



***On the Occasion of the Study Visit to the Commission on Human Rights of
the Philippines to Support the Establishment of an Independent National Human
Rights Commission in Cambodia***

Commission on Human Rights, Quezon City
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delivered by

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Chairperson

WELCOME REMARKS

More than a thousand kilometers separate, the museums and monuments of Phnom Penh [pronounced:*puh-NOM-pen*], from the cathedrals and parks of Manila . But more than distance separates our two nations, the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Republic of the Philippines . Our colonial experiences and recent histories are distinct. Our forms of government are different. Our architecture, languages and cultures are dissimilar. But despite this divergence, despite all these circumstances and factors which might set us apart, our gathering here today, and the work which we will undertake this week, offer eloquent testimony for the fact that there are also many fundamental issues, on which our two nations and our two people are in agreement.

We are here today because of the mutual realization, that human rights are a key and indispensable component, of any country's attempt to become more just and more secure, more prosperous and more sustainable. We recognize that human rights law creates legal obligations which bind governments, that State policies and actions must be continuously monitored closely, and that any violations must be roundly criticized and condemned. And we acknowledge the importance of establishing truly independent national human rights institutions (NHRIs), fully compliant with the Paris Principles, so that human dignity can be more effectively protected and promoted, at the local level.

Let me thank the men and women of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), who have labored long in order to make this Study Visit a reality. Let me thank the Southeast Asian NHRI Forum, composed of the NHRIs of Indonesia, Malaysia , the Philippines and Thailand , for continuing to support efforts to found an NHRI

in Cambodia . And most importantly, to our honored guests, the members of the Cambodian Joint Working Group, let me say thank you, for taking up the cudgels for the cause of human rights, and the creation of an NHRI in Cambodia . *aww-KOON-ch'ran* [Khmer for Thank you very much].

We are looking forward to an active exchange of ideas, experience and expertise over the coming days, between our two groups. I am certain that there is much that the CHR can learn from the observations, challenges faced, and achievements of our honored guests. At the same time, it is our hope that the Joint Working Group will benefit from scrutinizing the work of the CHR, our legal mandate as well as attempts to safeguard and strengthen our independence, our core programs and major services, our specialty centers, field operations and regional offices, the nitty gritty of our investigations, forensic training, public inquiries, legal services, visits to detention facilities, and education and public-awareness campaigns, as well as the joint efforts we sometimes undertake with the military, the police, the Executive Department, Congress, the Judiciary, civil society, and other segments of society.

Human rights issues continue to plague our two countries. The Philippines saw unacceptably high rates of electoral intimidation, threats and violence, in the run up to and during the recently held national elections. And these last several years have seen journalists and judges, lawyers, human rights advocates and members of militant or progressive organizations harassed, abducted and murdered, either with the direct involvement or complicity of security forces. Cambodia has borne witness to allegations of abuse in its system of drug detention centers, the forcible return of asylum seekers to countries where they may be persecuted, the use of intimidation and violent confrontations in land disputes, and the lack of access to justice of many victims of sexual violence.

The challenges that lie before us, in our two nations, are substantial, and the interests arrayed against us are many and powerful. Those who benefit from the status quo seek to consolidate its continuation. And institutional inertia coupled with apathy serve to make change rather difficult to bring about. But this is why we have a shared interest in working together. This is why NHRIs in the region are working hard to support the launch of an NHRI in a neighboring country. We derive greater strength from our increased numbers. And the development of a more diverse alliance will result in an even larger pool of knowledge and practice from which we can all draw on.

May this Study Visit work to the advantage of both our institutions. And may it result in even closer and more effective working relationships, among the human rights professionals of our two nations. To our honored guests, thank you for being here and welcome to the Philippines . Good morning to all of you. *aROON-su-ors-dei* [Khmer for Good morning].