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OPENING STATEMENT BY MR WONG KAN SENG,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF CAMBODIA, PARIS, 30 JULY 1989

Please allow me to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of this Conference. You are shouldering a grave responsibility. I offer you my best wishes for a successful conference. You will be ably assisted by my good friend, the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, His Excellency Mr Ali Alatas, whose patience and tenacity in seeking a comprehensive settlement to the Cambodian problem is well-known to all of us. I am pleased that his efforts have been recognised by his election as Co-Chairman of this Conference. The task before us is a daunting one. The Cambodian people have suffered all but a continuous nightmare since 1970. Our task is to put a permanent and effective end to this nightmare.

It is our duty and responsibility to speak frankly and honestly. May I begin by restating certain basic facts to dispel the smokescreen created by Vietnam.

The Issue is Vietnamese Invasion of Cambodia

Mr Chairman, this is not a Conference on "the Cambodian problem". In reality, we are here to discuss "the Vietnamese problem" which we may, for convenience, euphemistically call the "Cambodian problem". Cambodia's misfortune is to be a small state located next to Vietnam. Vietnam has always trampled on Cambodia in

pursuit of its ambitions. When the Cambodians tried in 1970 to drive out the Vietnamese forces occupying Cambodian territory, Vietnam responded by helping the Khmer Rouge to take over power inside Cambodia. When the Khmer Rouge also turned against Vietnam, Vietnam responded by invading and occupying the country.

Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge

We must be absolutely clear in our minds why Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978. Vietnam claims that it did so to save the Cambodian people from the Pol Pot Regime. The Khmer rouge certainly did commit horrendous atrocities. They should not be allowed to return to a position of dominance.

However, until extremely late in the game, Mr Hun Sen was a loyal accomplice of Pol Pot's genocidal fraternity, rising to the rank of Regimental Commander. There is only one significant difference between Hun Sen and Pol Pot. One worked for Vietnam, the other would not. Most of the killings took place while Mr Hun Sen and others in his regime worked loyally for the Khmer Rouge. Hun Sen's hands are no less bloody than Pol Pot's.

Until months before the invasion of Cambodia, the Vietnamese went on exchanging fraternal greetings with Pol Pot. In April 1978, Mr Pham Van Dong congratulated Pol Pot on his "ardent patriotism", "spirit of self-reliance" and "fine achievements", including presumably his killing fields. The record shows that Vietnam did its best to keep on good terms with Pol Pot.

Vietnam and Hun Sen now want us to forget that the Khmer Rouge was once their closest ally. But at a meeting of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in September 1978, a mere three months before the Vietnamese invasion, a proposal to

investigate gross violations of human rights including genocide in Cambodia under Pol Pot was opposed only by Vietnam's friends in the Subcommittee, presumably at Vietnam's request.

If Hanoi can despatch hundreds of thousands of its own citizens in leaking boats to watery grave in the South China Sea, will the Vietnamese leadership really shed any tears over the loss of Cambodian lives? From Hanoi's point of view, Pol Pot's mistake was not his taste for mass murder, but his foolishness or temerity in refusing to be a vassal in a Vietnamese Imperial Indochinese Federation. That is why Vietnam prefers Hun Sen over his former accomplice Pol Pot.

An Indochina Federation

The French colonial administration treated Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as a single administrative entity. However much the Vietnamese communists may have disliked French colonialism, they embraced this notion of empire enthusiastically.

Subsequently, the Communist International treated Indochina as a single entity in its plans for revolutionary action. It created a single Indochinese Communist Party under Vietnamese domination. In 1951, the Indochinese Community Party ostensibly dissolved itself but the Vietnamese Workers' Party called for a "genuine union" of the three countries.

These are not just the dry bones of history. In the minds of Hanoi and their leaders, it is a living, breathing reality. The Summit Conference of Laos, Vietnam and the Hun Sen regime held in February 1983, clearly stated:

"The history of the three peoples' struggle, especially since revolution in the three countries of Indochina was enlightened by great President Ho Chi Minh with Marxism-Leninism and the Communist Party of Indochina - predecessor of the People's Revolutionary Party of Laos, the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea and the Communist Party of Vietnam - was founded, shows that militant alliance among them is a law of development of the three countries' revolutions ..."

This "militant alliance" is the new codeword for the Vietnamese Indochinese empire which is found, in one form or another, in all subsequent documents.

It would help to dispel suspicions of Vietnam's real ambitions were Mr Nguyen Co Thach to state clearly at this Conference that the "Federation" of Indochinese States, created by Vietnamese might, is dead and will stay buried, and that Vietnam would under no circumstances ever reinvade Cambodia. What assurances are there that Mr Hun Sen will not call back Vietnamese troops into Cambodia, and how much are these assurances worth? This Conference must recognize that Vietnam's withdrawal announcement in no way signals a repudiation of its dream of a Vietnamese-dominated "Indochina Federation".

A Change of Tactics

We should recognise that Vietnam did not decide voluntarily to withdraw its troops. It was forced to do so because it failed to subdue the nationalist resistance. A decade of isolation and international pressure, correctly pursued by the international community, has brought its economy to ruin.

Having reduced itself to economic ruin by chasing dreams of empire, Hanoi now hopes that this Conference will award it the prize that it failed to win by force of arms. French colonial rule bequeathed Vietnam the dream of an Indochina Federation. It would be a tragic irony and a cynical farce if this International Conference allows Vietnam to realise that dream.

Hanoi's Negotiating Record: Broken Promises

Let us remind ourselves of the fate of previous International Conferences on Indochina: the 1954 Geneva Conference and the negotiations conducted in Paris between 1968 and 1973. Both failed for similar reasons. Firstly, Vietnam stampeded its negotiating partners into concluding agreements at any price. Secondly, and more importantly Vietnam at an opportune moment broke the promises given at these conferences.

The reality of the Vietnamese negotiating record for the past four decades - or more precisely the Vietnamese records of broken promises and discarded agreements - must give us pause. Those of us who may be tempted by Mr Tach's smooth assurances should pause to review previous assurances given by Vietnam. Vietnam's past assurances - in the form of the 1954 Geneva Agreement and the 1973 Paris Accords - are today not worth the paper they were written on.

The Vietnamese Strategy

It is no accident that Vietnam has selected 30 September as the deadline for its withdrawal. The date was carefully chosen to pressure those who have for ten years condemned Vietnamese aggression in the UN. 122 out of 159 nations condemned Vietnam last year. Vietnam hopes

to avoid another painful condemnation this year by deceiving the international community that it has abided by UN resolutions.

The so-called Cambodian problem, more accurately the Vietnamese problem, can only be solved by a total and permanent dismantling of all traces, not only military, of Vietnamese colonialism in Cambodia. Vietnam's game at this Conference will be to obfuscate the central fact of its aggression and to stampede us by promises of withdrawal into concluding a hasty and ill-considered agreement that would legitimize and perpetuate Vietnamese rule in Cambodia.

No separation of "Internal" and "External" Aspects

Any settlement that leaves Hun Sen dominant in Phnom Penh will mean that the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia has not come to an end. The argument that we should leave it to the Cambodians to settle the so-called "internal" issues is untenable. The distinction between the so-called "internal" and "external" aspects of the Cambodian problem is artificial. The regime in Phnom Penh was installed by a Vietnamese invasion and will always be a creature of Vietnam. Its very existence is an act of Vietnamese intervention. Mr Hun Sen is a Vietnamese proxy and cannot be considered as a purely "internal" party. He has no legitimacy both in Cambodia and internationally.

National Reconciliation And Elections

Our task is to help the Cambodian people achieve national reconciliation and genuine self-determination. To do this, there must be a provisional quadripartite government under Prince Sihanouk's effective leadership that can organise free elections under international supervision. This should be after a period of calm and stability so that the Cambodian people can exercise their choice freely.

If Mr Hun Sen wants a place in Cambodia's future, he should seek a mandate from the Cambodian people through free and internationally supervised elections. Perhaps the people of Cambodia want a creature of Vietnam to rule over them. If so, the world will accept their decision. But they must have a free choice.

Prince Sihanouk

HRH Prince Norodom Sihanouk has fought for Cambodia's freedom all his life. He has lost his children, grandchildren and relatives to the Khmer Rouge. Yet he fights the Vietnamese for invading Cambodia. Why? Why did he not thank them and serve as their figure head? Because he will not surrender Cambodia to Vietnam. He is a great patriot who deserves the world's support. His people will rally to him because they know that he will not deliver them to a historical enemy. Deny the Cambodians a chance to bring back Sihanouk, and we give them no choice but the Khmer rouge and Hun Sen, a proxy of Vietnam. We, who profess not to interfere in the Cambodians' affairs, would have intervened to hand over Cambodia to a new form of Vietnamese colonialism.

Until there is a comprehensive settlement, Vietnam must not be spared the economic and political pressures that have brought it to the negotiating table. It is in serious economic trouble. The flow of oxygen to Vietnam diminishes with each passing day. Very soon it will force Vietnam to think again and compromise. This Conference must not betray the Cambodian people by hastily legitimizing the fruits of Vietnamese aggression.

Why ASEAN Stood Up To Vietnam

Mr Chairman, let me remind this Conference why ASEAN and Singapore decided to stand up to Vietnam over its invasion of Cambodia: it is because Hanoi had

announced publicly that Thailand would be the next target. Many may have forgotten the warnings over Radio Hanoi of the day when it would wreak vengeance on Thailand and other ASEAN countries.

Immediately after their victory over the Americans in April 1975, the Vietnamese proclaimed that the next task for the Vietnamese revolution was to fight for "genuine independence" in the whole of Southeast Asia, to liberate the rest of us in the region. They repeated this ambition at the Non-Aligned Summit in Colombo in 1976.

After the invasion of Cambodia, Vietnam sent clear signals that this was no idle boast. They massed troops on the Thai border. There were daily incursions of Vietnamese troops into Thailand and artillery attacks on Thai territory. We decided that we must stand by an ASEAN partner, make a stand or be cowed. Vietnam was isolated and left to stew in its own juice, a pariah and an outcast.

Today, the sight of a crippled and hopefully somewhat chastened Vietnam has made many of us forget the fears and anxieties that an arrogant Vietnam had created in ASEAN hearts. It is worthwhile reflecting on what will happen if a secretly unrepentant Vietnam, still nursing dreams of empire and vengeance, wins in Cambodia.

Towards A Durable Solution

After ten years of international isolation and economic pressure, it is finally within our grasp to disabuse Vietnam of its ambitions. It would be a tragic mistake if Vietnam left this Conference with the belief that it has once again outwitted the rest of the world. A reinvigorated Vietnam, with the third largest army in the world, could resume its crusade for the "liberation" of its neighbours.

Finally, Mr Chairman, the main issue before us is not the Khmer Rouge as Vietnam and Hun Sen would have us believe. It is already accepted by all that the Khmer Rouge must not be allowed to return to dominance. This can be worked out. The main issue is to achieve a complete Vietnamese withdrawal and a provisional quadripartite government that will organise elections for the Cambodian people to choose their own political future. We did not come to Paris to bless the fruits of Vietnamese aggression and to endorse continued Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia through its proxy Hun Sen. This will happen if there is no comprehensive settlement. Remember that Vietnam desperately needs Western and Japanese trade, aid and investment. Vietnam will come to terms when it realises that those who matter can match it in tenacity and will not let it get the better of them. Democracies of the world which value their principles cannot consign Cambodia to Vietnam's control, no matter how expedient it may seem now. If they do, it will be a triumph of Vietnamese arms and cold-blooded cunning; a mockery of all that the civilized world stands for. I am sure that most of us here will not be a party to such an outcome.

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