Kampuchea still violates freedoms

To the Editor:

A former Kampuchean civil police officer who left the country in 1984, recently told an Amnesty International researcher that Kampuchean policemen have a maxim: “It is okay to arrest someone by mistake, as long as no one is released by mistake.”

The former policeman then explained that in Kampuchea “evidence against someone is not necessary to decide on his or her arrest, a simple suspicion of contacts with enemies of the regime is enough for someone to be taken into custody, sometimes for months or years.”

The newly formed MIT chapter of Amnesty International is participating in a worldwide campaign to protect human rights in the Peoples’ Republic of Kampuchea. Amnesty’s current concern is that country include arbitrary political arrest and imprisonment, torture, executions, treatment of “miflled people,” unfair political trials and inadequate prison conditions.

Amnesty is also concerned about the involvement of Vietnamese forces and advisors in human rights abuses and about human rights violations committed by the opposition Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea. Vietnamese troops and advisors have operated in Kampuchea since 1979 when a cooperation treaty was signed by the two governments. The CGDK has waged continuous guerrilla warfare against the PRK, but others are run directly by Vietnamese personnel.

Kampuchean authorities have arrested a number of people for printing and distributing opposition literature. The official government media identify the offense of “psychological warfare” as “making verbal attacks on government pronouncements, policies, or practices.”

Torture is reportedly widespread in detention centers throughout the country. Both former interrogators and detainees have reported torture in detention. Former prisoners consistently report that police authorities permit shacking, confinement in dark cells, and severe restrictions on diet, medical care, exercise, and contact with friends and family.

Lack of proper diet and unsanitary conditions reportedly contribute to a wide range of diseases which are exacerbated by malnutrition. According to one detainee, “Those who die mostly in dark solitary confinement cells.”

In addition to panel institutions operated by PRK and Vietnamese officials, several foreign press accounts have described “re-education” centers in Kampuchea. Citizens classified as “misled persons” are sometimes sub-

To re-education,” where they are given official instruction under military guard. Amnesty is concerned that “some misled persons are restricted without charge or trial because of their political beliefs.”

Since 1979, guerrilla warfare between the PRK, with its Vietnamese allies, and the CGDK has been fierce. The United Nations has only recognized Democratic Kampuchea since 1976. Officials of the CGDK represent Kampuchea at the UN. Each of the three parties in the coalition has its own army and its own administrative structure and foreign relations program. All three parties also have unilateral authority over their own military personnel and administrative structures, as well as over military operations, which are in camps they control.

Amnesty has obtained information on three detention centers operated by the Partite of Democratic Kampuchea, one of the parties of the CGDK. Former prisoners have stated that in some camps prisoners are detained arbitrarily, shackled and compelled to perform labor under life-threatening conditions. Amnesty has also received reports that PRK troops have executed extrajudicially Kampucheanas in camps under Party administration.

Amnesty has identified two prisons operated by the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front, another party to the CGDK. Military and civil agents of the KPNLF have reportedly executed political and other prisoners at centers, occasionally bludgeoning them to death with nail-molded sticks. Female refugees have also reported being beaten and raped at military camps administered by the KPNLF.

Amnesty also remains concerned that officials of the Democratic Kampuchea be brought to justice in accordance with international law for practices and policies which according to available evidence resulted in the deaths of between one and two million of Cambodia’s approximately eighteen million citizens between 1975 and 1979.

Richard R. Koch

opinion feedback

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