

**Fundraising Dinner
Khmer Anti-Poverty Party
Long Beach, California
21 January 2012**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen:

Today, I am very excited because I have been offered the unique opportunity to talk to you about a fascinating country, its people and its destiny. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend this important event here in California in person. I nevertheless hope that this short video helps me to convey my message to you.

Several decades ago, an authoritarian regime brutally murdered approximately one-quarter of Cambodia's population. The regime wilfully destroyed every fixture and totem of twentieth century life. Eighty percent of Cambodia's educational professionals and 95 percent of its medical professionals were killed, along with almost everyone else who had any education. Cambodia, as its leaders liked to say, was returned to year zero.

In the early 1990s, Cambodia became a UN protectorate. A total of 16,000 multinational troops and 5,000 civil administrators were deployed. The UN ran the country for two years and spent US\$ 3 billion in an effort to give the people of Cambodia an opportunity to start over, to enter the modern age. But what has Cambodia done with that unique chance? There is no doubt that the United Nations has overestimated its ability to effect democratic change and socioeconomic development.

Today, Cambodia is run by a corrupt and autocratic regime. Freedom House concludes in its latest report on Cambodia that the current government's consolidation of control over all aspects of the electoral process and its increased intimidation of civil society have seriously undermined democratic development. Moreover, according to studies carried out by Transparency International, public sector corruption has increased steadily in Cambodia over the last ten years. Most recent survey data even suggests that there are only two countries in the region with higher levels of public sector corruption than Cambodia. Those two countries are Myanmar and North Korea.

In short, authoritarian leadership and systemic corruption have forced the majority of Cambodians to live in poverty without any chance of enjoying political and civil rights. There are over 2,000 international aid agencies operating in Cambodia in order to help the Cambodian people to overcome their difficulties. Notwithstanding, as a political scientist by training and profession, I should like to point out that in the long run the country's manifold social and economic problems cannot be solved without an efficient and clean government.

Democratic development is needed and it is important not only for the people of Cambodia but also for the entire region. Such development becomes all the more imperative with China's rise as an economic, political and military power, which has already had adverse effects on regional democracy. It is time for all of us to begin creating a new political reality in Cambodia and embracing new political actors who are prepared to work toward establishing the values of shared prosperity and respect for the rule of law.

It is time for change. Cambodia needs a new government – a government that puts an end to corruption and poverty. Cambodia needs responsible politicians like Daran Kravanh. I urge you to support Daran and the Khmer Anti-Poverty Party. Help him to help the people of Cambodia. Help him to help us shape a common future for all of us.

Thank you!

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