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CAMBODIA'S ELITE PARADE ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH AT WEDDING OF NETH SAVOEUN'S DAUGHTER

Cambodia's elite flaunts ill-gotten gains at wedding of Neth Savoeun's daughter

The unlimited wealth on display at the wedding of Cambodian deputy prime minister Neth Savoeun's daughter Neth Thida Chanthima in February was a slap in the face for ordinary Cambodians.

The expensive trinkets on show at the ceremony attended by Hun Sen belong to a different world to that inhabited by most Cambodians. Everyone at the wedding goes abroad for their healthcare as Cambodia has no decent health system. Most people can't afford it. Cambodia has remained a Least Developed Country (LDC) as defined by the United Nations for decades of Hun dynasty rule. The government had planned to exit LDC status by 2025, but this has been pushed back yet again until 2029.

The latest issue of the Fair Work Monitor for 2024 paints a stark picture of the realities faced by working Cambodians. The report found that the average expenditure per worker was \$412 per month. The country's minimum monthly wage for 2025 has been set at \$208,

So by the end of each month, on average 30% of workers have run out of food in their household, and 42% lack money to buy medication. The research found that 73% of workers borrow money for basic expenses, and 82% cannot save for emergencies.

Neth Savoeun's official salary, like those of all Cambodian government leaders, is modest. Yet property held in London by Neth Savoeun's wife and daughter has been estimated to be worth more than \$10 million. The UK has allowed the family to continue to use London as their playground. The British government is reported to have issued "Investor Visas" to Neth Thida Chanthima, as well as Neth Savoeun's wife Hun Kimleng, a niece of Hun Sen.[1]



The wedding of Neth Savoeun's daughter



Hun's family

The human rights abuses carried out by Neth Savoeun are serious enough to merit visa and financial sanctions being imposed on him and his family. His crimes were detailed in a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 2018, Cambodia's Dirty Dozen: A Long History of Rights Abuses by Hun Sen's Generals.[2] HRW draws on evidence from The Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights (LCIHR), which in 1984 reported that a former police colleague told them that Neth Savoeun had been promoted to first vice chair of the Phnom Penh police because of the extreme violence with which he would conduct interrogations. Throughout the 1980s, he presided over systematic police extortion, kidnapping for ransom and bribe-taking in Phnom Penh.

In 1998, Neth Savoeun was a member of the "command committee" which oversaw the violent suppression of demonstrations protesting fraud in Cambodia's July 1998 national assembly elections. He was national police chief between 2008 and 2023. In January 2014, his forces deployed overwhelming force including firing live ammunition into crowds of protestors, resulting in the deaths of at least seven people. In November 2017 Neth Savoeun said that "all police throughout the country" supported the judgement of the politically controlled supreme which dissolved the country's only

large-scale opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

Decades of international tolerance of the Hun family regime and billions of dollars of foreign aid have succeeded only in creating a closed elite which enjoys fabulous wealth and is completely detached from the realities of Cambodia. The regime has stamped out all domestic dissent and systematically uses transnational repression in an attempt to end criticism from the global Khmer diaspora.



Cambodia will never move forward while it remains under the grip of the current elite which exists only to perpetuate its own wealth and power. Foreign governments should impose personal sanctions on Neth Savoeun. Only a democratic government which is accountable to its people can achieve real progress for ordinary Cambodians. That was the system laid down in the Paris Peace Agreements of 1991. Signatory countries to the agreements must reconvene to assess how the agreements can be implemented.

[1] [In London, Cambodian Elites Tread in the Kremlin's Footsteps – Radio Free Asia](#)

[2] [Cambodia's Dirty Dozen: A Long History of Rights Abuses by Hun Sen's Generals | HRW](#). See pages 112 to 124.

