CHAPTER 11

The Cambodian Genocide — 1975–1979

BEN KIERNAN

In the first few weeks after Cambodia fell to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975, the nation's cities were evacuated, hospitals emptied, schools closed, factories deserted, money and wages abolished, monasteries emptied, and libraries scattered. Freedom of the press, movement, worship, organization, association, and discussion all completely disappeared for nearly four years. So did everyday family life. A whole nation was "kidnapped," and then besieged from within. Meals had to be eaten in collective mess halls: Parents ate breakfast in sittings, and if they were lucky their sons and daughters waited their turns outside. During the years 1975 to 1979, Democratic Kampuchea (DK) was a prison camp state, and the 8 million prisoners served most of their time in solitary confinement. One and a half million of the inmates were worked, starved, and beaten to death.

Pol Pot and His Circle

The shadowy leaders of Democratic Kampuchea gave few clues to their personal lives. In 1978, the first journalists into DK from Yugoslavia, had to ask the prime minister, "Who are you, comrade Pol Pot?" He was evasive (Pol Pot, 1978, pp. 20–21). New light on his social background suggests its importance for his political life. How little is explained by his personality, though, remains an anomaly.

The story began in a large, red-tiled, timber house on stilts overlooking a broad, brown river, downstream from the town of Kompong Thom. The river teemed with fish, its lush banks lined by coconut and mango trees.
Behind the houses along the bank stretched large ricefields. A small Chinese shop sold a few consumables.

On May 19, 1928, Pol Pot was born Saloth Sar, the youngest in a family of six boys and a girl. His parents owned 9 hectares of riceland, 3 of garden-land, and six buffalo. Pol Pot’s father, Saloth, with two sons and adopted nephews, harvested enough rice for about 20 people. In later years (during the reign of the Khmer Rouge), due to their relative wealth the family would have been deemed “class enemies.” But few villagers thought so then. Rich or poor, everyone tilled the fields, fished the river, cooked tasty soups, raised children, propitiated local spirits and French colonial officials, or thronged Buddhist festivities in Kompong Thom’s pagoda. In 1929, a French official described Kompong Thom people as “the most deeply Cambodian and the least susceptible to our influence.”

But the Saloth family were Khmer peasants with a difference. They had royal connections. Pol Pot’s cousin had grown up a palace dancer, becoming one of King Monivong’s principal wives. At 15, his eldest sister, Saroeung, was chosen as a consort. In 1928, his eldest brother, Loth Suong, began a career in palace protocol. In 1934, at the age of six, Pol Pot joined him.

The country boy Saloth Sar never worked a ricefield or knew much of village life. A year in the royal monastery was followed by six years in an elite Catholic school. His upbringing was strict. The girl next door, Saksi Sbong, recalls that Saloth Sar “was very serious and would not gamble or allow children to play near his home” (Kiernan, 1985a, p. 27). The palace compound was cloistered and conservative, the old king a French puppet. Outside, Phnom Penh’s 100,000 inhabitants were mostly Chinese shopkeepers and Vietnamese workers. Few Cambodian childhoods were so removed from their vernacular culture.

At 14, Pol Pot went off to high school in a bustling Khmer market town. But he missed World War II’s tumultuous end in Phnom Penh. Youths forced his cousin, the new boy-king Norodom Sihanouk, to briefly declare independence from France, and Buddhist monks led Cambodian nationalists in common cause with Vietnamese communists. In 1948, while back in the capital learning carpentry, Pol Pot’s life changed. He received a scholarship to study radio-electricity in Paris.

He wrote Suong occasionally, asking for money. But one day a letter arrived asking for the official biography of King Sihanouk. Suong sent back advice: Don’t get involved in politics. But Pol Pot was already a member of the Cambodian section of the French Communist Party, then in its Stalinist heyday. Those who knew him then insist that “he would not have killed a chicken,” that he was self-effacing, charming. He kept company with Khieu Ponnary, eight years his senior, the first Khmer woman to get the baccalauréat. The couple chose Bastille Day for the day of their wedding back home in 1956.

Most of Pol Pot’s Paris student friends — such as Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, and Son Sen — remained in his circle long after they were overthrown from power. He had early disagreements with Hou Yuon, later a popular Marxist intellectual, who was to be one of the first victims after the seizure of power by the Khmer Rouge in 1975. But Pol Pot stood out in his choice of a nom de pieuse: the “Original Cambodian” (khmaer da’em). Others preferred less racial, modernist code-names, like “Free Khmer” or “Khmer Worker.” Pol Pot’s scholarship ended after he failed his course three years in a row. His ship arrived home in January 1953 (Kiernan, 1985a, pp. 30–32, 119–22).

The day prior to his arrival home, King Sihanouk had declared martial law to suppress Cambodia’s independence movement, which was becoming radicalized by French colonial force. Pol Pot’s closest brother, Saloth Chhay, joined the Cambodian and Vietnamese Communists, and took Pol Pot along. In this first contact, Vietnamese Communists began teaching him, as one of them later put it, how to “work with the masses at the base, to build up the independence committees at the village level, member by member.” It seemed a patronizing slight, like his failure to quickly rise to the leadership, despite overseas experience. A former Cambodian comrade claims that Pol Pot “said that everything should be done on the basis of self-reliance, independence, and mastery. The Khmers should do everything on their own” (Kiernan, 1985a, p. 123).

In the 1960s, a group of younger, mostly French-educated communists took over the leadership of the more orthodox (pro-Vietnamese) Workers’ Party of Kampuchea, which had led the struggle against French colonialism in the 1950s. In 1966, the new leadership changed the party’s name to the “Communist Party of Kampuchea” and set out on their path to power by staging an uprising against Prince Norodom Sihanouk’s neutralist government. After victory over Sihanouk’s successor regime, that of Marshal Lon Nol, in 1975, they proclaimed the state of Democratic Kampuchea, which, as previously noted, lasted nearly four years before being overthrown by a Vietnamese invading army in 1979.

The ruling body in DK comprised the members of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). The leaders with maximum national power and responsibility for the genocide about to be perpetrated were those based in Phnom Penh and not those specifically responsible for a particular geographic area of the country. The former were known as the “Party Center.” The Party Center was comprised of the following individuals: Saloth Sar (alias Pol Pot), secretary-general of the CPK since 1962, and prime minister of DK; Nuon Chea, deputy secretary-general of the Party
since 1960, and president of the Representative Assembly of DK; Ieng Sary, who was ranked number 3 in the Party leadership since 1963 and was one of DK’s deputy prime ministers (responsible for foreign affairs); Son Sen, number 11 in the Party in 1963 and a deputy prime minister of DK (for defense and security); Khieu Samphan, a Party member since the 1950s who became DK’s president; Ieng Thirith, wife of Ieng Sary and DK minister of social action; and Yun Yat, wife of Son Sen and DK minister of culture. Khieu Ponnary, older sister of Ieng Thirith and childless wife of Pol Pot, was a provincial Party official and president of the Women’s Association of Democratic Kampuchea, but reportedly suffered insanity around 1975. (Pol Pot remarried in Thailand after his overthrow and had two children.)

Two other figures were longtime members of Pol Pot’s group. Though they held regional posts in 1975, they increasingly assumed responsibility for the implementation of genocidal policies throughout the country: Mok, number 9 in the Party in 1963, was Party secretary of the key Southwest Zone and later chief of the general staff of the Khmer Rouge armed forces, and Ke Pauk, Party secretary of the Central Zone of DK, later became undersecretary-general of the Khmer Rouge armed forces.

The Mechanics of Power

The late 20th century saw the era of mass communications, but DK tolled a vicious silence. Internally and externally, Cambodia was sealed off. Its borders were closed, all neighboring countries militarily attacked, use of foreign languages banned, embassies and press agencies expelled, local newspapers and television shut down, radios and bicycles confiscated, mail and telephones suppressed. Worse, Cambodians had little to tell each other anyway. They quickly learned that any display of knowledge or skill, if “contaminated” by foreign influence (normal in modern societies), was a folly in Democratic Kampuchea. Human communications were reduced to daily instructions and orders.

The CPK Center, known as Angkor Loeu (the high organization), began its purges in the 1960s by assassinating Party figures assumed to be too close to Vietnam’s Communists. In the early 1970s, before taking power at the national level, the Center organized the arrest and “disappearances” of nearly 900 Hanoi-trained Khmer Communists who had come home from North Vietnam to join the insurgency against Lon Nol’s regime. They had accounted for half the Party’s membership in 1970. Then the Center gradually exerted its totalitarian control over the population by replacing autonomous or dissident Zone administrations and Party Committees with Center-backed forces commanded by loyalist Zone leaders Mok and Ke Pauk. By 1978, purges had taken the lives of half of the members of the Party’s Central Committee, although there is no evidence that this body had ever officially met.

Democratic Kampuchea was initially divided into six major zones, and 32 regions, each of which in turn comprised districts, subdistricts, and villages. One aim of the CPK Center was to build larger and larger units at the local level, abolishing village life altogether in favor of “high-level cooperatives” the size of a subdistrict. At the other end of the hierarchy, the Center set about reducing the autonomy of the zones by bringing them under its own direct control.

The most common pattern was for Mok’s or Ke Pauk’s forces to undermine a zone from below, first purging the district, subdistrict, and village committees, then regional ones, before finally picking off the severely weakened zone Party leadership. Another tactic was to carry out purges through the regional security forces (santesok) in a direct chain of command from the Center, bypassing the zone leadership. Those arrested were taken to the nerve center of the system, the national security service (santebal) prison in Phnom Penh, code-named Office S-21, now preserved as the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide. Up to 20,000 people, mostly suspected CPK dissidents and regional officials, were tortured and killed there from 1976 to 1979. Chief of the santebal, Kaing Khek Iev, alias Deuch, reported directly to Son Sen, who was the Center official responsible for security.

The entire process began in the insurgent zones before victory. In 1973, with Center backing, Mok emerged supreme in a factional battle for control of the Southwest Zone Party Committee, executing his senior and rival, Prasith, who had been number 7 in the 1963 Party hierarchy. The poorest region, renamed the Western Zone, was assigned to another rival, Chou Chet, who was eventually executed in 1978. After victory in 1976, Ke Pauk’s forces carried out a violent purge of cadres loyal to his executed predecessor, Koy Thuon, in the Northern Zone, now enlarged and renamed the Central Zone. In 1977, Mok’s Southwest Zone forces and administrators carried out a similar purge of the Northwest Zone, eventually arresting the Zone Party Secretary, Nhim Ros, number 8 in the 1963 Party hierarchy. On the other side of the country, Mok also took over two of the five regions of the Eastern Zone. Finally, a May 1978 conventional military suppression campaign commanded by Son Sen, Ke Pauk, and Mok overran the rest of the Eastern Zone and abolished its Party Committee. Zone Secretary So Phim, number 4 in the Party hierarchy since 1963, committed suicide.

The Center’s struggle for total control was complete. But it had sown the seeds of its own overthrow. Surviving officials of the Eastern Zone went into rebellion, and in late 1978 they crossed the border and requested the Vietnamese military assistance that eventually brought DK to an end.
Monks have disappeared from 90 to 95 per cent ... . Monasteries ... are largely abandoned. The foundation pillars of Buddhism ... have disintegrated. In the future they will dissolve farther. The political base, the economic base, the cultural base must be uprooted (cited in Boua, 1991, p. 235).

This clear evidence of genocidal intent was carried through. As Chanthou Boua (1991) points out, “Buddhism was eradicated from the face of the country in just one year” (p. 227). By early 1977, there were no functioning monasteries and no monks to be seen in Cambodia. In 1978, Yun Yat claimed that Buddhism was “incompatible with the revolution” (Jackson, 1989, p. 191). The Cambodian people, she said, had “stopped believing” and monks had “left the temples” (Jackson, 1989, p. 191). She added: “The problem gradually becomes extinguished. Hence there is no problem” (Jackson, 1989, p. 191).

Genocide against Ethnic Groups

The largest ethnic minority groups in Cambodia before 1970 were the Vietnamese, the Chinese, and the Muslim Cham. Unlike most other Communist regimes, the Pol Pot regime’s view of these and the country’s 20 other national minorities, who had long made up over 15 percent of the Cambodian population, was virtually to deny their existence. The regime officially proclaimed that they totaled only 1 percent of the population. Statistically, they were written off.

Their physical fate was much worse. The Vietnamese community, for example, was entirely eradicated. About half of the 450,000-strong community had been expelled by the United States-backed Lon Nol regime in 1970 (with several thousand killed in massacres). Over 100,000 more were driven out by the Pol Pot regime in the first year after its victory in 1975. The ones who remained in Cambodia were simply murdered.

In research conducted in Cambodia since 1979 it has not been possible to find a Vietnamese resident who had survived the Pol Pot years there. However, eyewitnesses from other ethnic groups, including Khmers who were married to Vietnamese, testify to the fates of their Vietnamese spouses and neighbors. What they witnessed was a campaign of systematic racial extermination.

The Chinese under Pol Pot’s regime suffered the worst disaster ever to befall any ethnic Chinese community in Southeast Asia. Of the 1975 population of 425,000, only 200,000 Chinese survived the next four years. Ethnic Chinese were nearly all urban, and they were seen by the Khmer Rouge as archetypal city dwellers, and as prisoners of war. In this case, they were not targeted for execution because of their race, but like other
evacuated city dwellers they were made to work harder and under much more deplorable conditions than rural dwellers. The penalty for infractions of minor regulations was often death. This basically constituted systematic discrimination predicated on geographic or social origin.

The Chinese succumbed in particularly large numbers to hunger and to diseases like malaria. The 50 percent of them who perished is a higher proportion even than that estimated for Cambodia’s city dwellers in general (about one-third).

Further, the Chinese language, like all foreign and minority languages, was banned, and so was any tolerance of a culturally and ethnically distinguishable Chinese community. This, in essence, constituted being destroyed “as such” (Kiernan, 1986b).

The Muslim Chams numbered at least 250,000 in 1975. Their distinct religion, language and culture, large villages, and autonomous networks threatened the atomized, closely supervised society that the Pol Pot leadership planned. An early 1974 Pol Pot document records the decision to “break up” the Cham people, adding: “Do not allow too many of them to concentrate in one area.” Cham women were forced to cut their hair short in the Khmer style, not wear it long as was their custom; then the traditional Cham sarong was banned, as peasants were forced to wear only black pajamas. Ultimately, restrictions were placed upon religious activity.

In 1975, the new Pol Pot government turned its attention to the Chams with a vengeance. Fierce rebellions broke out. On an island in the Mekong River, the authorities attempted to collect all copies of the Koran. The villagers staged a protest demonstration, and Khmer Rouge troops fired into the crowd. The Chams then took up swords and knives and slaughtered a dozen troops. The retaliating armed forces massacred many and pillaged their homes. They evacuated the island, and razed the village, and then turned to a neighboring village, massacring 70 percent of its inhabitants.

Soon after, the Pol Pot army forcibly emptied all 113 Cham villages in the country. About 100,000 Chams were massacred and the survivors were dispersed in small groups of several families. Islamic schools and religion, as well as the Cham language, were banned. Thousands of Muslims were physically forced to eat pork. Many were murdered for refusing. Of 113 Cham hakkem, or community leaders, only 20 survived in 1979. Only 25 of their 226 deputies survived. All but 38 of about 300 religious teachers at Cambodia’s Koranic schools perished. Of more than a thousand who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, only about 30 survived. (Kiernan, 1988)

The toll goes on. The Thai minority of 20,000 was reportedly reduced to about 8,000. Of the 180 families of the Lao ethnic minority, only 800 families survived. Of the 2000 members of the Kola minority, “no trace ... has been found” (Kiernan, 1990b).

**Genocide against a Part of the Majority National Group**

Finally, of the majority Khmers, 15 percent of the rural population perished in 1975–1979, and 25 percent of the urban population. Democratic Kampuchea initially divided its population into the “old citizens” (those who had lived in Khmer Rouge Zones before the 1975 victory) and “new citizens” (those who had lived in the cities, and were the last holdouts of the Lon Nol regime). All cities were evacuated in April 1975. The next year, however, the “new citizens” were repopulated “deportees,” and most failed to even qualify for the next category, “candidates,” let alone “full rights citizens,” a group to which only favored peasant families were admitted. But not even they were spared the mass murders of the 1977–1978 countrywide purges.

The most horrific slaughter was perpetrated in the last six months of the regime, in the politically suspect Eastern Zone bordering Vietnam. The author interviewed 87 survivors in the Eastern Zone: In just 11 villages, the Khmer Rouge carried out 1663 killings in 1978. In another community of 350 people, there were 95 executions in 1978; 705 executions occurred in another subdistrict, 1950 in another, 400 in another. Tens of thousands of other villagers were deported to the northwest of the country. En route through Phnom Penh they were “marked” as easterners by being forced to wear a blue scarf, reminiscent of Hitler’s yellow star for Jews (Kiernan, 1989b), and later eliminated en masse.

A total 1978 murder toll of over 100,000 (more than one-seventeenth of the eastern population) can safely be regarded as a minimum estimate (Kiernan, 1986a). The real figure is probably much higher (see Table 11.1).

**The Historical Forces at Work**

Rural conditions were better in prerevolutionary Cambodia than in neighboring countries like Vietnam or even Thailand. Land was more equitably distributed, and most peasant families owned some land. However, rural debt was common, and the number of landless tenants or sharecroppers increased from 4 percent of the farming population in 1950 to 20 percent in 1970 (Kiernan and Boua, 1982, p. 4). Thus, alongside a landowning middle peasant class, a new class of rootless, destitute rural dwellers emerged. Their position was desperate enough for them to have nothing to lose in any kind of social revolution.

The gap between town and countryside has been cited as a precondition for the Khmer Rouge’s march to power. Unlike the countryside, the cities were not predominantly Khmer, but included large populations of ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese. Nor was the urban manufacturing sector very significant, producing few consumer goods for the countryside. Many peasants saw cities as seats of arbitrary, even foreign, political and
TABLE 11.1  Approximate Death Tolls under Pol Pot, 1975–1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social group</th>
<th>1975 pop.</th>
<th>Numbers perished</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;New Citizens&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Khmer</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Khmer</td>
<td>600,000</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese (all urban)</td>
<td>430,000</td>
<td>215,000</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese (urban)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao (rural)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL New citizens</td>
<td>3,050,000</td>
<td>879,000</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Base Citizens&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Khmer</td>
<td>4,500,000</td>
<td>675,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmer Krom</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cham (all rural)</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese (rural)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai (rural)</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upland minorities</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Base citizens</td>
<td>4,840,000</td>
<td>792,000</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>7,890,000</td>
<td>1,671,000</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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thrown by the U.S.-backed general, Lon Nol. The Vietnam War spilled across the Vietnam–Cambodia border, Sihanouk swore revenge, and a new civil war tore Cambodia apart.

The U.S. bombing of the countryside increased from 1970 until August 15, 1973, when the U.S. Congress imposed a halt. Up to 150,000 Cambodians had been killed in the American bombardments. Nearly half of the 540,000 tons of bombs fell in the last six-month period. Hundreds of thousands of peasants fled into the cities, to escape first the bombing and then the imposition of Khmer Rouge power. In the ashes of rural Cambodia arose the CPK regime, led by Pol Pot.

Pol Pot’s forces had profited greatly from the U.S. bombardment. Contemporary U.S. government documents and peasant survivors reveal that the Khmer Rouge used the bombing’s devastation and massacre of civilians as recruitment propaganda, and as an excuse for their brutal, radical policies and their purge of moderate and pro-Vietnamese Khmer Communists and Sihanoukists (Kiernan, 1983a, 1989a). By 1975 they had national power.

The Long-Range Impact on the Victim Groups

The population of Cambodia totaled around 6.5 million in 1979. The survivors thus emerged from the Pol Pot period nearly 3.5 million fewer than the 1980 population that had been projected in 1970 (Migotzi, 1973, p. 269). Not all of the difference is attributable to the Pol Pot regime; much is the result of the American war and aerial bombardment of the populated areas of Cambodia from 1969–1973, and of projected population growth that was unrealized due to instability, population displacement, and harsh living conditions throughout the 1970s. But 1.5 million deaths are attributable to the Khmer Rouge regime (Table 11.1, and Kiernan, 1990a).

The Cambodian population remains severely affected by psychological trauma. Post-traumatic stress syndrome is a general problem, including illnesses such as psychosomatic blindness, which has been diagnosed among survivors living in the United States.

International Responses and Current Status of the Cambodian Genocide Issue

On December 6, 1975, eight months after the Khmer Rouge takeover, U.S. President Gerald Ford and U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited Southeast Asia. Ford told Indonesia’s President Suharto: “The United States intends to continue a strong interest in and influence in the Pacific, Southeast Asia, and Asia. As a whole, we hope to expand this influence.” Continuing, Ford said: “The unification of Vietnam has come more
quickly than we anticipated. There is, however, resistance in Cambodia to the influence of Hanoi. We are willing to move slowly in our relations with Cambodia, hoping perhaps to slow down the North Vietnamese influence although we find the Cambodian government very difficult.” Kissinger then explained Beijing’s similar strategy: “The Chinese want to use Cambodia to balance off Vietnam. We don’t like Cambodia, for the government in many ways is worse than Vietnam, but we would like it to be independent. We don’t discourage Thailand or China from drawing closer to Cambodia” (Burr and Evans, 2001). For such geopolitical reasons, while the Cambodian genocide progressed, Washington, Beijing, and Bangkok all supported the continued independent existence of the Khmer Rouge regime.

In January 1979, the Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia, driving out the Khmer Rouge. A much less repressive regime was established with Hun Sen, first as foreign minister, and then as prime minister from 1985 onward. Vietnamese troops withdrew in 1989, after training a new Cambodian army that succeeded in defending the country on its own. But most of the international community embargoed the new government and continued to recognize the “legitimacy” of the defunct Pol Pot regime, voting for it to occupy Cambodia’s UN seat for another 12 years. Therefore, until 1989, the Khmer Rouge flag flew over New York, and until 1992 Pol Pot’s ambassador ran Cambodia’s mission there. No Western country voted against the right of the government-in-exile dominated by the Khmer Rouge to represent their former victims in international forums (Kiernan, 1993, pp. 191–272).

Independent commentators often followed suit. In 1979 British journalist William Shawcross, author of Sideshow, a good study of the pre-1975 U.S. intervention and wartime destruction of Cambodia, hung the label of “genocide” on the Khmer Rouge’s opponents. He alleged that Hanoi’s invasion to topple Pol Pot meant “subtle genocide” (Shawcross, 1980, pp. 25–30) by enforced starvation, and warned of “2 million dead by Christmas” (Shawcross, 1979b, n.p.). Fortunately, he was very wrong. In his second book, The Quality of Mercy, Shawcross conceded that “there is no evidence that large numbers of people did ‘starve to death’ at the hands of the Vietnamese or their Cambodian allies” (Shawcross, 1984, p. 370). He also noted, “For the overwhelming majority of the Cambodian people the invasion meant freedom” (Shawcross, 1984, p. 78). Nevertheless, most Western governments portrayed the Vietnamese invasion as the cause of the Cambodian problem.

In the decade after Pol Pot’s overthrow, many reputable legal organizations also dismissed proposals to send delegations to Cambodia to investigate the crimes of the DK regime. The International Commission of Jurists, the American Bar Association, and LawAsia all refused such opportunities to report on what the UN’s Special Rapporteur on genocide, Benjamin Whitaker, described in 1985 as genocide, “even under the most restricted definition.”

A few voluntary organizations around the world pressed on, unaided by major human rights groups. These included the U.S. Cambodia Genocide Project, which in 1980 proposed a World Court case (Stanton, 1993); the Australian section of the International Commission of Jurists, which in January 1990 called for “international trials” of the Pol Pot leadership for genocide; the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, which in June 1990 organized a one-day mock trial of the Khmer Rouge following the procedures of the World Court, with testimony by a dozen victims of the genocide; the Washington-based Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge, supported by 45 U.S. organizations, a former Cambodian prime minister, and survivors of the Khmer Rouge period; Yale University’s Cambodian Genocide Program; and the NGO Forum, an international body of private voluntary agencies working in Cambodia.

At the first Jakarta Informal Meeting of Southeast Asian diplomats, on July 28, 1988, the Indonesian chairman’s final communiqué noted a regional consensus on preventing a return to “the genocidal policies and practices of the Pol Pot regime” (Vatikiotis, 1988, p. 29). But the November 3, 1989, United Nations General Assembly resolution watered this down to “the universally condemned policies and practices of the recent past.” A February 1990 Australian proposal referred only to “the human rights abuses of a recent past” (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1990, pp. v–7). The five permanent members of the Security Council (the United States, the UK, France, the USSR, and China) emasculated this formulation in August 1990, vaguely nodding at “the policies and practices of the past” in the peace plan they drew up and imposed on Cambodia in late 1991.

In June 1991, the co-chairs of the Paris International Conference on Cambodia, Indonesia and France, accepted Phnom Penh’s proposal that the final Agreement stipulate that the new Cambodian Constitution should be “consistent with the provisions of ... the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” (Indochina Digest, June 7, 1991). But the great powers rejected it; reference to the Genocide Convention disappeared from the Agreement.

In Western countries, public pressure on governments mounted. One result was the British government’s disclosure on June 27, 1991, that despite repeated denials, its elite SAS military teams — from 1983 to at least 1989 — had trained forces allied to the Khmer Rouge (Pilger, 1991b, 1991c; Asia Watch, 1991, pp. 25–27, 59). The UN Subcommission on Human Rights, which the previous year had quietly dropped from its agenda a draft resolution condemning the Pol Pot genocide, now passed a