



*Ambassador Julio A. Jeldres PhD  
Counsellor to the Cabinet of H. M. the King of Cambodia  
with the protocol rank of Minister of State*

Phnom Penh, 30 March 2017

Mr Sum Narin  
Voice of America  
PHNOM PENH

Dear Sum Narin,

I read with concern your article “Amid Korean Tensions, Could Cambodia Play a Mediation Role” dated 29 March 2017.

The article contains a number of assertions, concerning the relationship between His Late Majesty the King Father Norodom Sihanouk and the late President Kim IL Sung of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which I feel need to be clarified in order to preserve the accuracy of the historical record.

Firstly, the friendship between Samdech Sihanouk and President Kim IL Sung was not a political or strategic one. It was based on a solid personal friendship, the understanding by both leaders of what was good for their countries and their peoples and the principle of non-interference. Samdech Sihanouk considered President Kim IL Sung “surest and most sincere friend and the most steadfast in his support”.

It should also be pointed out that it was President Kim IL Sung who negotiated with the Khmer Rouge leadership in August 1975, the return of Samdech Norodom Sihanouk to Cambodia, which the Khmer Rouge had prevented since their “victory” in April 1975.

Secondly, regarding a mediatory role for Cambodia between North and South Korea, it should be pointed out that in May 1984, Samdech Norodom Sihanouk was asked by President Kim Il Sung to convey a message to the Prime Minister of Japan, on the occasion of the late King's visit to Japan. The message gave assurances that North Korea would not attack South Korea and wished to develop good relations with Japan.

Furthermore, in an opening to the United States, President Kim Il Sung asked Samdech Norodom Sihanouk in 1985 to convey personal invitations to former US President Richard Nixon and former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to visit North Korea. Both gentlemen declined saying that the time "was not right"!

Thirdly, I personally think that presently it would be difficult for Cambodia to assume a mediatory role between the two Koreas because circumstances have changed as well as the leaders in the three countries are different and do not enjoy the same level of friendship and trust that existed between Norodom Sihanouk and Kim Il Sung.

Fourthly: The people of North Korea are a fiercely independent people and I do not think that they are "a tool of China to strengthen its power against the USA" as suggested in your article. Furthermore, I think Dr Paul Chambers is mistaken in suggesting that "the Hun Sen government will have to distance itself from North Korea in order to save face". Why save face? Cambodia has done nothing wrong against any of the two Koreas and as an independent state it can choose to have diplomatic links with any other countries of different political persuasions.

I would suggest, with respect, that Dr Chambers' statement does not make sense because on the one hand he asks the Royal Government of Cambodia to distance itself from North Korea, yet, on the other he suggests that Cambodia could still play a "mediating role between the Koreas".

As one, who lived in North Korea for various periods of time between 1981 and 1991, I can attest that the relationship between His Late Majesty the King Father and the late President Kim Il Sung was unique in the sense that President Kim did not give in to pressure from the Soviet Union, Vietnam and other "socialist" countries to break his personal friendship with Norodom Sihanouk and continued to receive him with high respect and dignity in his country, without asking for anything in return, at a very difficult time for Norodom Sihanouk and Cambodia.

Lastly, Kim Jong IL never visited Cambodia. It was the President of the Supreme People's Assembly Presidium who visited Cambodia in 2001.

I sincerely hope you will publish this letter in your website in order that the accuracy of the historical record can be preserved.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Julio A. Jeldres". The signature is stylized and cursive.

(Julio A. Jeldres, PhD)