



Communicating a Crisis: **UNDP and the Khmer Rouge Trials**

UNDP Regional Communications Workshop
29 June – 1 July, 2009
Bangkok, Thailand

United Nations Development Programme Cambodia

The Khmer Rouge: a brief history



Who were the Khmer Rouge?

- Socialist movement of Khmer students studying in France in 1950s and 1960s.
- Took root in Cambodia's northeastern jungles as early as the 1960s
- Gained legitimacy when Prince Sihanouk was deposed in a military coup in 1970 and leaned on the Khmer Rouge for support
- Banned all institutions, including banks, hospitals, schools, religion, and the family. Children separated from parents to work in mobile groups or as soldiers.



The Khmer Rouge: timeline



17 Apr 1975
Khmer Rouge
take Phnom
Penh

7 Jan 1979
Regime
toppled by
Vietnamese
troops

May 1993
UN-supported
democratic
elections

15 Apr 1998
Pol Pot dies



Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia



Who has been charged?

- **Kaing Geuk Eav (Duch)**, former S-21 prison chief
- **Nuon Chea**, former head of the Democratic Kampuchea National Assembly
- **Ieng Sary**, former Minister of Foreign Affairs
- **Ieng Thirith**, former Minister of Social Affairs
- **Khieu Samphan**, former head of state

UNDP and the ECCC



- UNDP manages donor money to the national side of the court – not involved with the UN side of the court
- Normally UNDP would not be involved in a court like this as it is outside of our mandate
- In 2006 UNDP set up a project to disburse remaining funds from the UNDESA UNTAC trust fund. Other donors have since contributed funds through UNDP



What Crisis?



- **September 2006:** First rumours of funds being mismanaged
- **January 2007:** UNDP-initiated special audit conducted
- **February 2008:** Special Review conducted to assess corrective measures taken
- **June 2008:** Allegations of corruption in the court resurface
- **July 2008:** UNDP, in consultation with its donors, freezes funds

Communications response



- Developed a detailed **crisis communications strategy**
- **Stayed ahead** of the game – regularly updated chronology, strategy, attended all relevant meetings, predicted the questions journalists would ask and had answers ready, kept a copy of every story published
- **Regularly consulted** with HQ, Regional Communications Advisor and UNAKRT
- Was **proactive** – met with journalists who had previously published negative reports to find out why
- Developed a method of **response delivery** and stuck to it

Before and After: taking a proactive approach



John Hall, Wall St Journal 25 Sept 2007

The United Nations Development Program is already under scrutiny for gross irregularities in its programs in North Korea, from which it was forced to pull out earlier this year. Now there's another scandal to add to the list: UNDP's lack of oversight of the Khmer Rouge war-crimes tribunal, for which it oversees a significant share of the funding.

The complete details of an audit examining hiring practices haven't fully come to light yet, thanks to the UNDP's refusal to make the audit public or even share it with donors. But we've seen an early draft, and can start to fill in the outline of what's going on. It isn't pretty.

So what exactly did the final audit say? Only the UNDP -- and the Cambodian government -- know. The Project Board issued a press release saying it discussed the findings at its first meeting in June. But even the board was not allowed to see the final audit report. "The internal audit is not shared except between UNDP and the member state," a UNDP official in Phnom Penh who prefers to remain anonymous tells us in response to a question about whether the board saw the report. So much for the UNDP's responsibility to the European and U.S. taxpayers putting up the money.

John Hall, Cambodia Daily, 15 Aug 08

When kickback allegations were raised in 2007, the UN was reduced to simply asking the Cambodian side to investigate. UNDP sent a letter to that effect to Cabinet Minister Sok An in January 2008. The result was predictable: Nothing.

Tolbert's markedly different approach is to distinguish between an initial review (intended to assess whether a complaint, prima facie, is adequate to warrant an investigation), and an investigation (the examination of evidence to determine the merits of the allegations).

Crisis Communications Strategy: key elements



- The strategy is your most valuable reference tool
- Clearly outline purpose/objectives, challenges and approach
- It should contain all relevant background information (as brief as possible) including key dates, figures, players
- Audiences identified, their concerns outlined and key messages tailored to address them
- Finally, a frequently updated Q and A section



Taking control: dealing with the media



- Senior management support is essential
- Make yourself known to reporters who regularly cover the story
- Ensure reporters know they can count on UNDP for comment
- Maintain close links with other relevant PI people (here UNAKRT PI Officer)
- Know your material
- Identify a spokesperson

Summary: key elements in coping with a crisis



- Be prepared – never get caught off guard
- Knowledge is key – make sure you're included in all relevant meetings
- Be organised – ensure all relevant materials (strategy, chronology, reports, press releases, statements, official letters) are up to date, filed and easily accessible
- Use the networks that you have – e.g. Regional Communications Advisor, HQ
- Senior management support

Ouk Koun!

