khmer Rouge control has raised the debate by some scholars to challenge the global evaluation of the Agreements that UNTAC had not been able to implement its intended mandate properly and as such the peace accords failed to bring peace to Cambodia as UNTAC failed to end the Khmer Rouge threat.
- 27- There was a question why UNTAC not use Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to get rid of the Khmer Rouge? Chapter VII of the United Nations

Charter sets out the UN Security Council's powers to maintain peace. It allows the Council to "determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression" and to take military and nonmilitary action to "restore international peace and security".

- 28- According to Mr. Akashi, there were calls by Deputy Force Commander Jean-Michel Loridon of France and some civilian "young Turks" around him who advocated the use of force to invade Khmer Rouge controlled areas when the latter began boycotting cooperation with UNTAC, jeopardizing the Paris Agreements concerning re-groupment, cantonment, disarming and demobilization of forces in June 1992.
- 29- For UNTAC to be able to use the UN Chapter 7, new mandate is needed from the UN HQ and a new UNSC Resolution must come into force which will not be obvious as China was a good friend to the Khmer Rouge at that time. What left for Mr. Akashi was to stand firm on the strict implementation of the Paris Agreements, and not much else UNTAC can do to make the Khmer Rouge compromised. UNTAC at that time rely on the wisdom made by the SNC in Cambodia and not to pursue an action taken by the UN Security Council.
- 30- At the end of the UN operation in September 1993, the territory under the control of the Khmer Rouge remained intact. The Cambodian government then had to deal with the security remnant left by UNTAC. There were large proportion of civilians remained under the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge. Incidents of fighting had still occurred. Trains were attacked resulted in the murdered of innocent lives, including Cambodian and three foreign tourists from Australia and France.
- 31- This failure has also contributed to uneasy transition to peace and stability for Cambodia for the first term of government from 1993-1998 where the civil-military relations were characterized by a fierce competition between the two leading parties at the time, the FUNCINPEC and the CPP.
- 32- Although there was merit in creating sound policy to end the internal security crisis through national reconciliation and national unity, the administration of two political parties had lobbied and began a campaign to persuade the remnant of the Khmer Rouge forces to join the rank and file of its own military command and control, under the

banner of merging them into a national army. Subsequently, the defections of NADK unit began in early 1996. Adding to this murky situation, there were frictions brewing between security forces loyal to the two political parties which led to an outbreak of fighting in Phnom Penh on 4-5 July, 1997 which had delay the long-awaited plan for Cambodia to join ASEAN until 1999.

33- It should be mentioned that the Win-Win Policy of Prime Minister Hun Sen had succeeded as the last groups of the Khmer Rouge guerrillas were integrated into the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces in late 1998. This marked the historical and total dissolution of the Khmer Rouge's political and military organs and the return of all secession areas to government control.

34- Allow me to conclude my remarks as follows.

35- Despite some shortfalls and lack of comprehensive strategy in dealing with unforeseen circumstance, UNTAC operation in Cambodia for me represent a new beginning for Cambodia to re-immerge as a new nation yearning for stability, peace, independence, progress and democracy.

36- For all the good things we should remember about UNTAC is that the UN operation has help Cambodia ends years of isolation, foster the spirit of national reconciliation and allow the Cambodian people for the first time in almost 40 years to choose their government in a comparatively free, fair and democratic manner. Furthermore, UNTAC succeeded in organizing a surprisingly successful May 1993 election, enable a new constitution to be adopted with a new government formed and His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk was restored to the throne as Cambodia's constitutional monarch and a national army was established.

37- The flip sides of UNTAC includes high monetary cost of operation worth approximately \$1.5 billion with the human cost was also great among UNTAC personnel with 142 casualties, including 84 killed and 58 seriously injured as of 31 August 1993. There were questions of neutrality and impartiality of UNTAC is coping with four different

existing administration of the Cambodian warring factions at the time and the inability of UNTAC of dealing Khmer Rouge's blatant violations of the Paris Peace Agreements to demobilize and disarm.

38- Another harsh legacy of UNTAC has to do with the lack of ability to reconcile the contested 1993 election results which was contested by the dominant State of Cambodia at the time. During the preceding period of UNTAC, the process of confidence building has not been properly instill and as such animosity remain as deep scar among the Khmer factions and as a result, although the security situation was significantly improved, full stabilization was not achieved and a lot of fictions entails during the first period of the newly born Royal Government of Cambodia with two Prime Minister.

39- However overall, UNTAC has been known as the UN's first major success of the post-cold war era and one that establishes benchmarks for future similar UN operations. Let me revive a statement made by former UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali who told UNTAC personnel in Phnom Penh in April 1993, and I quote "a new system of international co-operation for peace-building has been launched here. It is not only the future of Cambodia which hangs in the balance. This operation will influence the nature and scope of future UN mandates and operations all over the world."

40- UNTAC provides a legitimate foundation for Cambodia to rebound from a war-torn country that once experienced mass atrocities and foreign intervention to a fast developing and responsible member of the international community. Please allow me to conclude my remarks as follows"

41- We should pay tribute to the mission of UNTAC that justified in action the spirit of the Paris Peace Agreements and we accept that while significant challenges remain in the country's development path, there is no doubt that Cambodia can stand on its own feet as a unitary, sovereign, and independent nation with development well underway, thanks to the desire for peace and the spirit of national reconciliation

born from the Cambodian leaders as well as the strong support from international community, especially Australia.

Thank you very much for your attention!