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Baucus Trip to Thailand and Cambodia, Providence Forum at the College of Great Falls

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 **November-1978**


 **Providence Forum at the College of Great Falls**

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 **Baucus Trip to Thailand and Cambodia**

 **11/11/1979**



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OPENING REMARKS
OF
SENATOR MAX BAUCUS
PROVIDENCE FORUM AT THE COLLEGE OF GREAT FALLS
GREAT FALLS, MONTANA
NOVEMBER 11, 1979
1:00

BAUCUS TRIP TO THAILAND AND CAMBODIA
OCTOBER 19-24, 1979

GIVEN THE HUMANITARIAN TRADITION OF MONTANA, AND ITS LONG HISTORY OF GENEROUS RESPONSE TO THOSE IN NEED, I WAS PROUD THAT OUR STATE, BY MEANS OF MY TRIP TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND SUBSEQUENT ACTIVITY IN THE SENATE, HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE WORLDWIDE EFFORT TO ALLEVIATE THE SUFFERINGS OF FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS.

THE PLIGHT OF THE PEOPLE OF CAMBODIA HAS ONLY RECENTLY ATTRACTED WIDESPREAD ATTENTION AND MEDIA COVERAGE. HOWEVER, SINCE 1975, NEARLY HALF THE POPULATION OF THIS NATION HAS DIED FROM EXECUTION, MISTREATMENT, STARVATION, AND DISEASE. UNLESS MASSIVE ASSISTANCE IS QUICKLY DISTRIBUTED WITHIN CAMBODIA, AS MANY AS TWO MILLION MORE PERSONS MAY DIE.

AT THE REQUEST OF PRESIDENT CARTER AND THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SENATE, SENATORS JAMES SASSER OF TENNESSEE, JOHN DANFORTH OF MISSOURI, AND I WENT TO BANGKOK, THAILAND; PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA; AND THREE SETTLEMENTS OF KHMER REFUGEES ALONG THE THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER.

THE PURPOSE OF OUR TRIP WAS TO INVESTIGATE FIRST-HAND THE FAMINE CONDITIONS INSIDE CAMBODIA AND THE NEEDS OF THOSE THOUSANDS OF PERSONS WHO IN RECENT MONTHS HAVE BEEN FLEEING INTO THAILAND IN SEARCH OF FOOD AND MEDICINE; AND TO RECOMMEND AN APPROPRIATE U.S. RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS.

WE ARRIVED IN BANGKOK ON A HOT, HUMID SUNDAY MORNING AFTER A FLIGHT OF NEARLY 22 HOURS. AFTER THE U.S. AMBASSADOR WARMLY GREETED US AND TOOK US TO THE GUEST HOUSE WITHIN THE AMERICAN RESIDENCE COMPLEX IN BANGKOK, WE SPENT THE DAY AT BRIEFINGS WITH THE EMBASSY STAFF. WE SHARED EVENING DINNER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF THAILAND.

WE LEARNED THAT IN RECENT WEEKS, FAMINE CONDITIONS AS WELL AS INCREASED HOSTILITIES IN WESTERN CAMBODIA HAVE PUSHED 100,000 KHMER ACROSS THE THAI BORDER. AN ADDITIONAL 200,000 KHMER MOVED TOWARD THE THAI BORDER IN A FRANTIC SEARCH FOR SAFETY AND THE FOOD AND MEDICINE WHICH INTERNATIONAL RELIEF GROUPS DISTRIBUTE AT BORDER POINTS.

THE REFUGEES POSE AN IMMENSE BURDEN FOR THE THAI SOCIETY.

ON MONDAY WE TRAVELLED BY PLANE, HELICOPTER, AND JEEP TO THE THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER. THE GROUND WAS ROUGH, MUCH OF IT COVERED BY WAIST-HIGH GRASSES AND WEEDS. SINCE THE RAINY SEASON ENDED A FEW WEEKS AGO, BROWN PATCHES HAD BEGUN TO TAKE OVER GREEN AREAS. THERE WERE FEW TREES.

WE WALKED AMONG THE THOUSANDS OF NEWLY ARRIVED KHMER IN THREE SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE BORDER. WE SAW AND SMELLED THE EFFECTS OF UNTREATED DISEASE AND STARVATION. THE ODOR WAS SHARP, ACID-LIKE, AND PENETRATING. WE SAW HOLLOW-EYED CHILDREN WITH STICK-LIKE ARMS AND LEGS SUFFERING FROM THE FINAL STAGES OF MALNUTRITION.

WE SAW ROW UPON ROW UPON ROW OF PEOPLE TOO WEAK TO WALK OR SIT UP, LYING CROWDED TOGETHER ON THE HARD GROUND UNDER PLASTIC SHEETS PROPPED UP BY BAMBOO POLES. BLOTCHED SKIN, PATCHES OF BALDNESS, PERSISTENT COUGHS WERE COMMONPLACE. NO ONE SMILED, VERY FEW MOVED.

AFTER RECEIVING ASSISTANCE SOME PERSONS WOULD RECOVER, BUT MANY, ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN, HAVE ALREADY SUFFERED PERMANENT BRAIN DAMAGE AND BONE DEFORMATION. WE SAW CORPSES NO ONE HAD TIME TO BURY. WE WITNESSED DEATHS, DEATHS WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN AVOIDED.

WE TALKED TO VOLUNTEERS ON THE SCENE FROM FRANCE, SWEDEN, THE UNITED STATES, AND OTHER COUNTRIES. THEY TOLD US THAT 70 PERCENT OF THE REFUGEES SUFFERED FROM MALARIA; THAT 5 TO 10 PERCENT OF THEM DIED EVERY DAY. DYSENTARY, T.B., AND SEVERE MALNUTRITION WERE PREVALENT.

WE SPENT THE ENTIRE DAY AT THE MAKE-SHIFT SETTLEMENTS AND CAMPS, RETURNING TO BANGKOK AFTER 9 P.M. IT WAS A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE, EVOKING WITHIN ME FEELINGS OF HORROR, PITY, ANGER, AND CONVICTION THAT UNLESS WE TRY TO STOP NEEDLESS SUFFERING, NONE OF US CAN EXPERIENCE JOY.

PERHAPS THE SLIDES I HAVE BROUGHT TO SHOW YOU, WHICH ARE THE SAME ONES WE SHOWED TO PRESIDENT CARTER UPON OUR RETURN TO WASHINGTON, WILL CONVEY TO YOU THE DEPTH OF HUMAN NEEDS OF THESE INNOCENT PEOPLE.

WE SPENT THE ENTIRE THIRD DAY OF OUR MISSION TALKING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS -- THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS (ICRC) AND THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S EMERGENCY FUND (UNICEF) -- AS WELL AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MANY PRIVATE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES WORKING IN THE AREA, SUCH AS THE CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES, CHURCH WORLD SERVICE, THE AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE, WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL, AMONG OTHERS. WE WERE IMPRESSED AND GRATEFUL FOR THE DEDICATION AND HIGH LEVEL OF COMPETENCY AMONG THE RELIEF WORKERS.

SINCE MY RETURN, I'VE BEEN HAPPY TO HEAR THAT SOME CITIZENS OF MONTANA HAVE VOLUNTEERED FOR RELIEF WORK TO THE CAMBODIANS. MANY OTHERS HAVE ASKED FOR INFORMATION.

TO PREVENT THE STARVATION OF HALF THE KHMER POPULATION, RELIEF WORKERS TOLD US THAT 1,000 TONS OF FOOD AND MEDICINE PER DAY MUST BE DISTRIBUTED WITHIN CAMBODIA FOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS. TO DATE, ABOUT 10,000 TONS OF FOOD AND MEDICINE HAVE BEEN DELIVERED INSIDE CAMBODIA BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PRIVATE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES.

IN VIEW OF THE URGENCY OF THE NEEDS, THE AMOUNT OF AID REACHING THE KHMER PEOPLE IS TOO SMALL AND ITS DISTRIBUTION IS TERRIBLY SLOW.

POLITICAL AND LOGISTICAL OBSTACLES HAVE HAMPERED THE AID EFFORT FROM THEIR OUTSET. CAMBODIA IS TORN BY WARFARE. THE MAIN CONTENDERS ARE:

1.) THE AUTHORITIES IN PHNOM PENH WHO ARE SUPPORTED BY 200,000 VIETNAMESE TROOPS ON CAMBODIAN SOIL; AND

2.) THE 25,000 OR SO KHMER ROUGE FORCES, HEADED BY POL POT WHO HAD BEEN IN CONTROL OF CAMBODIA FROM APRIL, 1975, UNTIL HIS OUSTER FROM PHNOM PENH BY THE VIETNAMESE IN JANUARY, 1979.

FOOD IS BEING USED AS A WEAPON BY ALL FACTIONS, AND THERE ARE MANY REPORTS OF THE DESTRUCTION OF PLANTED FIELDS AND GRAIN STORAGE AREAS.

IN ADDITION TO POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS, EXTENSIVE LOGISTIC PROBLEMS INHIBIT THE DISTRIBUTION OF AID WITHIN CAMBODIA. AFTER A DECADE OF WAR AND DOMESTIC TURMOIL OF A MOST VIOLENT NATURE, CAMBODIA IS IN SHAMBLES. THERE ARE FEW TRUCKS IN THE COUNTRY. THE ROADS ARE IN DISREPAIR. DOCKS AT KOMPON SOM HAVE BEEN DESTROYED. UNLOADING EQUIPMENT IS SCARCE. DOCK WORKERS ARE OFTEN TOO WEAK TO HANDLE HEAVY LOADS.

GIVEN THESE DEPLORABLE CONDITIONS, SENATORS SASSER, DANFORTH AND I FLEW INTO PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA, ON THE FOURTH DAY OF OUR TRIP. WE PROPOSED TO THE PHNOM PENH AUTHORITIES THAT THEY PERMIT THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO TRUCK EMERGENCY FOOD AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES INTO CAMBODIA FROM THAILAND. A MAJOR ADVANTAGE OF THE TRUCK CONVOY PROPOSAL IS THAT IT CAN DISTRIBUTE GOODS QUICKLY TO POPULATION CONCENTRATIONS.

OUR NINE HOUR VISIT ALLOWED US TO SEE THE CONDITIONS OF THE CITY AND THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE. THE RUNDOWN CONDITION OF THIS ONCE BEAUTIFUL CITY SHOWED BOTH THE NEGLECT OF THE PAST FOUR YEARS AND THE DELIBERATE DESTRUCTION OF THE PREVIOUS REGIME.

WHOLE SECTIONS OF THE CITY ARE STILL BARRICADED SHUT. RICE IS SCARCE. NO CURRENCY EXISTS. NO CENTRAL MARKET OPERATES. FOOD IS DISTRIBUTED THROUGH LOCAL STREET MARKETS.

ALTHOUGH WE WERE RECEIVED WITH COURTESY, THE AUTHORITIES DID NOT AGREE TO OUR PLAN TO TRUCK IN FOOD AND MEDICINE. IT APPEARS THEY FEAR THAT UNLESS THE VIETNAMESE AND THEY HAVE DIRECT CONTROL OVER ANY AID COMING INTO THE COUNTRY, SOME OF IT MIGHT GET INTO THE HANDS OF THOSE UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THEIR OPPONENTS. WE ARGUED FOR THEIR CONSIDERATION OF THE SUFFERING OF INNOCENT PEOPLE.

SINCE OUR RETURN, WE HAVE CONTINUED TO ARGUE THAT THE KHMER PEOPLE NOT BE LEFT TO DIE, THAT POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO SUPERCEDE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS.

WE GAVE OUR TRIP REPORT TO THE SENATE LEADERSHIP. WE MET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER AT THE WHITE HOUSE TO TELL HIM FIRST HAND OF OUR EXPERIENCES. WE TRAVELLED TO THE UNITED NATIONS ON NOVEMBER 5.

SENATORS SASSER, DANFORTH AND I WERE MEMBERS OF THE U.S. DELEGATION TO THE U.N. CONFERENCE ON RELIEF TO CAMBODIA. THE CONFERENCE WAS CALLED BY SECRETARY GENERAL KURT WALDHEIM FOR THE PURPOSE OF SOLICITING FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL AID EFFORT TO CAMBODIA.

THE MEETING, WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY MORE THAN 75 NATIONS, WAS HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL. IT RAISED ABOUT \$210 MILLION IN CASH AND SUPPLIES, AND FOCUSED WORLD ATTENTION ON THE NEED FOR AN URGENT AND ADEQUATE PROGRAM.

AS THE SITUATION STANDS NOW, UNLESS 200,000 TONS OF FOOD AND MEDICINE ARE DISTRIBUTED IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS INSIDE CAMBODIA, THOUSANDS, IF NOT MILLIONS OF PERSONS, MIGHT DIE. FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE ASSISTANCE NECESSARY TO AVERT THIS TRAGEDY IS AVAILABLE. DISTRIBUTION PLANS ARE IN HAND AND SOME ARE UNDERWAY, BUT THEY ARE HAMPERED BY POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. A STRAIGHT-FORWARD SOLUTION TO AN ENORMOUS HUMAN PROBLEM IS BEING COMPLICATED BY POLITICS.

A HUMAN TRAGEDY OF MASSIVE PROPORTIONS IS UNFOLDING IN CAMBODIA WHERE MILLIONS OF KHMER PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING TO REMAIN ALIVE IN THE FACE OF WIDESPREAD DISEASE AND HUNGER.

AS WE WALKED AMONG THE MAKESHIFT SHELTERS OF PLASTIC SHEETS AND BRANCHES ON THE THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER, WE SAW EXPRESSIONS OF DEEP PAIN AND MISERY IN THE EYES OF KHMER MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN. REFLECTIONS OF THE CAMBODIAN TRAGEDY DAILY APPEAR IN OUR NEWS MEDIA.

IN MY VIEW, UNLESS THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY RESPONDS TO THE CAMBODIAN TRAGEDY WITH GENEROSITY AND WITH URGENCY, A TRAGEDY OF ANOTHER DIMENSION MIGHT TAKE ROOT -- AN INSENSITIVITY TO HUMAN SUFFERING ON THE PART OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY.

THE PURPOSE OF MY TRIP WAS TO TRY TO RISE ABOVE POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ORDER TO SAVE THE LIVES OF FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS. I SAW AND FELT THE GREAT NEED OF THE KHMER WITHIN CAMBODIA AND AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE RECENTLY CROSSED INTO THAILAND. MY ROLE IS TO CONTINUE TO SPEAK IN EVERY FORUM AVAILABLE, TO DESCRIBE THE SUFFERING OF THE KHMER PEOPLE IN ORDER TO BRING THE PRESSURE OF WORLD OPINION TO BEAR ON THOSE GOVERNMENTS WHO CAN OPEN CAMBODIA TO FULL-SCALE ASSISTANCE.

IF ONE GROUP IN HUMAN SOCIETY IS THREATENED, ALL OF US ARE MADE LESS SECURE. I AM CONFIDENT THAT MANY PEOPLE OF MONTANA SUPPORT THE INTERNATIONAL EFFORT TO HELP THE KHMER PEOPLE. THE TREMENDOUS RESPONSE BY PHONE AND LETTERS WHICH MY OFFICE RECEIVED IN THE LAST WEEKS DEEPENED MY CONVICTION THAT AN EFFORT TO EASE HUMAN SUFFERING, NO MATTER HOW DISTANT, ENSURES SECURITY FOR THOSE CLOSE TO US.