

UN NEWS CENTRE

Cambodia needs to adopt independent judiciary, democratic pluralism – UN October 23, 2011

Despite progress in the 20 years since the Paris peace agreements ended decades of fighting in Cambodia, much still needs to be done to fulfil the promise of the accords, including instituting an independent judiciary and a fully pluralist democracy, a United Nations expert warned on Sunday.

“Cambodia has undeniably progressed over the past 20 years, with peace and stability bringing enormous dividends in terms of wealth and development,” Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia Surya P. Subedi said in a message marking today's 20th anniversary of the accords that ended the war with the Khmer Rouge, whose 1975-1979 regime is estimated to have killed up to three million people in what is widely recognized as genocide.

“Institutions have been established and laws written. However the challenge remains in the implementation of many of these laws and proper functioning of these institutions,” he said, calling for the vision of the peace agreements to be turned into reality for all Cambodians.

“The independence of the judiciary needs to be anchored in fundamental laws on the judiciary, which have been awaiting adoption since 1993 and the pluralist democracy in the country needs to be deepened and strengthened, particularly as Cambodia enters two election years,” he stressed.

Last week Judge Siegfried Blunk, international co-investigating judge on the UN-backed tribunal set up to try those accused of the worst crimes under the Khmer Rouge regime, resigned, citing repeated statements by senior Government officials opposing progress on two cases concerning senior Khmer Rouge members suspected of responsibility in the deaths of thousands of people.

Yesterday UN Legal Counsel Patricia O'Brien met with Cambodia's Deputy Prime Minister Sok An in Phnom Penh, the South-east Asian country's capital, and urged the Government to refrain from interfering in any way with the tribunal, officially known as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).

“Impunity needs to be addressed for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge period as well as for crimes committed since then, and the right to freedom of association, expressly mentioned in the agreements, needs to be carefully protected and nurtured if Cambodia is to remain on the right road,” Mr. Subedi said in his message.

“As we mark the 20th anniversary of the agreements, all parties should reaffirm their commitment to the full implementation of the agreements so that their vision and legacy may become reality.”