



Petition

Call for an Independent Review of the Paris Peace Agreements: Urgent Action Needed to Restore Democracy and Human Rights in Cambodia

Petitioners: The People of Cambodia

Recipients: The Signatories of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords

Petition Text:

We, the people of Cambodia, urgently call upon the signatories of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements on Cambodia to initiate an independent review of the implementation of the agreements. The agreements, signed on 23 October, 1991 have failed. These accords state that their purpose is " to ensure the exercise of the right to self-determination of the Cambodian people through free and fair elections" and to "defend the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and inviolability, neutrality and national unity of Cambodia ".

More than three decades later, the core promises of the accords have been systematically violated under the rule of Hun Sen, his son Hun Manet, and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP).

1. Erosion of Democracy: The Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), the main opposition party, was dissolved in 2017, and the Candlelight Party was barred from contesting the 2023 election on dubious grounds. Elections have been held without a legitimate opposition, undermining the right of the Cambodian people to choose their leaders.
2. Violation of National Sovereignty: Cambodia's increasing reliance on China, including the establishment of a Chinese military base at Ream, violates the principle of neutrality enshrined in the Paris Peace Accords. Since 1991 the world has poured billions of dollars into Cambodia in an attempt to create a functioning democracy. International assistance to Cambodia in this context is simply funding for an illegal autocracy which undermines regional stability. The Hun family regime remains determined to escape any kind of domestic or international accountability for its actions.
3. Human Rights Abuses: The Cambodian government continues to trample on basic human rights. Recent crackdowns on civil society, environmental activists, and those criticizing government policies illustrate the regime's hostility toward any form of dissent. The justice system, completely controlled by the ruling elite, is used as a tool of repression, further deepening the culture of fear and violence.
4. Land Grabs and Economic Exploitation: The Khmer Rouge genocide of the 1970s abolished property rights in Cambodia. Under Hun Sen, hard property rights are reserved for the elite, and land rights for everyone else can be revoked at will. The system of Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) set up by Hun Sen allows land to be cleared for "industrial agricultural exploitation ". ELCs, according to the human rights group Licadho, control about 14% of the territory in Cambodia.

According to the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association, by 2014 about 770,000 Cambodians had been affected by land disputes. That number has continued to grow with the ruling elite being the only winners. Cambodian authorities in the second half of 2022 began evicting large numbers of people from Angkor, ostensibly to protect the location's World Heritage status. Many of these people have lived in the Angkor area for generations. As Amnesty reported, the displaced were given small empty plots of land at a barren relocation site and told to build their own homes with sheets of corrugated iron.

5. Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle Area (CLV-DTA): Between late July and August 28, Amnesty International reported that at least 94 individuals, including children, were arrested for publicly criticizing the CLV-DTA. The agreement enabled the unchecked plundering of Cambodia's natural resources and stripped Cambodians of their land and livelihoods. The Cambodian government on 20 September announced its withdrawal from the agreement after widespread public protests. All those arrested and imprisoned for criticizing the agreement must be immediately released. Close monitoring will be needed to see if the economic damage caused to Cambodia continues after the dropping of the formal agreement.

These arrests reflect the Cambodian regime's ongoing campaign of repression against civil society and critics of its policies. In July, ten young environmentalists from the Mother Nature Cambodia group were sentenced to between six and eight years in prison for their peaceful work to highlight environmental issues. The government's control over the justice system has allowed such abuses to continue unchecked.

The result is an atmosphere of fear, backed up by close government surveillance and extra-judicial violence.

6. Microfinance Crisis: An illegitimate government which functions without the rule of law is the ideal context for the rapid build-up of microfinance loans which leave huge numbers of Cambodians trapped in misery. In 2023, total Cambodian microfinance loans rose to more than \$16 billion, nearly half of the country's GDP, exacerbating poverty and hardship for ordinary citizens.

7. Criminal Activity and International Sanctions: Cambodia has become a haven for forced labor, human trafficking, and cybercrime, as evidenced by recent sanctions imposed by the US under the Global Magnitsky Act on Ly Yong Phat, a Cambodian senator and an adviser to Hun Sen and Hun Manet.

The signatories to the Paris Peace Accords – including the United States, China, Russia, France, the UK, Japan, Indonesia, India, and Australia – have a moral and legal responsibility to address the violations of these agreements. None of the signatories to the agreements alone has enough influence over Cambodia to insist that it meets its legal international obligations. The only hope for positive results is through a collective effort.

Our Demands:

We call for an independent, international review of the Paris Peace Accords' implementation, with the aim of restoring democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Cambodia. This review must include an assessment of Cambodia's compliance with the accords and provide recommendations for corrective actions.

Cambodia's future depends on the restoration of democracy and full participation of its citizens in the political process. An independent review is the first step toward freeing Cambodia from the grip of autocratic rule, persecution, and fear.

Only democracy with the full participation of all Cambodians will shape Cambodia into a strong member of ASEAN, and other international institutions.

We urge the signatories to act now in the spirit of the Paris Peace Accords to safeguard the future of Cambodia and its people who have suffered for far too long.



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