

THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

HON. JAMES A. LEACH

OF IOWA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 28, 2005

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express concern about heightened threats to fundamental freedoms in Cambodia.

As my colleagues know, since the 2004 formation of a new coalition government, Prime Minister Hun Sen of the dominant Cambodia People's Party (CPP) has steadily consolidated his authority. According to credible nongovernmental organizations like Human Rights Watch, threats to opposition figures, trade unionists, journalists, human rights defenders and civil society leaders have intensified. Freedom of assembly has become increasingly restricted, while freedoms of speech and association have likewise been significantly curtailed. Meanwhile, the government's longstanding influence over the judiciary has been extended through a so-called "Iron Fist" policy which has included the dismissal or suspension of judges and prosecutors. The courts are increasingly being used to harass and silence government critics.

The coalition between the CPP and the former Royalist opposition party FUNCINPEC has also resulted in ominous new pressures on Cambodia's political opposition, the Sam Rainsy Party, SRP. The immunity of three SRP parliamentarians, including its leader Sam Rainsy, was lifted in February. One of them, Mr. Cheam Channy, was convicted and sentenced to seven years imprisonment in August for the alleged creation of an illegal army. Party leader Sam Rainsy fled Cambodia when his immunity was lifted in February and, fearing arrest because of criminal defamation lawsuits against him, has not since returned.

Here it should be noted that the United States condemned the August 9 conviction by a military court of Cheam Channy and conviction in absentia of Kong Piseth on charges of fraud and establishment of an illegal armed group. According to a State Department spokesperson, the conduct of the trial appeared to violate international standards, again raised questions about the competence and independence of Cambodia's judiciary and constituted further intimidation of opposition voices. The U.S. urged appropriate review of this case. In addition, the U.S. also called on the Cambodian National Assembly to immediately restore the immunity of the Sam Rainsy Party, SRP, parliamentarians that was stripped by the National Assembly on February 3, an action which Washington strongly condemned.

In the view of many observers, the current deteriorating environment in Cambodia is not an isolated event but part of an ongoing trend toward silencing dissident voices and cementing the power the incumbent Prime Minister.

According to reports from the field, attacks on freedom of speech have escalated significantly since the signing of a border treaty between Cambodia and Vietnam on October 10. Relations with their larger neighbor Vietnam has traditionally been a neuralgic issue for many Cambodians, and as a consequence the treaty (the terms of which have not been revealed to the Cambodian public) has been highly controversial. In response, the govern-

ment of Hun Sen has filed criminal defamation complaints against persons who have criticized the treaty. The Prime Minister appears to be particularly sensitive to accusations of having surrendered Cambodian territory to Vietnam.

Two arrests have been made in connection with criticism of the treaty. Mam Sonando, director of the independent Beehive Radio station in Phnom Penh, was arrested earlier this month on charges of criminal defamation for broadcasting an interview with a Cambodian activist in France who criticized the border treaty. Rong Chhun, president of Cambodia's Independent Teacher's Association, was also arrested this month in connection with a press statement issued by a coalition of groups that was critical of the treaty. He has been charged with criminal defamation and incitement to commit a crime.

According to Peter Leuprecht, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia, these arrests appear to be procedurally unlawful. Both men are now detained in Phnom Penh's Prey Sar prison.

It is my understanding that other Cambodian figures also fear imprisonment because of widespread rumors about further imminent arrests. At least four persons are believed to have entered Thailand for safe haven, and a number of others have apparently gone to other countries. According to credible sources, among those who may be subject to possible arrest are at least two human rights NGOs, several opposition parliamentarians, and a number of political party and trade union activists. Indeed, it would appear that the current climate of fear in Cambodia among civil society leaders and the political opposition is worse than it has been since the violence of 1997, when the current Prime Minister first sought to consolidate his power, and the subsequent 1998 elections.

Mr. Speaker, while Cambodian-Vietnamese relations are of an historically sensitive nature, that issue should not be used by the government in Phnom Penh as a pretext to imprison critics of the Prime Minister or to further manipulate the Cambodian judiciary. More broadly, concern is widespread that the current attacks on free speech are not an isolated event related solely to the border issue, but part of an ongoing campaign to silence political opponents and stifle other critical voices.

In this context, it is incumbent on the United States and other interested countries to urge in the strongest possible terms that the Prime Minister take immediate, credible steps to strengthen Cambodia's democratic institutions, fight corruption, and respect basic human rights. Absent such steps, Cambodia's backsliding on human rights can only have negative implications for Phnom Penh's relations with the United States and other members of the international donor community.

HONORING CORA FAYE DIXON
CLAYTON

HON. CHARLES A. GONZALEZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 28, 2005

Mr. GONZALEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Cora Faye Dixon Clayton, a San An-

tonio native and civil servant for the 20th Congressional District of Texas. She worked for my father, Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez, for 30 years and truly epitomized public service. Dad trusted her as one of his most able employees, and knew she would do everything possible to help those who came to his office in dire need of help. Sadly, Ms. Clayton who had battled cancer with the same vigor she fought for the people of San Antonio passed away in September.

Born and raised in San Antonio, Ms. Clayton graduated from Phyllis Wheatley High School and later earned a business degree at Our Lady of The Lake University. She began her career at the Fort Sam Houston library, and after Dad won a special election in 1961, he honored a promise he had made to the NAACP to hire an African American for his staff, so he brought Ms. Clayton to Washington, DC for his first term.

Dad knew well the barriers people of color faced before the enactment of Civil Rights legislation and was more than willing to hire a person others shunned because of the color of her skin. So, at the height of the Civil Rights movement, she became the first African American Congressional staffer for a Southern Member. She pulled double duty as his personal secretary and handled constituent casework for 30 years. Dad never could find anyone who could transcribe his dictation as accurately, and what truly amazed him is that she did so with very few errors. After a few years on Dad's Washington staff, she returned to San Antonio yet would often help him as a personal secretary until the end of her service some 30 years later.

Her heart made her an indispensable and loved member of my Dad's team. Co-workers recall the compassion with which she helped constituents resolve their claims. She would bring her years of experience to each and every case and could untangle the toughest red tape so someone's life could be just a little better.

I often think casework is the most important function we have as members of Congress. Of course, passing laws that improve the lives of Americans is very important, but making sure someone gets the benefits they deserve is just as important, if not more so. And, of course, her commitment to bettering the lives of others did not end when she left work as she was also very active in her community through volunteer programs.

I am proud to have known such a remarkable woman, one of the countless public servants who make our government work. My colleagues and I would readily admit that we could accomplish little without our staffs and Dad owed much to people like Ms. Clayton. Our community is poorer and sadder for her leaving it.

I would like to extend my condolences to her two daughters, Michelle "Toni" Clayton Collier and Tina Marie Clayton, two brothers, Jessy and Ralph Dixon, and sister Mariam Dixon.