

# SPOTLIGHT ON R2P



## Capacity Building Training on Importance of Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

On Saturday, 16 September 2023, the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) and the Svay Rieng University (SRU) co-organized a capacity building training on “Importance of Responsibility to Protect (R2P)” at Svay Rieng University which is located in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia. The event was supported by the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) of the University of Queensland, Australia.

About 50 participants took part in this training, ranging from faculty members and university students including venerable monks at Svay Rieng University, to members of Friends to R2P-Cambodia Network.

The event aimed to take R2P as an outreach program at the community level and raise awareness of key concepts and relevance of R2P. It also aimed to build local constituents and champions of R2P in Svay Rieng.

The event started with a welcoming remark by Amb. Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of CICP, and followed

by an opening remark by Professor Sous Yutheary, Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences at Svay Rieng University. The one-day training covered two sessions and included a session to interact with participants.

This training used parts of the four R2P Training Manuals prepared by APR2P. The trainers were Soeung Bunly and Him Raksmeay, CICP Research Fellows and Core Members of Friends to R2P-Cambodia Network. The trainers used simple Khmer language to conduct this training. CICP also disseminated Khmer-translated materials and training manuals on R2P to the interested participants.



From Left to Right: Mr. Soeung Bunly, Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Professor Sous Yutheary, Mr. Him Raksmeay

### Opening Session

The event began with a welcoming speech by Amb. Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of CICP. He warmly welcomed all participants to the event. He expressed his appreciation to APR2P for the support of this training. He also offered his thanks to the management of the Svay Rieng University represented by Professor Sous Yuthary, Dean at SRU, for agreeing to co-organize this event. He thanked researchers at CICP and colleagues at SRU for relevant works in realizing this training.



Ambassador Pou Sothirak

Amb. Pou provided contexts to set stage for the event. Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a political norm entailing that each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. R2P was adopted unanimously by heads of state and government including Cambodia at the UN World Summit in 2005. Cambodia is an active supporter of R2P, having appointed an R2P Focal Point, a senior personality who has helped promote R2P nationally, regionally and internationally, since 2016.

For the past 10 years, CICIP has been active in promoting R2P with the support of our partner the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. Through CICIP's Network of Friends of R2P-Cambodia, it has implemented various activities such as conferences, workshops, seminars, trainings and public lectures to promote greater awareness and importance of the use of R2P principle as the effective tools to prevent mass atrocities from happening. The think tank have undertaken these activities through various forms of engagements with a wide variety of local stakeholders ranging from government, diplomatic corps, civil society and universities in Cambodia. Officers and researchers of CICIP have also taken part with other external networks in the region that pursue like-minded aspirations in maintaining the commitment to principle of R2P.

To further mainstream R2P in Cambodia, it is important that R2P is widely disseminated to more local communities. In December 2019, CICIP conducted a capacity building outreach on R2P to university students in Svay Rieng, a south-eastern province in Cambodia. At that time, there were considerable interests from the participants to learn more on R2P and atrocity pre-

vention. Unfortunately, this activity has been put on hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Now that Covid-19 has subsided, this useful training needs to be resumed. Building up on the momentum in our previous training, CICIP joined with SRU in organizing this event. This activity intended to take R2P to raise awareness of key concepts and relevance of R2P. It also aimed to build local constituents and champions of R2P on the ground.

This event had two sessions. Two knowledgeable trainers were invited to give lectures on basic elements of R2P. The first session was under the sub theme of "Introduction to R2P and Atrocity Prevention" by Mr. Soeung Bunly, Research Fellow at CICIP and Associate Professor at SRU. The session intended to introduce key basic concepts and backgrounds of R2P, atrocity prevention and the 4 atrocious crimes namely, Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes and Ethnic Cleansing.

The second session was about "Importance of R2P in Cambodia" by Mr. Him Raksmeay, Research Fellow at CICIP. The session focused on introducing Cambodia's achievements in promoting R2P and the importance of such continued efforts to further enhance Cambodia's standing in promoting peace and atrocity preventions in the Southeast Asia and beyond.

Amb. Pou encouraged the participants to ask questions and share their comments during discussions to make this event interactive and productive. The discussions were designed to be open to stimulate exchanges of views.

Professor Sous Yutheary, Dean at SRU joined Amb. Pou in welcoming all participants who took their time to take part in this training. He commended CICIP's efforts in initiating this event and engaging SRU in



Professor Sous Yutheary

this important endeavor. SRU was pleased to work together with CICIP to co-organize this event.

Prof. Yutheary shared his observations on R2P and how it helps enhance peace in Cambodia. R2P indicates state's commitment to protect populations from the four mass atrocity crimes namely, genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Looking at this angle, this norm is important to enhance peace in post-conflict countries such as Cambodia which used to experienced horrified atrocities, particularly those committed by the Democratic Kampuchea from 1975 to 1979. Now that Cambodia is peaceful, it is important to maintain and enhance peace. R2P is important to help in this respect. On that note, he announced the opening of the training and hoped that there were fruitful discussions between the trainers and participants.

### Session 1: Introduction to R2P and Atrocity Prevention

The first training opened with Mr. Soeung Bunly who introduced basic concepts and background on R2P.

After Mr. Bunly's conclusion of his lecture, an open discussion took place between the trainer and participants. There were many questions raised, particularly how R2P is relevant to post-conflict societies like Cambodia and ongoing crises such as Myanmar.





## Discussion

The highlight of discussions in the first session of the training are as follows:

- Despite having R2P, why the international community such as the United Nations has not responded effectively to stop killings in Myanmar?

Mr. Bunly said that R2P is a norm. A norm can only be enforced if there is political willingness from states. Unfortunately, despite unanimous adoption of R2P back in 2005, many states continue to be ambivalent in supporting R2P due to their continued concerns, especially related to their sovereignty. Also, any actions including economic sanctions, and military actions in R2P must follow the UN System, primarily the UN Security Council. Any decisions are difficult to get agreements in the UNSC due to the ongoing polarizations in the body. Particularly, in the case of Myanmar, the actual willingness of states, particularly those in Southeast Asia and superpowers, is not there to push for internationalized involvement for a collective response to the ongoing crisis in Myanmar due to various interest and strategic calculations by states.

- What should countries like Cambodia do to enhance implementation of R2P to prevent mass crimes from happening again?

The trainer stated that the political willingness of the Cambodia's government is important to enhance implementations on efforts to prevent future atrocities. So far, Cambodia has been active in promoting R2P,



Mr. Soeung Bunly

particularly at the regional and international fronts through various supportive statements and appointing a R2P national focal point. However, efforts are still needed such as raising awareness and localizations of R2P to the Cambodian public. Furthermore, the Cambodian government also has to take into considerations risk factors identified in the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, which would help equip Cambodia with enhanced abilities to have early warnings to prevent atrocities and build protection mechanisms.

## Session 2: Importance of R2P in Cambodia

The second session on “Importance of R2P in Cambodia” with Mr. Him Raksmeay as trainer.

He provided overall contexts of the importance of R2P in the Asia Pacific. Many parts of the Asia Pacific region are vulnerable to violent conflicts that lead to mass atrocities. The key reasons include countries in the Asia Pacific are multi-ethnic societies in the process of nation-state building, and are surrounded with internal conflicts. Many internal conflicts that can be generally observed in the region comprise of armed ethnic organizations, identity- or ideology-based conflicts, culture of impunity, weak institutions, scarce resources, and deep root causes to internal strives such as poverty, access to basic services, justice, culture of impunity, failure of good governance, absence of government, etc.

In this context, regional safeguards are essential for atrocity preventions in the Asia Pacific. While safeguards need to instill in national and regional mechanisms and need lengthy process to do so, beginning steps can be taken, especially ongoing-conflict areas. Those steps include facilitation of dialogue and reflection, national-based peace negotiations, fostering legal safeguards, and providing assistance to manage tensions.

Regarding Cambodia, the government has taken steps to enhance its efforts for atrocity preventions. As a country with horrified history of atrocities and wars, Cambodia has



Mr. Him Raksmeay

been active to promote international and regional norms such as R2P. The country was one of the countries that adopted the R2P norm. Cambodia also appointed a National Focal Point on R2P in 2016, the only country in Southeast Asia, and one of the six countries in the Asia Pacific that did so. Besides R2P specifically, Cambodia also subscribed to many international instruments on human rights such as ratifying the Rome Statue and many international human rights laws.

While Cambodia's efforts are commendable, there is still room for improvement which are important to further enhance the country's capacities for atrocity prevention. There is a vital need for Cambodia to invest more in prevention capabilities of atrocities such as establishing national mechanisms and early warning systems. Furthermore, Cambodia also needs to pay more attention in substantial governance reforms such as institutional strengthening, modernizing security sector governance, and enhancing social justice that are among risk factors that trigger mass atrocities. Lastly, more efforts are needed to raise awareness to the relevant stakeholders about the importance of international norms such as R2P. The norm should be viewed as the norm that helps Cambodia have an additional opportunity to deeply engage with the international community to further enhance Cambodia's capabilities in atrocity preventions.

## Discussion

The highlight of discussion in this session are as follows:

- With the growing competitions between superpowers, are international norms such as R2P relevant to countries like Cambodia?



Mr. Raksmeay argued that it is important for small countries like Cambodia to pay close attention to promoting international norms such as R2P because it is among few niches that small countries have in enhancing spaces. It is within Cambodia's vital interests that international laws and norms are respected because if the international order that dominates is based on "might is right" would be dangerous for Cambodia. Therefore, actively promoting international norms such as R2P is strategically good for Cambodia. More importantly, R2P is relevant to Cambodia because the norm helps further link the country to the international community, and through international support, helps enhance Cambodia's capabilities for atrocity prevention and raise the country's regional and international standing.

- How can local champions localize and raise awareness of R2P?

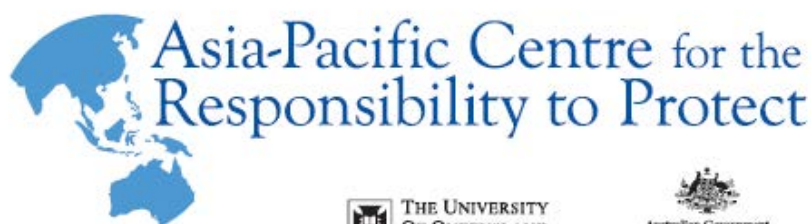
R2P work should be viewed as a process that needs to be sustained. It is never easy to introduce a norm discussed internationally and bring it nationally. It takes some time to mainstream. To get more buy-ins from relevant stakeholders in Cambodia, localizing and raising awareness of R2P are important and need to be done regularly. The key step for localizing is to simplify R2P in local contexts and use concepts that would be easy to understand. Regarding raising awareness, conducting training nationwide are essential to promote more understandings of the norm and develop more local champions.

### Closing Session

On behalf of Amb. Pou Sothirak, Mr. Him Raksmeay thanked to the speakers and all of the participants for their contributions in making the discussions interactive and fruitful. He also expressed appreciations to APR2P for the support in making the training possible. He offered his thanks to core members of Friends to R2P-Cambodia Network and colleagues at the Svay Rieng University for all their help in realizing this capacity building workshop.

Prepared by: Him Raksmeay, Focal Point in charge of R2P

Reviewed by: Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of CICP



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