

REMARK

H.E Mr. Min Khin, Minister of Cults and Religions of the Kingdom of Cambodia

In sixteenth Symposium on Law and Religion at the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah state, United State October 02-07 2009

Yours Excellencies ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I have great honor and pleasure to be invited to participate with Your Excellencies, ladies, and Gentlemen in this year symposium on “ **Connecting Communities of Discourse: How the Judiciary, Academia, Government and International Institution Further the Work of Religious Freedom?** ” which takes place in the beautiful City of Provo, Utah State of United States of America.

Taking this great opportunity, I would like to express my highest appreciation for this conference organized by **The International Center for law and Religion Studies of Brigham Young University**, to share opinions, experience, and information with each other for the benefit of Religious Freedom, which is crucial for all nations.

Cambodia is a Kingdom in South East Asia, has total land area of 181 035 km² and the population is about 14 millions, where the king reigns under the constitution and pluralism democracy; the Kingdom of Cambodia adheres to the free market economy and respect for human rights. Because of the win-win policy of the Royal Government of Cambodia, the country has regained peace and security after more than 3 decades of civil war and internal conflict. The political agenda of the Royal Government of Cambodia under the leadership of **SAMDACH AKKA MOHA SENA PADEI TECHO HUN SEN**, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, has set out “the Rectangular Strategy” for growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency, in which good governance is the cornerstone of all areas of state reforms. As a result, Cambodia has achieved favorable economic growth and significant progress of poverty reduction and freedom of belief as well.

In parallel with the economic growth, better social infrastructure, political stability and respect of human rights, the religions in Cambodia are also improving, including not only Buddhism, which is considered as the state religion, but also Christianity, Muslim, and others religions. They are expanding and spreading throughout the country in a free and peaceful way with mutual respect under a legal framework. Cambodia provides its people with rights and freedom to freely choose their belief. The freedom of belief and religious practices is guaranteed by the state with the condition of not annoying other beliefs or religions or the public order and security. As the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia in chapter 3, article 43 prescribed that “*Cambodian people both sexes have full rights to believe. Freedom to believe and to practice religious belief is assured by the state in the condition that no violation on others beliefs, religions social order and public security. Buddhism is a state religion*”.

Cambodia adheres firmly to a long traditional belief in Buddhism in its ancient history, but has never experienced any religious conflict. Even, today, many other religions are rapidly expanding; Cambodian people adhere to the principle of tolerance, respect of

each other's rights of religious belief in a good manner. As statistics of the Ministry of Cults and Religions now a day we have around 95% of the population who believe on Buddhism, 3% Muslim, 1% Christian, and the remaining 1% believe on others religions. Buddhism has two sect, Mahanikaya, and Dhammayutti Buddhism, and as total of both sects we have 4,331 Buddhist Pagodas, and 56,040 Buddhist monks. For Muslims the total of mosques and Suravs are 295 and 465,732 believers. Christianity is the third largest religion and has 325 churches, 219 schools, and 135,282 believers. The rest belong to the other religions, such as Mahayana Buddhism, Bahai i.e.

In order to maintain religious harmony in Cambodia for a long-lasting future, the Ministry of Cults and Religions in collaboration with other relevant Ministries has issued some regulations to avoid religious differences among religious groups. In such a sense, we encouraged all the religions to exist in harmony and cooperation in the worldly issue in order to restore and develop the country since January 7, 1979 when the nation was liberated from the massacre by **Pol Pot's** Democratic Kampuchea regime. During that time all religions were eliminated. Consequently, even though the birth of a religion may date back to hundreds or thousands of years ago, all the religions in Cambodia share the same birthdays on the year 1979. This is a strange phenomenon in this country.

Cambodia now gives full religious freedom to all Cambodian people as stipulated in the Constitution. From this standpoint, Royal government of Cambodia has set high priority to the religion sector by inserting this sector to the nation motto that reads, "**Nation, Religion, King** ", with view to simultaneously promoting their advancement, development, and to be complementary to each other. As we have all been aware, the religious sector can be seen as a major contributor to development and maintenance of peace for the whole society.

The term of religious freedom in Cambodia is currently upheld to mean –allowing individuals to believe in, practices and promote the religion of choice without repercussions. This is to mean without interference, harassment, or other repercussions as long as practices are based on, or resulting from, those beliefs and do not break the law. We do not encourage or allow fraud, murder, terrorism acts designed to undermine the government or the constitution. As a fact, the Royal Government of Cambodia acknowledges and supports individuals to have the rights and freedom to abide by their own beliefs and related legitimate practices as long as they are not disturbing the rights and freedom of others. For instance, when one religious believer expresses opinions on another religion, he should take care to do his/her homework. Incorrect comments not only cause ill feelings, but promote an attitude of condescension on the other side. Genuine dialogue, however, is possible only in an atmosphere of mutual respect, based upon a consensus that it is being conducted among equals.

To achieve this, the government encourages that the public administration or government official should take charge of their duty and responsibility with fairness and justice; they should be neutral in holding office or in solving problems. It does not matter whether they are a community leader, village or commune, district and provincial chief or government official, one should avoid or reduce intentionally favoring one faith group over others and one should make sure that everyone has the same religious rights and social or political agenda. It is true that if the village chief is not neutral, neglecting or even banning other religions in his village, that could be a danger. In other villages or communities, commune leader maybe religiously biased, for instance; one is a Muslim,

and only thinks of Islam and fails to recognize Buddhism and Christianity or other religious beliefs that could cause be a problem. This has something to do with its accountability of neutrality in being government leadership and institutions to ensure religious freedom.

Last April, 2008 Cambodia was host country for Asia Pacific Interfaith Dialogue on “Phnom Penh Interfaith Dialogue 2008 on interfaith cooperation for Peace and Harmony” Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia; **SAMDACH AKKA MOHA SENA PADEI TECHO HUN SEN** gave 3 recommendations for the religious development and advancement with rejection of any forms of persecutions, as follow:

-First, to respect the close, honest cooperation and solidarity based upon mutual understanding in all circumstances, in order to bring about social unity and harmony.

-Second, to respect and practice personal religious discipline with the recognition of the rights of the followers of other religions and adherence to principles of nonviolence, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness.

-Third, to respect an individual’s freedom of religion in which the purpose value of each religious belief is to lead to right thinking so as to bring about happiness to self and to society.

In conclusion, actually, 95% of Cambodian people are Buddhist, and even though Buddhism is promoted as the state religion, Cambodia never prohibits nor controls the practices of other religions. This indicates that all religions in Cambodia are smooth operations in all parts of the country, and so far these operations have not endangered the public security and order. In contrast, all religious organizations in Cambodia currently contribute largely to the Royal Government of Cambodia in the development of the country in the areas of such humanitarian affairs, educations, and health care i.e. Cambodia guarantees full rights of religious belief in the framework of existing laws in order to ensure peace, and mutual respect amongst religious groups. Our ultimate goal is to make great efforts in bringing our society and the whole world peace and religious harmony. Taking this opportunity let me again thanks International Center for Law and Religious Study of Brigham Young University invite me and my delegation to participate this year symposium. Thank you very much for your attention, and may I wish you good health and success.

Thank you!