

After 65 years with the UN, Cambodia should look within

Seun Sam

The Kingdom of Cambodia officially became a member of the United Nations (UN) on December 14, 1955. It is now 65 years since Cambodia became a member of the UN. There are good and bad memories that have taken place for Cambodia during this period. What should be the way for Cambodia to go from now?

The world congratulated Cambodia after it fully received independence from France in 1953. At that time the citizens of Cambodia at all levels hoped that the country would live in peace and harmony for eternity; unfortunately, in 1970 the country faced a coup d'etat led by marshal Lon Nol and his team. During the Lon Nol regime from 1970-1975, Cambodia faced a lot of civil wars and invasions.

Between 1975-1979, Cambodia was under the leadership of the Khmer Rouge which killed almost two million innocent Cambodians. We cannot describe the living standard of the regime that isolated itself from the outside world, except China. Even the UN operations was suspended during that time.

In 1979, Cambodia was liberated by the Vietnamese Government (Some western government and scholars treated Vietnam's liberation as the invasion of Cambodia until they left in 1989).

The period between 1979-1989 was severe for the People's Republic of Kampuchea because they were besieged by Western countries and the UN. The UN treated the government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea as illegal and it still



The UN General Assembly Adopt its first resolution. Marcel Bolomey

recognised the Khmer Rouge leaders as the official and the legal representative of Cambodia in its ranks.

We need to imagine the situation when one has to lead a country that had no choice to choose but had to choose only one existing choice.

In 1982, The United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) came into existence to provide and coordinate humanitarian assistance to Cambodia's displaced persons along the Thai-Cambodian border. Under the support of the UN, many Cambodian people received opportunities to live in third countries such as the US, Canada, France, Australia, and other European countries.

The UN played a very important role to organise the first general election in Cambodia in 1993. However, Trevor Findlay from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute had written in detail in a book titled "Cambodia; the legacy and lesson of UNTAC"

about the problems and challenges of the UN operation in Cambodia.

The mission of the UN was at the very least, daring considering Cambodia's renowned physical, cultural, and psychological impenetrability to outsiders. Understanding Cambodia has always seemed like trying to put together a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle of morality, politics, and geography. It should not be too surprising; therefore, if an organisation as far from perfect as the UN, got some of its missions wrong.

The international community always continue to assist Cambodians in nurturing their fragile democracy and in rehabilitating and reconstructing of the country, but the future always essentially is in the hands of the Cambodians themselves. The ability to take advantage of foreign donations and support are based on the capacity and the willingness of the

government of Cambodia. Until the present time, to survive the Kingdom of Cambodia still annually needs to seek funds from other countries. It is not only Cambodia that borrows money from other countries to support national annual expenditure, but the government of the borrowing countries should also ensure transparency and effectiveness in usage of those foreign loans.

The UN has frequently informed the Cambodian Government about the human rights situation and freedom of expression in Cambodia while the government of Cambodia paid much attention to the living standard of Cambodian citizens. There are many discussions and predictions by western newspapers on who will lead the country in the future. It is very disturbing to talk about who will be the future prime minister while the present prime minister is in power.

Sweden, one of the countries that had a very good rank in the human rights situation recently announced a long-term loan for Vietnam to construct the most comfortable international airport in Asia. Recently, Vietnam signed a free trade agreement with the EU and just recently signed a free trade agreement with the UK. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a communist country, but Vietnam has very good relations with other democratic countries in the world such as the EU, US, Japan, and South Korea, and so on. It seems like there is no one who talks about human rights in international relations with a country that has a strong economy and has strategic geopolitical tendencies.

There is a different interpretation

towards Singapore and Brunei; the two countries are members of the ASEAN community just like Cambodia, but the world appreciates the brilliant future of Singapore and the brightening daily life of Brunei. There are few countries that dare to mention human rights situation in the two countries since they have trade exchanges with each other or both countries are strategically located. It seems like when you are rich, everyone will appreciate everything about you even when you have deficiencies, at the same time people will criticise everything done by the poor.

After 65 years as an official member of the UN, the Cambodian Government should find its strengths and shape its goals. Democracy and freedom of expression are very important for human beings, but it is not the first obligation to build a strong country. Social justice, social infrastructure development, the quality education system, military power, border protection, irrigation systems at all provinces, markets for farmers to sell agricultural products, corruption reduction at all levels, natural resource protection, and effective use of natural resources in the smart and modern ways are all critical components of priorities.

If the Royal Government of Cambodia could effectively shape their strengths, young Cambodian workers would not migrate to work in other countries. It is a sad future if young Cambodian workers go abroad to look for work while they are energetic and then return home when they are sick or old. ■

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Where we stand five years after the Paris Agreement

Saleemul Huq

ON December 12, 2015, then-French Foreign Minister and President of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) Laurent Fabius gavelled through the historic Paris Agreement to uproarious applause in the conference chamber.

I had the good fortune of being in that chamber on that historic night. I was part of that applause. I was witness to a last-minute moment that had hung in the balance throughout the two weeks of intense negotiations.

Five years on, the United Kingdom — as the incoming president of COP26 to be held in November 2021, has convened a Climate Ambition Summit. To be held on the

fifth anniversary of that momentous night, it serves as an opportunity for heads of government from around the world to share their revised plans for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

And this is an opportunity they must take seriously.

Back in December 2015, the vulnerable developing countries, which I help to represent, advocated hard for a long-term temperature goal of 1.5 degrees Celsius. Our call was met with initial resistance from many developed nations, which made the ultimate inclusion of the goal in the Paris Agreement a major achievement for us.

'Loss of momentum'

But not enough has happened in

the intervening years to set us on a path to meeting the target. We saw the US pull out of the accord, and although no other country followed suit, it was still a major setback to the global effort to combat climate change.

The overall loss of momentum in the past half-decade has allowed temperatures to rise by more than 1 degree Celsius above pre-industrial averages. The adverse impacts of this planetary warming are now becoming visible around the world, with wildfires, floods, droughts and hurricanes impacting lives and livelihoods.

We are already living in a climate-changed world.

One of the major outcomes of the Paris Agreement was to unleash the opportunities for

nongovernmental actors including mayors of cities, heads of companies, civil society groups as well as youth and even children to take the requisite actions regardless of whether their own governments were doing so.

This has led to major global movements that have seen school kids, led by Greta Thunberg — push their parents and elders to take necessary action.

The future of the planet, however, cannot be left to such movements alone.

Joe Biden has pledged to rejoin the Paris Agreement as soon as he is sworn in as US president in January 2021. But if we are to come anywhere close to the 1.5-degree

target for which we fought so hard, all countries will need to considerably increase their ambitions.

And when COP26 does finally happen next year, it must also be a forum to address the issue of supporting the victims of loss and damage as a result of global warming. Failure to do so may lead to failure of the COP. ■

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