



AP R2P

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SPOTLIGHT ON R2P

Second National Dialogue on R2P and Atrocities Prevention

Raffles Le Royale Hotel, Phnom Penh, 22-23 August 2017

The second Cambodian national dialogue on R2P and atrocities prevention was organised by the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) in partnership with the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) at the Raffles Le Royale Hotel in Phnom Penh on 22-23 August 2017. Some 50 local participants, including government staff, civil society, media, and academic/think tank representatives participated in the one and a half-day meeting that focused on developing a national action plan for implementing the Responsibility to Protect in Cambodia and its role in promoting the norm in the wider Southeast Asian region. A draft outline of the national action plan (NAP) was the basis of discussion among

participants, which include concrete ideas on building public awareness through education, training, and capacity building on R2P and atrocities prevention. Participants divided into three groups in the afternoon of the first day of the meeting where they discussed further some concrete ideas and recommendations on developing the R2P NAP for Cambodia.

In her welcoming remarks, Ms. Benita Sommerville, Acting Deputy Head of Mission of the Australian Embassy to the Kingdom of Cambodia, pointed out that the second dialogue indeed reflected the energy and commitment to move R2P forward, following the achievements of the first national dialogue of the previous year. Thus, the second dialogue will sustain and increase the

much needed momentum to continue in proceeding with the NAP. In this context, she emphasized the support of the Australian government for Cambodia's efforts in the promotion of mass atrocities prevention, not only in the country but also in ASEAN as a whole.

For his part, H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of CICP and the Cambodian National Focal Point of R2P, stressed that the political will of the Cambodian government in upholding the R2P norm. He then highlighted the recent regional and global cases of crimes against humanity, emphasizing why R2P is important and so urgently needed across the globe. He pointed out that Cambodia can



take a leading role in the region by engaging with other countries to ensure that mass atrocity prevention are carried out realistically and concretely. He also argued that with the support partners like APR2P and the Australian government, local stakeholders in Cambodia are encouraged to develop the national action plan without overdependence on the international community. In addition, he firmly stated that the NAP has to be approved, accepted, and led by the Cambodian government. He then proposed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC) should appoint an official or the Ambassador to UN to deliver a statement in the General Assembly's annual dialogue on R2P on 06 September 2017 in New York, on the development of R2P in Cambodia. This would be a major milestone since Cambodia is the first and the only country in the region to have appointed a national focal point.

Meanwhile, Dr. Noel M. Morada, Director for Regional Diplomacy of APR2P, recalled the accomplishments of the first national dialogue and pointed out that this year, discussion about developing a national action plan will be the core focus of the second dialogue. He also expressed gratitude for Ambassador Sothirak's strong commitment to implementing R2P in Cambodia in his capacity as the national focal point and the continuing support of CICP to the Centre's program in promoting a deeper understanding of R2P and its implementation in the country and the wider region of ASEAN.

Importance of atrocities prevention in the Cambodian context

In the first plenary session of the dialogue, Ambassador Pou Sothirak began by stressing that it is now twelve years since R2P was unanimously adopted at the 2005 UN Summit. Yet, the international community is still struggling to effectively handle and to prevent mass atrocity crimes. He noted the present atrocities that are happening across the world including in South Sudan, Syria, Libya, and those closer to home such as in Southern Thailand, the case of Rohingya in Rakhine state in Myanmar, the killings in relation to war on drugs in the Philippines by President Duterte, among others. He pointed out that the second national dialogue is timely and important to build upon this momentum. He stated that Cambodia should be at the forefront in promoting the R2P norm in the region. He concluded his presentation by saying that, in his capacity as a national focal point, he will stand ready to ensure that the R2P norm will serve as a moral and imperative means addressing past mass atrocity crimes and in preventing the same in Cambodia and across the wider ASEAN region.

For his part, Mr. Youk Chhang, Director of the Documentation Center for Cambodia (DC-CAM) set out how his Center collects the documents from the Khmer Rouge regime and how these are used in helping to prosecute cases against those who committed atrocities. As an organization, DC-Cam has three main ob-

jectives: 1) to compile and organize information that could potentially assist in the legal accounting of the crimes against humanity of the regime; 2) to memorialise or promote remembrance of the atrocity crimes in relation to the national education system through developing instructional materials in the teaching the history of the genocide, which is key to the prevention of future mass atrocities more effective; and 3) to promote national reconciliation. The Sleuk Rith Institute for education and research (part of DC-CAM) is now focusing on collecting stories from villagers in relation to crimes during the Khmer Rouge so that potential future incidents could be anticipated and thereby prevent atrocities in the future. He also said that the government will work on utilizing the history of Cambodia as a mechanism for peace building and reconciliation.

Developing a national action plan for atrocities prevention

In his presentation, Dr. Morada elaborated the reasons why a national action plan for implementing R2P is needed in Cambodia. First, inasmuch as there is a clear political commitment to R2P by the Cambodian government with the appointment of the national focal point last year, it is also necessary to translate this commitment through concrete action plans. Specifically, such plan should set priorities and strategies for implementing the R2P norm and he identified four key objectives for developing a national action plan: 1) to raise awareness at the grass-roots level; 2) to anchor the understanding of R2P on local values and contexts; 3) to promote capacity-building among relevant stakeholders; and 4) to establish partnerships among various organizations in the areas of research, training, and publication on atrocities prevention. Developing a NAP on R2P also involves the identification of risk factors and provide assessments that should be submitted to the government for

further actions. It should also include a regional dimension which recognizes Cambodia's leading role in Southeast Asia in promoting the norm in the region. More importantly, the Friends of R2P – Cambodia serve as a template for creating a regional network aimed at promoting R2P across the region. He also mentioned the role of parliamentarians in accelerating the institutionalization of R2P, particularly in the protection of civilians. Interfaith dialogue is also another aspect to consider given the rise of religious extremism, intolerance, hate speech, and violence in a number of multi-ethnic societies in the region.



Recommendations on developing Cambodia's national action plan on R2P

Following discussions among three groups of participants about developing a national action plan, the following were some of the recommendations were presented during the plenary session:

- Increasing public awareness about R2P and atrocities prevention should be a priority area in the NAP. Specifically, high-level dialogue and capacity building with government sector should be pursued while dialogue among civil society organizations and academia should still be maintained and actively promoted.
- The bottom-up approach in promoting and implementing R2P should begin with civil society, through the Friends of R2P— Cambodia. The group should develop relevant educational and training resources as reference materials to support capacity building among those engaged in dialogue with security sector and the state as a whole.
- Research and publications should also be included in the main objectives of the R2P NAP for Cambodia, as well as training the trainers for atrocities prevention.
- In adopting the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocities Prevention as part of the R2P NAP, it was suggested that it should be contextualised in Cambodian setting, with a view to making policy recommendations that are based on research of the significant risk factors.
- It was suggested that the R2P NAP should have government support and for it to generate national consensus in its implementation. It should also support the development of an early-warning mechanism and country risk assessments, with the support of civil society groups. Once the risk factors are identified, for example, it would be easy to formulate R2P NAP for Cambodia.
- A national mechanism that would be set up for implementing the R2P NAP for Cambodia should be an inter-governmental body composed of relevant ministries and agencies of the government, with inputs from the grassroots. It should also draw up a roadmap for implementing the R2P NAP in various stages and timeframe.
- The government should also support the idea of creating study groups by tapping on the Friends of R2P Cambodia for relevant inputs on developing the various components and priority areas of R2P NAP. This includes providing resources and developing a sense of local ownership of the national action plan to ensure that implementing R2P in Cambodia is not a donor-driven endeavour.
- An important component of the R2P NAP should be inter-faith dialogue using existing mechanisms already in place, such as the education and outreach programs in rural areas and grassroots by the Buddhist community in Cambodia.

Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, Ambassador Pou Sothirak highlighted the following:

- There will be an outcomes report that will be sent to all relevant stakeholders, particularly the government, including the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Human Rights Commission, and Friends of R2P. He urged

a focus on what the majority had agreed upon as a basis for moving forward successfully and efficiently.

- As the second national dialogue focused on developing the R2P national action plan, important not underestimate this important task, which may seem rather ambitious at this stage. It is a major undertaking but it is doable given the support and commitment of APR2P for this endeavour. Moreover, it is essential that the R2P concept is brought down to the community level in order to enhance effectiveness. With regard to the idea of establishing the study group, Friends of R2P can be broken down into smaller working groups in order to more efficiently provide substance to the recommendations made in the meeting.
- It is important to get the sustained attention and support of the government in implementing R2P in Cambodia and continually engage with relevant officials in dialogues. The development of a national action plan is indeed an important undertaking which will show the commitment of Cambodia to the principle of R2P, which was adopted by 194 member states of the UN even though there are only 58 members have appointed a national focal point.

For his part, Dr Morada pointed out the following in his closing remarks:

- There is clearly a consensus among participants in the dialogue that developing a Cambodia R2P NAP is important; however, it may take time for the government to buy in, but this should not preclude other stakeholders continuing the discussion on the national action plan. For example, with regard to promoting public awareness of the principle, social media is a crucial platform to promote R2P. More voices from Cambodia need to be heard, including the sharing of op-ed pieces and articles in lo-

cal media. Self-commitment to do more study and research on the development of R2P could all be considered to be forms of individual contributions to the development and implementation of certain aspects of action plans that were discussed in the dialogue.

- R2P is a useful lens for examining other relevant issues and assessing the relevant risk factors faced by Cambodia as well as other countries in the region.
- With regard to the timeframe for R2P NAP, it is important to be practical and focus on what is doable in the near- to medium-term based on the resources and commitment of stakeholders.

The Centre will continue to work in partnership with CICIP to hold another national dialogue next year as part of building public awareness and deepening knowledge about R2P and atrocities prevention. Both organisations have agreed to support the efforts of local stakeholders in Cambodia, through the Friends of R2P, to pursue further discussions on developing a national action plan on implementing R2P at the domestic and regional levels.



This Spotlight article is adopted from the summary report submitted by CICIP following the second national dialogue in Phnom Penh on 22-23 August 2017. The Centre would like to acknowledge the contributions of Professor Pou Sovachana and Ms. Charadine Pich in the writing of the summary report.



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