

## A RETROSPECTIVE ON UNTAC

by Yasushi Akashi

### 1. The framework of the Cambodian peace

The Peace Conference on Cambodia held in Paris lasted over two years and finally culminated in the signing on 23 October 1991, of a series of agreements by the four Cambodian Parties and eighteen governments - including the five Permanent Members of the Security Council, the six ASEAN countries, the Indo-China States of Vietnam and Laos and countries such as Australia, India and Japan. These Agreements were intended to bring to a final end the conflict over Cambodia which had lasted over twenty years, starting in 1970 when the pro-American Lon Nol Government carried out a coup d'état to depose Prince Sihanouk as President. These Agreements were made possible thanks to the end of the Cold War and, more specifically, to the rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the United States, and to the improvement of relations between Vietnam and China and its ASEAN allies.

The peace talks in Paris were hampered by the question as to who should rule Cambodia during the interim period leading to elections and a new government. The primary issue was the formula for power sharing among the four Cambodian factions. The State of Cambodia, or the Phnom Penh administration, insisted on retaining as much of its actual control as possible, while the three resistance factions, composed of Prince Sihanouk's FUNCINPEC faction, Son Sann's KPNLF faction and the Democratic Kampuchea faction (the so-called "Khmer Rouge"), wanted to weaken the State of Cambodia in order to produce a political atmosphere which would be favourable to their factions. In the end, the efforts of Gareth Evans, Australian Foreign Minister, and others led to the proposal to give the primary responsibility for governance in Cambodia to the United Nations during the interim period.

The alignment among the four Cambodian factions changed over time as follows. At the time of the signing of the Paris Agreements, the State of Cambodia faced the joint front of the

three resistance factions. Subsequently, in the early months of UNTAC's rule alignment was changed to the Democratic Kampuchea versus the State of Cambodia, with two factions, FUNCINPEC and KPNLF, moved more towards a middle ground between DK and SOC. "Khmer Rouge" intransigence against UNTAC tended gradually to intensify the division between the DK and three other factions, on issues such as rehabilitation assistance and the acceptance of Phase II cease-fire. Finally, by the electoral period, there developed a juxtaposition between the State of Cambodia defending the status quo and two opposition political parties, FUNCINPEC and KPNLF, contesting this dominance. By that time, the Party of Democratic Kampuchea had decided to boycott the UNTAC-organized elections.

It is to be noted that the Paris Agreements did not provide for enforcement or any kind of sanction in the event of non-compliance by the Cambodian parties with the provisions therein. In other words, the Agreements were premised on a "good faith" implementation by all parties concerned. The Agreements contained only one clause (article 29) regarding the right of the two Co-chairmen, France and Indonesia, in the case of a violation or threat of violation of the Agreements, to engage in consultations with a view to taking appropriate steps to ensure respect for the commitments undertaken. The Co-chairmen would do so "without prejudice to the prerogatives of the Security Council" and "upon request of the Secretary-General". In reality, the Co-chairmen met with the Cambodian parties on three occasions - in Tokyo in June 1992, in Beijing in November 1992, and in Phnom Penh in June 1993. The Security Council met more frequently on Cambodia and adopted some crucial resolutions, together with a few Presidential Statements in the name of the Council.

## 2. New responsibilities for the mission of UNTAC

By its resolution 745, the Security Council established UNTAC on 28 February 1992, based on the Secretary-General's

implementation plan of the Paris Agreements (S/23613), which provided for unprecedentedly ambitious tasks, to be entrusted to the United Nations in order to bring about peace, and to rebuild a whole country based on national reconciliation and to establish democracy through free and fair elections. UNTAC has spent over 1.5 billion U.S. dollars of the assessed United Nations budget, in addition to a significant amount of voluntary contributions in order to achieve these goals. Participating in UNTAC have been almost 22,000 international personnel, consisting of 16,000 military personnel, 3,600 civilian police and 2,000 civilians. Military and police contingents came from over forty-four countries. In the period preceding and during the elections they were joined by about 1,000 international polling station officers and over 50,000 Cambodian staff.

What makes UNTAC different from other peacekeeping operations is, in the first place, its extensive authority. Under Article 6 of the Paris Agreements, UNTAC was given the authority to implement the provisions of the Paris Agreements, while it has to consult with the Supreme National Council, in which Cambodian sovereignty and legality are enshrined. The Supreme National Council has not in reality exercised much power; it is always left to UNTAC to propose or negotiate on substantive questions during the transitional period. Prince Sihanouk, President of the Supreme National Council, calls the Special Representative of the Secretary-General his Co-chairman of the Supreme National Council. UNTAC has been given the power of direct control over the existing administrative structures in the five key areas of foreign affairs, national defence, finance, information and public security. It has the right of unlimited access to documentation. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has the right to reassign or dismiss officials, should the need arise.

When there is a deadlock in the Supreme National Council the President of the Council, Prince Sihanouk, is authorized to resolve such deadlock by his decision. When he is not in a

position to do so, that power shifts to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. At any rate, the Special Representative retains the right to decide whether the decisions taken by the Supreme National Council are in conformity with the Paris Agreements.

Another special feature of UNTAC is its complex, diverse mandate. It is a multi-faceted operation, comprising seven distinct parts - the military functions of cease-fire, supervision and disarmament/demobilization is one; deployment of civilian police to monitor and supervise the maintenance of law and order is another; the organization of elections from zero is a third domain; the ensuring of human rights protection is the fourth and the control of civil administration is the fifth task which is quite unique.

In addition, two other operations, that is the repatriation of Cambodian refugees and the rebuilding of the economic and social infrastructure that had been completely devastated by two decades of war are to be organized on the basis of voluntary contributions.

These seven components have been coordinated and harmonized under the single umbrella of UNTAC. Each component is to contribute to the fulfilment of the central purposes of UNTAC. UNTAC is thus a comprehensive organization, which made it possible to avoid inter-sectoral rivalry among U.N. agencies which is visible in other operations.

UNTAC's substantial achievements in various domains can hardly be contested. However, it could have been more effective, had its deployment in Cambodia been expedited by a more prompt arrival of military and civilian personnel and a more rapid dispatch of vehicles, prefabricated housing, office and communication equipment and other necessary infrastructure. The process of budget authorization in New York and the cumbersome nature of procurement, based on open biddings in many cases, led to delays which affected the perceptions of Cambodians regarding UNTAC's efficiency.

Other problems arose from the international composition of UNTAC. In order to ensure the representative character of

the operation, UNTAC's personnel is composed of many nationalities coming from all parts of the world. This has a clear symbolic importance, but this advantage is accompanied by the weakness stemming from the multiplicity of national backgrounds, the difference in cultural and linguistic characteristics and the diversity of values, training and skills. The multinational character has probably not been a major debilitating factor in the military component, except in the case of one or two contingents which had disciplinary problems, but it has hampered the activities of the civilian police in which the United Nations has had only limited experience. Of the fourteen countries which sent over 100 police monitors, 13 were developing countries. Some of the personnel did not meet the highest professional standards. United Nations electoral personnel who came from many countries suffered from linguistic and communication problems with both the military and police components in the field. This contributed to the sense of insecurity during the tense period of violence against UNTAC personnel initiated by DK and others.

### 3. The issue of Democratic Kampuchea (DK)

In January 1992, when the Special Representative of the Secretary-General attended his first meeting with the Supreme National Council in Phnom Penh and had talks with DK leaders, Khieu Samphan and Son Sen, they pledged their cooperation and urged him to hasten the deployment of UNTAC in order to calm down the security situation in several provinces and to establish border checkpoints with Vietnam. At the outset of the UNTAC operation in March 1992, there was still a distinct impression that the DK was willing to cooperate with UNTAC.

However, as preparations proceeded for entry into Phase II involving the cantonment, disarmament and demobilization of the armed forces of the four factions, DK began to show increasing intransigence and engaged in cease-fire violations, ignoring admonitions by UNTAC. Furthermore, DK exhibited

considerable suspicion regarding the political nature of rehabilitation aid, which it felt benefited the State of Cambodia more than other factions. By May, it became clear that DK was extremely critical of UNTAC's intentions. However, some of the local commanders of the Democratic Kampuchea indicated to UNTAC military observers in the field that they were waiting for instructions to canton their troops and were ready to embark on cantonment in a week or two. The hopes engendered by these contacts proved, in the end, unfounded. This was the first of several instances in which the UNTAC military was led to believe in Democratic Kampuchea's good intentions and subsequently was disappointed. It is not clear whether it was manoeuvred by Democratic Kampuchea into believing in untruths, or whether it was due to disunity within Democratic Kampuchea between the hardliners and the moderates who wanted to cooperate with UNTAC.

By the second part of May, it became evident that repeated urgings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, both in bilateral discussions with Democratic Kampuchea leaders and at the Supreme National Council, were to no avail. The Security Council also expressed its dissatisfaction and irritation with the DK by adopting resolutions criticizing the DK's lack of cooperation with UNTAC.

The Expanded Permanent-Five in Phnom Penh, composed of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council, Indonesia, Australia, Japan and, later, Germany and Thailand, developed a series of proposals in the form of a "non-paper" and presented it on the margins of the Ministerial Conference on Cambodian Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in Tokyo in June. It was based on a close examination of Democratic Kampuchea's assertions and complaints and was an attempt to accommodate their concerns to the maximum extent possible, while preserving the framework of the Paris Agreements. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General introduced the "non-paper" on behalf of the Expanded Permanent Five and himself at an emergency meeting of the Supreme National Council held on

22 June 1992. It was accepted by three of the four Cambodian factions except Democratic Kampuchea. Khieu Samphan said he needed time to study it. Later in Phnom Penh, he indicated that the non-paper did not satisfy DK.

Another attempt at accommodating DK was made by Japan and Thailand in the late summer of 1992. These countries combined their efforts in a proposal to establish an administrative consultative body, consisting of representatives of the four factions for the five domains of direct control which UNTAC was entrusted to exercise.

The representatives of Japan and Thailand met with Democratic Kampuchea representatives several times on this question. Democratic Kampuchea countered with its own proposal for the establishment of consultative committees. Later Democratic Kampuchea proposed to combine the Thai-Japanese idea with its consultative committees. Furthermore, Democratic Kampuchea gradually modified its proposal for the complete dismantling of the State of Cambodia structure, but it was clear that DK wanted something which went far beyond the Paris Agreements.

In the fall of 1992, the Co-chairmen of the Paris Conference, France and Indonesia, with the backing of the Expanded Permanent-Five, made another attempt to find an acceptable solution. These efforts eventually crystallized in Security Council resolution 783 of 13 October 1992. It represented a skilful effort by France and others to show firmness towards Democratic Kampuchea intransigence and, at the same time, to indicate flexibility to accommodate their concerns, to the extent they were legitimate. The Expanded Permanent-Five was aware of the unreasonable attitude of DK, but was prepared to give negotiations one last chance before the Security Council shifted to a more resolute attitude. These diplomatic efforts were cumbersome but in the end effective in convincing countries sympathetic to Democratic Kampuchea, such as China and Thailand, to come around to supporting the common position held by the rest of the Security Council members.

Democratic Kampuchea's three assertions were essentially as follows. First, Democratic Kampuchea continued to claim that the Vietnamese forces were still present in Cambodia and that UNTAC should be doing more to ensure their withdrawal and non-return. Later, DK confused the issue by combining the question of Vietnamese forces with that of a large number of Vietnamese residents and immigrants living in Cambodia.

UNTAC responded to those assertions by establishing checkpoints on the border with Vietnam in greater numbers than originally envisaged, and at an earlier time than was foreseen in the Paris Agreements. It also invited the Cambodian parties, including Democratic Kampuchea, to send observers to these check points and repeatedly urged them to assist UNTAC by providing information necessary for the pursuit of investigations. None of the Cambodian parties in actual fact ever furnished the precise information necessary to substantiate their charges of the presence of foreign forces.

The second assertion of Democratic Kampuchea was that UNTAC's exercise of direct control over the five domains of foreign affairs, national defence, finance, public security and information was ineffective and that the State of Cambodia continued to pursue policies which were harmful to the "neutral political environment" necessary for the conduct of free and fair elections.

UNTAC's direct control over the five domains of the State of Cambodia was less than effective at the beginning. It took a great deal of time to recruit the necessary experts since the United Nations Secretariat did not possess them. UNTAC also spent considerable time developing concepts and methodology for carrying out its control functions. After all, it was an operation unprecedented in the history of the United Nations, and the UN did not possess the requisite expertise. However, towards the end of 1992 UNTAC's control functions became increasingly effective with the necessary manpower and developed innovative measures. Experts were deployed not only in Phnom Penh ministries but in all 21 provinces. In March 1993, Mr. Hun Sen, the State of Cambodia



Prime Minister, sent a letter to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, stating that UNTAC's method of control was so rigorous and intrusive that it resembled the method used by Pol Pot! As UNTAC's skills at unravelling the complexities of the SOC bureaucracy increased, so too did the resentment of those maintaining that structure. Hun Sen was indignant about UNTAC's special teams sent to the provinces to exercise control over provincial authorities and acquire necessary information, which was at times highly incriminating to SOC.

The third assertion was that the SNC was not given its legitimate authority and powers. On this point, the great majority of the signatories of the Paris Agreements were united in asserting that the SNC was essentially advisory to UNTAC in the latter's execution of its responsibility under the Paris Agreements. This position was supported by Prince Sihanouk and reiterated by the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Ali Alatas, during the Tokyo Conference. Democratic Kampuchea kept saying, however, that the SNC should be allowed to assert its authority over the "existing administrative structures". From any reading of the Paris Agreements one can hardly sustain these assertions held by Democratic Kampuchea.

It can only be concluded that the Democratic Kampuchea leadership, because of its obsession with the power of the State of Cambodia, was exclusively concerned with the latter's weakening and eventual destruction. It was not able or chose not to understand UNTAC's neutrality and impartiality. Democratic Kampuchea's tone criticizing UNTAC became increasingly strident. Its radio broadcasts called for the resignation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and repeatedly voiced total hostility towards UNTAC. From the beginning of 1993, Democratic Kampuchea engaged in direct acts of harassment, humiliation, physically attacking and ultimately killing UNTAC personnel. This led the Security Council to intensify its tone of condemnation of Democratic Kampuchea, its support for specific economic measures including the interdiction of the petroleum export to the

Democratic Kampuchea zone, and the conservation measures for logging and gem mining which constituted a profitable source of finance for the DK.

#### 4. Preparations for Elections

The return to Cambodia of over 360,000 refugees from Thailand was a major challenge and an important success. As one of the seven components of UNTAC, the task of refugee repatriation was given to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Its work was made difficult because of the limited availability of land that had water and could be cultivated, the lack of access roads due to land mines, and the onset of the rainy season which made transportation of refugees hazardous. However, through the flexibility and inventiveness of UNHCR officials, the refugee return was accelerated and was completed in time for the elections.

The negotiations on the electoral law began in April 1992 and took more than four months since its introduction in the Supreme National Council. Under the Paris Agreements, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General had the authority to promulgate the law after consulting the Supreme National Council. However, he felt that it would be absurd to impose an electoral law on reluctant Cambodians in order to bring about a democratic government in the country. He was of the view that democracy could not be forced on Cambodia but should be introduced with the willing consent of the Cambodian people. Nevertheless, by August, he came to feel that the electoral law had to be adopted and he obtained its adoption with the support of three of the four factions. Democratic Kampuchea was still strenuously opposed to it.

During the consultations, FUNCINPEC and KPNLF kept insisting that they were not totally satisfied with the electoral law and that it should be further amended in order to enable the overseas Cambodians not only to vote abroad but also to register outside Cambodia. They also insisted that

the so-called "Khmer Krom" residents from South Vietnam should be enfranchised. Initially, UNTAC showed flexibility and decided to tighten the requirements for "Cambodianness" at the request of the four parties. It was also willing to enable the eligible Cambodians to vote in New York, Paris and Sydney provided that they did register in Cambodia.

UNTAC found it impossible, however, to accommodate FUNCINPEC and KPNLF with regard to the overseas registration and Khmer Krom participation. Discussions with the parties concerning these matters lasted until December 1992. UN Headquarters in New York remained adamant and refused to accept any more amendments.

The registration of voters started in October 1992, and concluded in January 1993. It was conducted with professional competence and dedication. The participation of Cambodians was sought even in the remotest corners of Cambodia. The result was a surprising rate of registration - 96% of the estimated electorate. UNTAC laid great emphasis on information and education. Despite some scepticism in New York Headquarters, it was able to secure funds to engage in vigorous information and education activities throughout Cambodia. UNTAC radio became the powerful, most listened-to station in Cambodia, with 16 hours of airtime every day. Video programmes were also produced to instill in the minds of Cambodians the notion that elections were an important means for democratic participation and achieving peace. As the time of the elections approached, emphasis was put on the "secrecy of the ballot" so that the Cambodian electorate would be convinced that they could vote in utter privacy, irrespective of pressures and intimidation of all kinds to which they were subjected.

The Human Rights component of UNTAC was very active throughout, in having international human rights instruments ratified by the SNC, in propagating human rights even in villages and communes and in fostering the growth of human rights NGOs. Human rights groups boasted a membership of over 150,000 Cambodians.

The State of Cambodia was inextricably linked to the Cambodian People's Party and engaged in harassment of voters and intimidation of their political opponents, mostly members of FUNCINPEC and KPNLF. Not so subtle means, such as bombing of political offices, abducting of party agents, sometimes even killing of the opposition leaders, were utilized. UNTAC played an active role in restraining the State of Cambodia and compelled it to issue codes of conduct for civil servants, the army and the police, and also to issue a number of instructions to provincial governors and others to comply with UNTAC's instructions.

The six-week campaign was conducted. It was peaceful and thousands of political meetings and rallies were held with the massive participation of the population, especially for CPP and FUNCINPEC. No major incident was reported.

The elections were held from 23-28 May 1993, with the enthusiastic participation of 89.56% of the registered voters. Cambodians voted in a hopeful, even festive mood, defying bad weather, long distances and political harassments. UNTAC, as well as foreign observers, concluded that the elections were free and fair and were devoid of any serious irregularities. In the end, FUNCINPEC came first, followed by CPP as a close second. BLDP came a poor third. The distribution of the 120 seats in the Constituent Assembly was as follows: FUNCINPEC 58; CPP 51, BLDP 10, and Molinaka 1. CPP alleged that there were numerous irregularities and even fraud. It bitterly complained about broken seals and locks on the ballot boxes, the absence of party agents at "safe havens", miscounting and stuffing of ballot boxes. All charges were investigated and, in the opinion of UNTAC, there were no serious irregularities. UNTAC established, however, an internal committee of investigation to look into these allegations as a diplomatic concession to CPP.

##### 5. Military Aspect

UNTAC military personnel supervised the cease-fire,

reported on its violations, introduced greater security in the country-side, promoted dialogue among the factional forces, and monitored and controlled international borders. It failed to achieve, however, the major objective of cantoning and disarming the armed forces of the four factions and demobilizing at least 70% of these troops. After the proclamation of Phase II on 13 June 1992, UNTAC managed to canton and disarm approximately 25% of the armed forces of the SOC, FUNCINPEC and KPNLF. In the case of the latter two small factions, the cantonment of the troops went up to 50%. However, the flat refusal of the Party of Democratic Kampuchea to allow access to its zone of control and to start cantonment and disarming of its troops made it inevitable that the operation vis-à-vis the other three factions would be suspended. Many of the cantoned soldiers were later sent on "agricultural leave".

Democratic Kampuchea's non-cooperation also incited the State of Cambodia to be less than cooperative in complying with UNTAC's instructions. UNTAC was depicted by the State of Cambodia as a "paper tiger". In the eyes of the State of Cambodia, UNTAC's incompetence and lack of decisiveness vis-à-vis Democratic Kampuchea was a reason for its armed forces to engage in unilateral aggressive action against the Democratic Kampuchea, which continued to violate the cease-fire and expand its territory.

Cease-fire violations by both parties became numerous. UNTAC criticized all cease-fire violations by the parties, but had to recognize the right of defensive action. However, it was often difficult to distinguish defensive from offensive action. In the period immediately preceding the elections, UNTAC allowed the armed forces of the State of Cambodia and two other parties to repulse Democratic Kampuchea forces in order to secure the safety of polling stations.

UNTAC had insufficient information on the capacity and strength of the armed forces of Democratic Kampuchea. If measures had been taken earlier to cope with the Democratic Kampuchea's expansion through a timely request for a few more

infantry battalions, and the addition of more armoured personnel carriers and helicopters which gave mobility, and through a clearer definition of UNTAC's right of "self-defence", it is conceivable that some of the panic reaction by UNTAC civilians, particularly by UN volunteers in the tense months of April and May, could have been avoided. However, continuous analyses of the situation and greater cooperation achieved between the military, police and civilian components, led to enhanced team-work and a more flexible response to crisis situations just before and during the elections. At the same time, UNTAC was compelled to return some of the weapons in cantonment at the request of SOC, FUNCINPEC and KPNLF troops in order to enable them to cope with Democratic Kampuchea's aggression.

In the early months of 1993, increase in Democratic Kampuchea military strength, the expansion of its zone of control, a more aggressive leadership by its local commanders and regrouping of its forces into larger fighting units were noted. At the same time, the armed forces of the State of Cambodia showed a lack of morale due to poor pay. However, Democratic Kampuchea committed a number of crucial blunders before 23 May. The Democratic Kampuchea attack on Siem Reap City on 3 May was politically daring but was poorly executed. Their murderous attacks on 6 May on the civilian train travelling from Phnom Penh to Battambang resulted in 20 killed and 100 injured among innocent people. Their attack on Kompong Thom in late April was indiscriminate. These events created an impression that Democratic Kampuchea did not care about the safety of Cambodians. These mistakes may well have been a factor in the massive popular participation in the elections and the repudiation of a military solution to the Cambodian problem.

#### 6. Diplomatic efforts

The basic strength of UNTAC is based on the Paris Agreements signed not only by four Cambodian parties, but by

the five Permanent Members, by ASEAN states, by Laos and Vietnam and influential regional and Pacific states, such as Australia, Japan and Canada. The unity of outlook of the international community on the Cambodian problem was maintained in the Security Council and elsewhere, except on one occasion when China abstained on a vote due to its opposition to sanctions against the Democratic Kampuchea.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General devoted his efforts especially towards ensuring the understanding and support of China and Thailand, which had close links with the Democratic Kampuchea. China cut off its military assistance to Democratic Kampuchea with the signing of the Paris Agreements. It has, however, kept a close relationship with Democratic Kampuchea. China appears to have repeatedly told the Democratic Kampuchea to adhere to the Paris Agreements and cooperate with UNTAC. The Democratic Kampuchea attack on the Chinese engineers in May probably alarmed China as to the Democratic Kampuchea's intentions.

Thailand has more economic interests in Cambodia than any other country because of its long border with Cambodia. Its military and business interests have preserved close cooperation with the zone of Cambodia adjacent to Thailand where Democratic Kampuchea has been headquartered. The Thai central Government has cooperated with UNTAC and has upheld UN sanctions and moratoria. The adherence by the Thai military in all aspects of the moratoria is, however, less than evident. The United States, Japan and other western countries strongly urged Thailand to sever its remaining ties with Democratic Kampuchea in the border region. These informal talks probably had a dampening effect on the Democratic Kampuchea's resolve to resort to violent disturbances immediately preceding and during the elections. Prince Sihanouk's return to Cambodia on 22 May sent a note of reassurance to Cambodians.

The ASEAN countries have generally been united in cooperating with UNTAC. More particularly Indonesia, led by its able Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, has been instrumental in

unifying the ASEAN views in support of UN efforts in Cambodia.

In Phnom Penh, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has kept close contacts with the Expanded Permanent-Five, has constantly engaged in the exchange of information and ideas, and solicited and received their full cooperation with UNTAC. The Expanded Permanent-Five has participated in Supreme National Council meetings in the observer capacity and has often spoken in support of UNTAC's aims and objectives. Prince Sihanouk has been cognizant of the role played by the Expanded Permanent-Five in the implementation of Cambodian peace. France and Australia have been particularly active with regard to the military aspect of UNTAC's efforts, while they may at times have been at odds with each other.

#### 7. Peace, Reconciliation, Democracy

UNTAC has largely been successful in achieving its basic objective of bringing about peace, national reconciliation and democracy into Cambodia through organizing free and fair elections with the massive participation of the Cambodian electorate. Its success, however, is mitigated by the lingering problems with Democratic Kampuchea, which after the elections seems to recognize belatedly the prevailing aspirations among the Cambodians for national renewal and democratic change.

What UNTAC has been able to achieve is more than simply organizing elections. It has brought about a fundamental change from a one-party, communist-style authoritarian regime to a liberal democracy based on pluralism and freedom of choice. Elections were a device to introduce this radical change in a peaceful manner and legitimize it in Cambodia and abroad. Through their electoral verdict, the Cambodian people made their preference known as to the direction of the country they wanted to take. They indicated that they wanted far-reaching change, but not in a way to cut their ties to the past completely. They also made known that they valued the



guidance by Prince Sihanouk.

The success of UNTAC is largely due to the change in the external political environment: the end of the Cold War and a new perception among countries that it is fruitless to pursue the armed competition over Cambodia. The end of conflict between China and Vietnam and between the Soviet Union and Western countries led to the Paris Agreements on Cambodia and contributed to the successful implementation of those Agreements by UNTAC. The Paris Agreements were the guidepost which indicated that the Cambodian conflict should henceforth be dealt with as essentially a domestic matter, under the watchful eyes of the international community through the temporary tutelage of UNTAC. UNTAC thus benefitted from the common outlook among governments on Cambodia, which was reflected in Security Council resolutions. Consequently, UNTAC was enabled to concentrate on finding the best solution to deep-seated domestic hostility in Cambodia.

Internal rivalries are still latent in Cambodia. Mutual accommodation is a scarce commodity. This is not surprising in a country divided so long into armed power blocks. It is hoped, nevertheless, that Cambodians will gradually accept democratic rules of conduct and the need for a peaceful transfer of power.

UNTAC has focused on deepening the awareness of the Cambodian people regarding the changes which have taken place in the world, including the rights of citizens vis-à-vis the government. UNTAC has endeavoured to create a "neutral political environment" for democratic choice, although it was difficult to do so because of the authoritarian political tradition and the proclivity to use force in settling conflicts. Through the elections held by UNTAC, Cambodian people took the first courageous step for peaceful social change and for democratic governance.

In the end, politicians will have to prove that they can assure people a better and more rewarding life, which they amply deserve after more than twenty years of unspeakable suffering. How the Cambodian leadership of the future will

cope with the enormously high expectations held by the people remains to be seen. In any event, the international community will have to continue its support and encouragement in their effort to create a new country based on justice, freedom, mutual tolerance and a better life for all. Initial sessions of the Constituent Assembly in late June and early July reveal encouraging signs for the growth of democracy in Cambodia.

UNTAC has had to cope with numerous questions of policy and practice in its delicate implementation of the Paris Agreements and the Security Council resolutions. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has tried to combine flexibility with firmness. He has had to balance universal values with sensitivity to Asian approaches. He has been criticized by both sides of the political spectrum. Mass media was particularly prone to criticize UNTAC. UNTAC's caution was interpreted as timidity and indecisiveness; its flexibility was taken as the lack of resolve; its preference for a diplomatic solution was interpreted as the spineless abhorrence for forceful measures. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General kept believing that the objectives of UNTAC were achievable, while media thrived on depicting a dire image of doom for the mission. Only history will tell whether the policy pursued by UNTAC has been appropriate or not.

In any event, at a time when the United Nations is beset with difficult peace-keeping operations in areas such as the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Angola, UNTAC in Cambodia has shown that the United Nations can accomplish considerable positive results through the combined efforts of the Organization, its Member States and the cooperation of the Cambodian parties. The Cambodians have made their unique contribution to the attainment of the objectives by their courageous choice to participate in elections despite all kinds of harassment and intimidation. They thus deserve the warmest homage.

There is, however, no universal panacea for the settlement of conflicts. Each conflict and each situation call for a different policy. As a most ambitious, extensive

and complex UN peace operation, with the aim of creating a new country on the ruins of the old which crumbled after more than two decades of continuous war and fighting, it may safely be said that UNTAC's achievements are far from insignificant and that some useful lessons can be learned from this experience to enhance the future capability of the United Nations.