

Cambodian History & Global Standing

The document provides additional information about Cambodia. Part One provides information about Cambodia's recent history since about 1975. Part Two provides current information to provide a perspective of how Cambodia compares to other countries around the world.

Part One – Cambodian History

Cambodia has a long history, but one marked with civil conflict, foreign invasion, and genocide. “Hindu, Buddhist, royalist, republican, colonial and communist regimes came and went. Five relocations of the Khmer capital in as many centuries preceded the three foreign occupations and seven regime changes of the past sixty years alone.”¹

Cambodia, unfortunately, is remembered for Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge government that came into power in 1975.² The U.S., perhaps unknowingly, contributed to this event. Between 1969 and 1973, the U.S. was at war with Vietnam, and as Vietnamese moved into Cambodia, President Nixon ordered heavy bombing of Cambodia. U.S. bombing is believed to have killed 50,000 or more Cambodians.³

Pol Pot used the bombing to blame the Cambodian government that was in power at the time, coalescing support that helped him overthrow the government.⁴ In 1979, the Vietnamese overthrew Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge government. They occupied Cambodia until 1989.⁵

During the four years of Pol Pot's communist leadership, approximately 1.7 million people lost their lives due to execution, torture, and starvation.⁶ Pol Pot set out to destroy religion by

¹Ben Kiernan, *Recovering History and Justice in Cambodia*, Yale University - Cambodian Genocide Program, <http://www.yale.edu/cgp/resources.html>, (Last viewed: 23 February 2009), 76.

² U.S., Department of State, Background Note: Cambodia, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2732.htm>, (Last viewed: 24 March 2009).

³ Kiernan, 79.

⁴ Ben Kiernan, *History Today*, (September 2004), 16.

⁵ U.S., Department of State.

⁶ Anonymous, “Cambodia,” *Oxford Economic Briefings*, 30 January 2008.

committing genocide against the Khmer Buddhist monkhood, which had been the traditional bearers of cultural literacy. Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge tried to expel Vietnamese, Chinese, and Muslims who lived in the country. Some 150,000 Vietnamese were ordered to leave Cambodia. The 10,000 who chose not to leave were executed.⁷

The Khmer Rouge also targeted history and schools. Libraries were destroyed and schools were closed. Some 20,000 Cambodian teachers perished or fled from the country. None of the pre-1975 university professors who remained in the country survived the genocide.⁸

Shortly after Pol Pot came to power, he began evacuating the cities, forcing townspeople into the country. He also persecuted the townspeople, because they “tended to be more educated than the peasantry.”⁹ At the same time, money was abolished.¹⁰ Communes and compulsory community eating were established in 1977. Parents often worked in the fields or other remote locations. When they were at “home” they ate separately from their children.¹¹ This has been referred to as “crash collectivism and communization.”¹²

While Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge idealized the Khmer peasantry, they destroyed the three pillars of the Cambodian peasant life: “the peasant farm, the family unit, and the Buddhist religion.”¹³ Families were subjected to considerable pressure as they were deported across the country without consideration of the needs of their families.¹⁴

One source suggested that this was all part of Pol Pot’s plan to “return Cambodia to ‘year zero’ and transform it into an agrarian utopia.”¹⁵ Instead, he left no “recognizable state,” and the government needed to be reinvented in every way.¹⁶

⁷ Kiernan, “Coming to Terms with the Past Cambodia,” Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kiernan, Recovering History and Justice in Cambodia, ibid.

¹⁰ Ben Kiernan, Chapter 8 – External and Indigenous Sources of Khmer Rouge Ideology, *The Third Indochina War Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79*, (Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, Editors), posted on Yale University - Cambodian Genocide Program Website, www.cis.yale.edu/cgp/Ideology_Sources.doc, (28 March 2009), 8.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. 22.

¹³ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴ Ibid, 22.

¹⁵ Joel Brinkley, “Cambodia’s Curse,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (Mar/Apr 2009).

¹⁶ Peter Blunt and Mark Turner, “Decentralisation, Democracy and the Development in a Post-Conflict Society: commune Councils in Cambodia,” *Public Administration & Development*, (Feb 2005), 75.

When the Vietnamese ousted Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in 1979, they found “no institutions of any kind”...no bureaucracy, army, police, hospitals, schools, commercial networks, religious hierarchy, or legal system.¹⁷ The Vietnamese found a plethora of issues, including the “extermination of civil servants [which] had erased a national memory of how government worked.”¹⁸ The bureaucracy in place was rife with patronage where loyalty and compliance were valued over effectiveness and efficiency.¹⁹

Though Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were ousted in 1979, they continued to operate from jungle bases until the death of Pol Pot in 1998. Between 1979 and 1998, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge “kept killing Cambodian troops and civilians.”²⁰ On March 30, 2009 a United Nations backed tribunal started a genocide tribunal in Phnom Penh.²¹

After the Vietnamese left Cambodia, the United Nations Transitional Authority moved in with considerable resources. A centralized government and bureaucracy were established. When they left in 1993, political stability had not been achieved and rehabilitation and reconstruction had been largely ineffective.²²

Cambodia is divided into twenty provinces and four urban municipalities. Phnom Penh is the capital and one of the municipalities. The provinces are further divided into 122 districts, 1324 communes, and 9386 villages.²³

The current population is 90 percent Khmer. The primary language spoken in Cambodia is Khmer, which about 95 percent of the population speaks.²⁴

Prime Minister Hun Sen is the longest-serving head of state in Southeast Asia and leader of the Cambodian’s People’s Party (CPP).²⁵ CPP is the most powerful political party in Cambodia.²⁶

¹⁷ Ibid, 76.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kiernan, *Recovering History and Justice in Cambodia*, 84.

²¹ Yahoo News, “Killing Fields Tribunal,” http://news.yahoo.com/nphotos/Killing-Fields-Trial/ss/events/wl/021609cambodiatrial/im:090331/481/d9b5292dd0ff432aa25eba93e4106a84/#photoViewer=/090331/photos_wl_pc_afp/e0dc35f5431b309ac6994dda80b386e1, (Last viewed: 31 March 2009).

²² Blunt and Turner, 77.

²³ Aim4Asia Website, *Facts about Cambodia*, <http://www.aim4asia.net/pages/FACTS%20ABOUT%20CAMBODIA.html>, (Last viewed: 30 March 2009).

²⁴ ELL Assessment for Linguistic Differences Website, *Interpersonal Communication*, <http://www.ldldproject.net/cultures/cambodia/differences/interpersonal.html>, (Last viewed: 28 March 2009).

While Cambodia has come a long way, the country remains dependent on donor assistance. Allegations of widespread corruption abound. Lack of progress, particularly involving needed reforms to the judicial system, has brought criticism from donor countries.²⁷

Part Two – Cambodia’s Global Standing

In 2006, Cambodia was “considered one of the poorest nations in the world, with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of around \$US280 per year.”²⁸ A more current report forecasts the GDP to be \$US659 in 2008 and \$US700 in 2009.²⁹ However, the CIA World Fact Book projects the GDP per capita to be \$US2,100.³⁰ Poverty is widespread with about 66 percent of the population living on \$US2 a day and almost half on \$US1 a day.³¹

Cambodia is not immune from the global economic crisis. While the GDP is projected to grow by less than 6 percent in 2009, last year brought about the closure of some 22 garment factories resulting in a loss of 22,000 jobs pushing more people back into poverty. Cambodia was ranked 135 out of 185 countries by World Bank with respect to its business climate.³²

Research has shown that the quality of higher education in Cambodia is considered “quite low compared to international standards.”³³ One source put the literacy rate in 1999 at 47.6 percent for males and 29.2 percent for females with an average of 3.8 years of schooling.³⁴

²⁵ A Mani, Verghese Mathews, Azhar Ghani, Martin Stuart-Fox, Ooi Kee Beng, Robert H Taylor, Rodolfo C Severino, Terence Chong, Nirmal Ghosh, and David W H Koh, “The Asian 10,” *Regional Outlook, Singapore*, <http://0-proquest.umi.com.library.regent.edu/pqdweb?index=1&did=1437907281&SrchMode=2&sid=6&Fmt=4&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1238023885&clientId=3927>, (Last viewed: 28 March 2009).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ching-Yaw Chen, Phyra Sok, and Keomony Sok, “Exploring potential factors leading to effective training – An exclusive study on commercial banks in Cambodia,” *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 26, No. 9 (2007), 844.

²⁹ Anonymous, “Cambodia,” *Oxford Economic Briefings*, 30 January 2008, 1.

³⁰ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Fact Book*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html>, (Last viewed: 28 March 2009).

³¹ Anonymous, “Cambodia,” *Oxford Economic Briefings*, 4.

³² Stephen Kurczy, “Cambodia shares the pain,” *Asian Times*, 10 February 2009, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/KB10Ae02.html.

³³ Chen, et al, *ibid*.

³⁴ Arnold Zack, “Cambodia Moves Toward Industrialization,” ABE-LELS-International Committee Meeting, Beijing, China, (April 16, 2008),

Children are frequently sent to work, rather than school. Child prostitution is another by-product of the economic condition of Cambodia.³⁵ According to the Aim4Asia Website, “A UNICEF survey of females trapped in sexual slavery in Cambodia found there to be 55,000 young women and girls involved, with 35% being girls under the age of 16. These children are trapped and held as slaves to a life of exploitation, abuse and brutality, a life without hope.”³⁶ Tomorrow’s economic future is being compromised today.

The Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) is produced by the World Economic Forum and measures a country’s performance on various components.³⁷ Cambodia is ranked 109 out of 133 countries; indicating a low level of competitiveness.³⁸ The report identifies the following four factors as being the most problematic factors in doing business: corruption, inefficient government bureaucracy, inadequately educated workforce, and inadequate supply of infrastructure.³⁹

The Heritage Foundation defines economic freedom as, “...the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labor and property.”⁴⁰ The report ranks Cambodia 106 out of 179 countries.⁴¹

Reporters Without Borders produces an index that reflects the relative freedom members of the press experience freedom of the press in various countries around the globe. The countries exhibiting the greatest level of freedom all share a “parliamentary democratic system” and are not involved in war.⁴² The index ranks Cambodia 117 out of 175 countries, which is slightly improved from the 2008 ranking of 126.⁴³

The United Nations produces the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI measures three aspects of human development:

<http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/lwp/ABA%20Eijing%20working%20paper%20Zack%20cambodia.pdf>,
(Last viewed: 28 March 2009), 1.

³⁵ Anonymous, “Cambodia,” *Oxford Economic Briefings*, 4.

³⁶ Aim4Asia Website, *Our Mission*, <http://aim4asia.org/mission/>, (Last viewed: 28 March 2009).

³⁷ World Economic Forum, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2009-2010*,
<http://www.weforum.org/documents/GCR09/index.html> (accessed December 4, 2009), 4.

³⁸ Ibid, 106.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Heritage Foundation, *2009 Index on Economic Freedom Report*, <http://www.heritage.org/index/Default.aspx>
(accessed December 5, 2009).

⁴¹ Ibid, <http://www.heritage.org/index/Country/Cambodia>.

⁴² Reporters Without Borders, *Press Freedom Index 2008*, <http://www.rsf.org/en-classement794-2008.html>
(accessed December 5, 2009).

⁴³ Ibid, <http://www.rsf.org/en-classement1003-2009.html>.

- Living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy).
- Being educated (measured by adult literacy and gross enrolment in education).
- Having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income).⁴⁴

Cambodia is ranked 137 out of 182 countries.⁴⁵ This places Cambodia in the 25th percentile as compared to other measured countries around the world.

The last global measure to be included is the Corruption Perception Index. This index measures the “perceived level of public-sector corruption.”⁴⁶ Cambodia is ranked 158 out of 180 countries, suggesting a high level of public sector, i.e., government, corruption.⁴⁷

Suffice it to say, most people in the Western world enjoy a quality of life far higher than most Cambodians. However, change can occur. Developing leaders is a key step to changing Cambodia. This is not easy task. AIM 4 Leadership in Cambodia is one small step toward making a difference by helping to develop leaders among a large network of churches. Please consider partnering with us to make a difference!

⁴⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2009*, http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_KHM.html (accessed December 5, 2009).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2009*, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table (accessed December 5, 2009).

⁴⁷ Ibid.