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EU-Assistance on curbing Small Arms and light weapons in Cambodia

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**SPEECH BY DAVID DE BEER, EU ASAC PROJECT MANAGER,
AT THE FLAME OF PEACE CEREMONY,
KAMPOT,
6 JULY 2005**

Venerable monks
Excellency Deputy Prime Minister and Co-Minister of National Defence, Tea Banh
Excellency Governor Puth Chantarith
Excellencies Generals
Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Representatives of International Organisations and NGO's,
Representatives of the Press and Media,
People of Kampot

A Flame of Peace is always a very special event. Through the Flame of Peace destruction ceremony the Government is saying to the people of Kampot and elsewhere in the country that the years of war lie far behind. Weapons that were once used for fighting are no longer needed because the country is at peace. Today's ceremony also takes place the week before an important United Nations Conference on Small Arms in New York. This ceremony therefore sends a strong message from Cambodia to the United Nations that the Royal Government is doing its best to fulfil its international obligations on curbing small arms.

I know that every time weapons are destroyed in a Flame of Peace celebration there are some people who ask why Cambodia is destroying weapons. Would it not be better for the Royal Government to keep these weapons, so that it will still have a strong army? Let me take this opportunity to explain why it is good for the security of Cambodia that these weapons are destroyed.

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Military weapons destruction ceremonies follow what we call Weapons Registration and Safe Storage Projects and in 2004 we implemented such a project in Military Region 3 of which Kampot forms one part. In each project, a team of experts from the Ministry of National Defence and EU ASAC discusses with the military commander of the region about the number of weapons required for his soldiers. EU ASAC promises to provide financial and technical assistance to the Military Region to build weapons storage depots to safely lock up the weapons which are not needed for daily use. In addition EU ASAC agrees to provide special racks, so that the weapons which are regularly used by the soldiers can be locked up every night, so the soldiers do not have to take them home. In this way EU ASAC has provided buildings and racks so that the number of weapons that are required by the army in the Military Region are safely stored and locked up. Now each military commander knows exactly how many weapons he has in the military region and he knows where they are. In this way the army is more efficient than before EU ASAC started the project.

But when we finish a project there are still thousands and thousands of weapons left over; some weapons in bad condition, but mostly weapons that the army does not need, because it knows that all the weapons that it does need have been safely stored in buildings and racks. But the weapons that are left over are dangerous. In the past we have been told that many weapons were “leaked” from supplies of the armed forces to criminals in the provinces. The weapons which have been left over from a project are not safely stored and can easily be stolen or find their way into the hands of criminals and robbers or be sold illegally overseas. That is why the Royal Government has decided that all weapons which are not needed by the army after EU ASAC helps to store the weapons safely must be destroyed. So the Flame of Peace ceremony which is taking place this morning is really helping to make your lives, as citizens of Kampot, safer and I promise you that it does not make the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces any weaker. It just makes them more efficient.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to once again praise the Royal Cambodian Government, and particularly H.E. General Tea Banh, for the decision to destroy surplus weapons. Internationally the Royal Cambodian Government can proudly present its policy of weapons destruction. The fact that after today's ceremony some 163,000 weapons will have been destroyed since May 1999 provides proof of this



statement. EU ASAC is pleased to have assisted in the destruction of over 114,000 of these weapons as one step in the development of a Culture of Peace. It can certainly be said that no other country in South-East Asia has such a public policy on weapons destruction.

The new Arms Law which was adopted by the National Assembly in April and signed by His Majesty the King in June replaces Sub-decree 38 of 1999 and allows the Royal Government to act more strictly against those illegally owning weapons or lending weapons is another indication of the Royal Government's increased control of weapons in Cambodia.

EU ASAC is continually looking for new ways to show how Cambodia is moving towards a Culture of Peace. One example is the support we have given to Cambodian students to make works of art out of destroyed weapons. People become enthusiastic when they see sculptures of elephants or birds or even furniture made out of weapons which have been collected and destroyed. These students show the world that Cambodia does not need weapons, but rather a Culture of Peace. Maybe these weapons, when they have been destroyed, can also be used in this project to promote the Culture of Peace.

Two international NGO's have conducted two studies on the security of personnel working on development projects throughout the world. In the study published in 2003 expressed feelings of being threatened by small arms that would have made Cambodia the fifth most dangerous country in the world to work in. The second study was published last month and the feeling of security has been halved, making Cambodia drop to the fifteenth most dangerous place to work in. This shows a big improvement in Cambodia over the last few years and this is partly because the Royal Government has continued to destroy weapons.

Therefore I am sure that the flames that will soon destroy these 4,927 weapons will be seen in the world as a sign of further progress towards security and political stability in Cambodia.

There are many steps still to be taken down the road towards the Culture of Peace. But if we continue our good co-operation I am sure that further progress can be made.

I thank you for your attention.