



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
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09 December 2003

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Cambodia: Domestic violence in Cambodia, in particular, its prevalence and whether there are laws to protect the victims; if so, whether these laws are enforced; protection provided by the government
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

All the sources consulted that mentioned domestic violence in Cambodia indicated that this phenomenon was widespread (Fraternet Aug. 2000a; Oxfam Mar. 1999; *Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, Intro.; FVPF n.d.). Once source estimated that one in six women is a victim of violence inflicted by her husband (Fraternet Aug. 2000a), while another source put the number at one in four women (*Alternatives* 1 Mar. 2003). A study revealed that more than 10 per cent of Cambodian men reported that they used violence on their wives (FVPF n.d.). Traditional Cambodian ideas view domestic violence as a private matter and a woman as one of her husband's possessions (Oxfam Mar. 1999). It is not considered abnormal, according to some interpretations of this tradition, for a man to try to [translation] "discipline" his wife with violence (*Alternatives* 1 Mar. 2003).

Cambodia is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*Cambodia Daily* 26 May 2003). Furthermore, its constitution and federal laws condemn violence and discrimination (Fraternet Aug. 2000b). The government also supports various women's rights organizations (FVPF n.d.).

It is worth noting, however, that there is no specific law against domestic violence (ibid.; Fraternet Aug. 2000b). Nor does Cambodian society recognize the concept of rape within a marriage (FVPF n.d.). Although there was draft legislation that defined domestic violence as a crime, it sank into oblivion when parliament recessed for the 27 July 2003 general elections (*Asian Political News* 28 July 2003). The fact that it is extremely difficult to obtain a divorce (it can take up to three years) simply adds to the legal obstacles that women from violent homes must overcome (FVPF n.d.).

When the Cambodian Prime Minister spoke in 2001 on the matter of domestic violence in his country, he said that it had shown "a remarkable increase" in previous months (AFP 9 May 2001). In fact, between 2000 and 2001, the rate of domestic violence rose by 19.8 per cent (Xinhua News Agency 7 Mar. 2002). The Prime Minister also said that domestic violence often resulted in murder (AFP 9 May 2001). The Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs are two government organizations that deal with women's issues in Cambodia (WILPF n.d.). However, no information on whether these federal organizations offer protective services to victims of domestic violence could be found among the sources consulted.

Amnesty International underlined the fact that there is still a wide gap between Cambodia's human rights obligations and the measures taken by the government to improve the situation (19 June 2002). A United Nations representative in Cambodia said that the judiciary and police force were powerless and that ordinary Cambodians had lost faith in them (AFP 9 May 2001; see also AI 19 June 2002). Cases of rape, for example, rarely go to court, and in the few cases in which the aggressor is convicted, the punishment is often [translation] "laughable" (Fraternet Aug. 2000b). In short, although violence against women is on the rise in Cambodia, the perpetrators are almost never punished (*Cambodia Daily* 2 Dec. 2002). The authorities generally do not get involved in "domestic disputes" (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, Sec. 5). The police intervene in cases of domestic violence only when a woman is severely injured or killed (FVPF n.d.). Often, the woman cannot even rely on her neighbours or family for protection or support (ibid.). On the contrary, in many cases, mothers urge their daughters to return to their violent husbands (ibid.).

Nearly the entire burden of defending women's rights in Cambodia rests on local non-governmental organizations (Fraternet Aug. 2000b) that provide services and shelter to victims of domestic violence (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, Sec. 5). The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom lists 10 non-governmental organizations in Cambodia that strive to improve the status of women's rights in Cambodia (n.d.). The Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV) is one of very few non-governmental organizations in Cambodia dedicated exclusively to the prevention and elimination of domestic violence (Oxfam Mar. 1999). The PADV's main strategy is to increase public awareness and change the attitude toward domestic violence (ibid.). A new program, which is supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, broadcasts shows on national radio that encourage victims of domestic violence to talk about their situation, and gives referrals to legal and psychological specialists (UNDP 8 Aug. 2002).

On 26 May 2003, the *Cambodia Daily* newspaper announced that the Governor of Phnom Penh and the Minister of the Interior had denied the Cambodian Committee for Women (Canbow) permission to demonstrate in front of the National Assembly. Among other things, the group was demanding the implementation of a domestic violence law, and the authorities maintained that its demonstration could have shattered the peace in the capital (*Cambodia Daily* 26 May 2003).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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- Asian Political News* (APN) [New York]. 28 July 2003. "Focus: Cambodia's Vote Scuttles Crackdown on Acid Attackers." (Dialog)
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- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 8 August 2002. "PanAfrica: Ending Violence Against Women Around the World." (Africa News/NEXIS)
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), New York. n.d.
- "Cambodia." < http://www.peacewomen.org/contacts/asia/cambodia/cam_index.html > [Accessed 21 Nov. 2003]
- Xinhua News Agency [Beijing]. 7 March 2002. Li Chaobi. "Roundup: Cambodia Launches Campaign for Women's Rights." (Dialog)

Additional Sources Consulted

Attempts to contact the following organizations were unsuccessful:

- Acting for Women in Distressing Circumstances
- Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
- Cambodian Women Development Agency
- Cambodian Women's Voices Center
- Khemara
- Ministry of Women's Affairs
- Ministry of Women's and Veteran's Affairs

UNIFEM: East and South East Asia Regional Office

Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMC)

Dialog

IRB Databases

Internet sites, y compris :

The Advocacy Project

Amnesty International

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Freedom House

Human Rights Internet (HRI)

Le Monde

South China Morning Post

United States Department of State

US Agency for International Development (USAID)

World News

World News Connection

Search engine:

Google