



Cambodia

The United States and the Kingdom of Cambodia have been strengthening bilateral ties for the past decade. U.S. concerns remain, however, about human rights violations and the authoritarian tendencies of Prime Minister Hun Sen. U.S. interests and efforts in Cambodia include strengthening democratic institutions, civil society, and the rule of law; promoting economic growth; reducing poverty; and increasing bilateral trade and investment. U.S. military cooperation with Cambodia has increased as well. Military activities during the past decade include U.S. naval port visits; U.S. education and training of Cambodian officers; and joint exercises, such as *Angkor Sentinel*, related to international peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and counterterrorism.

Cambodia
Area: 70,000 sq. miles (about the size of Missouri)
Capital: Phnom Penh
Population: 15.5 million
Government: parliamentary (bicameral) under a constitutional monarchy
Head of State: King Norodom Sihamoni
Next General Election: 2018
GDP Composition by Sector: agriculture (33%); industry (25%); services (42%).
GDP per capita: \$3,300 (purchasing power parity) (2014)
Life Expectancy: 63 years
Literacy: 77%
Religion: Theravada Buddhism (95% of population)

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, 2016.

Political Developments

Many Cambodian political, social, and economic institutions that were destroyed under the rule of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, also known as the Khmer Rouge (1975-79), have been reestablished. The Kingdom has made fitful progress in some areas of governance and human rights, including the conduct of elections and the development of civil society. Economic growth of over 7% annually in recent years has brought prosperity to some Cambodians, particularly in urban areas, and many rural residents also have experienced improvements in their quality of life. However, political and judicial institutions remain weak and economic disparities have widened. Human rights groups assert that over half a million Cambodians have been displaced as government, business, and foreign entities, sometimes in collusion, have

confiscated their land and homes, sometimes forcibly or without proper compensation, to make way for agricultural, mining, logging, tourism, and urban development projects.

Experts say that Hun Sen, Deputy President of the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), has bolstered his power through a combination of “guile and force,” electoral victories, legal and extra-legal political maneuvers, influence over the broadcast media and judiciary, intimidation, patronage and cronyism. In July 2015, the Cambodian Parliament passed a law on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that critics say gives the government greater authority to restrict their activities.

Hun Sen has been the nation’s leader for 30 years, including as Premier of the Vietnam-backed Republic of Kampuchea between 1985 and 1993 and as Prime Minister after the United Nations sponsored the restoration of a constitutional monarchy in 1993. During the past decade, Hun Sen has suppressed an often-fragmented opposition and consolidated his own position. The most recent national elections, in 2013, were viewed by many observers as flawed, but resulted in a striking reversal of fortunes for the CPP and a boost for the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), led by Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha. The CPP lost 22 seats in the National Assembly, holding onto 68 out of a total of 123 seats, its lowest level of support since 1998. The main opposition groups, unified as the CNRP, won 55 seats, a gain of 26. The poll results reflected a changing electorate that is younger and more urban, more concerned about corruption and inequality, and more demanding of government. Furthermore, Cambodian voters as a whole may be becoming less impressed by Hun Sen’s claims that the CPP has brought stability and prosperity to the country following the period of genocidal rule, foreign invasion, and civil war during the 1970s and 1980s.

In July 2014, following a year of political unrest, including mass demonstrations and the CNRP’s boycott of parliament, the CCP and the opposition agreed to a power sharing agreement. However, despite promises by both sides to adopt a “culture of dialogue,” political rhetoric became increasingly strident. Beginning in the summer of 2015, Hun Sen and the CPP struck back at the opposition with physical assaults, arrests, and lawsuits which many observers perceived as politically motivated. In October 2015, two CNRP parliamentarians reportedly were pulled from their cars and brutally beaten in what some observers surmised to be an organized attack. Opposition Senator Hong Sok Hour was jailed for committing “forgery and incitement” related to politically-sensitive Cambodia-Vietnam border issues. Over a dozen CNRP activists have been arrested or convicted on charges related to their involvement in public protests in 2014. Three men involved

in the assault on the two CNRP lawmakers have been arrested.

In November 2015, the National Assembly stripped CNRP President Sam Rainsy of his parliamentary immunity and expelled him from the national legislature. Rainsy, who in 2013 had received a royal pardon for multiple defamation convictions, again faces charges or jail time in three criminal cases widely regarded as politically motivated, including a seven-year-old defamation case. Rainsy was in South Korea when the Cambodian government issued a warrant for his arrest, and remains in France in self-imposed exile. In December 2015, some Members of Congress signed a letter to Hun Sen calling on him to revoke Sam Rainsy's arrest warrant and reinstate him to the National Assembly.

Economic Developments

The United States is the largest overseas market for Cambodian merchandise. In 2014, bilateral trade was worth nearly \$3.2 billion, including \$2.84 billion in U.S. imports of Cambodian goods, mostly clothing and footwear. A garment factory monitoring system established through a trade agreement between the United States and Cambodia in 1999 (*Better Factories Cambodia*), managed by the International Labor Organization (ILO), and funded by international donors has helped to protect garment workers. However, labor rights abuses have increased in recent years as the apparel industry has developed.

Cambodia, which acceded to the World Trade Organization in 2004, has made commitments to reduce tariffs and fulfill other obligations by 2018 as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Area and the ASEAN Economic Community. The United States and Cambodia signed a bilateral trade agreement in 1996, which provided for reciprocal "normal trade relations" tariff treatment. The Kingdom also is a beneficiary of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) programs whereby developed countries apply lower tariffs to some Cambodian goods.

Cambodia and China

China is Cambodia's largest economic benefactor, with commercial investments reportedly worth \$10 billion and economic assistance totaling over \$3 billion. PRC assistance has come largely in the form of investment packages, concessional loans, Chinese-built infrastructure, and small-scale military aid. Chinese firms reportedly have invested more than \$1.6 billion to build six dams in the Kingdom. Some observers have expressed concerns about Chinese economic projects, including their quality, effects on the environment, and lack of transparency. Others allege that China's largesse has hindered some foreign aid donors' attempts to pressure Phnom Penh to make advances in the areas of human rights and democracy.

Foreign Assistance

Cambodia is heavily dependent upon overseas development assistance from Japan, the United States, Australia, and Europe (totaling roughly \$500 million annually). The United States provided an estimated \$77.8 million in foreign assistance to the Kingdom in FY2015. From 1998

to 2007, Congress prohibited assistance to the government of Cambodia in order to pressure Hun Sen into fully restoring democracy, but allowed U.S. assistance to NGOs. U.S. aid efforts in Cambodia, still channeled largely through NGOs, include the following areas: democracy, civil society, trafficking in persons, food security, nutrition, and maternal and child health.

Unexploded Ordnance

Cambodia is one of the countries in the world most heavily afflicted by unexploded ordnance (UXO), including cluster munitions, landmines, and other undetonated weapons left from U.S. bombing during the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese invasion in 1978, and civil wars during the 1970s and 1980s. The United States dropped 2.7 million tons of ordnance, mostly cluster bombs, on Cambodia, more than the amount that fell on Germany and Japan combined during World War II. An estimated one-third of the ordnance failed to explode. There have been roughly 64,000 UXO casualties in Cambodia since 1979, including over 19,000 deaths. With the help of international assistance, Cambodia has reduced the UXO casualty rate from around 700 per year a decade ago to 100, according to the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor. Since 1995, the U.S. government has provided over \$97 million for UXO clearance and disposal, related educational efforts, and survivor assistance programs in Cambodia.

Khmer Rouge Tribunal

The Khmer Rouge attempted to create an agrarian, communist society, a policy that included the forced depopulation of cities, establishment of rural communes, and executions of many educated and wealthy Cambodians and ethnic minorities. According to some estimates, nearly 2 million out of a population of 8 million Cambodians died from execution, torture, overwork, starvation, and disease. The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), established by Cambodia and the United Nations and financed by the Cambodian government and foreign countries, began proceedings in 2006 to try Khmer Rouge leaders responsible for violations of national and international law, including crimes against humanity. The U.S. government, which provides annual assistance to the tribunal through a U.N.-administered international trust fund (\$3.5 million in FY2015), withheld funding from 2006 to 2008 due to concerns about Cambodian political influence on the court. ECCC prosecutors have charged five former Khmer Rouge leaders and sentenced three to life in prison. One defendant died before the completion of his trial and another was declared unfit for trial. Cambodian and international human rights groups have advocated expanding the scope of prosecutions to include mid-ranking Khmer Rouge officials, while Hun Sen has opposed further indictments.

For more information, see CRS Report R44037, *Cambodia: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief*.

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