



# The Khmer Chronicle

The Cambodian Ministry Newsletter  
of George and Shary Frahm  
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## Zoning Plight

Violation of any law in this country can bring a fine, but if you violate the local zoning laws, there can be brutal consequences. The reason that laws concerning land are so severe is that it affects the economic development plans of the government. In general, the government of Cambodia owns all the land and has given every Cambodian citizen access to at least a small parcel. If a larger parcel is needed for a specific purpose, it is common for the government to come and relocate people and then combine the smaller parcels, making way for new buildings and businesses.

These past two days we have been to a new shore area of Sihanoukville for evaluation before a short term team arrives on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. These sort of short hops are necessary because of the fluid environment that we live in. For this girl, who uses landmarks for directional purposes, this very habit is in jeopardy for accuracy more times than not to get me where I want to go. Places come and go in a day. But not usually for the reason explained here.

The tiny area that we visited is capped on each end between two Chinese owned shored parcels. One of these is slated to become a large destination casino and the other, smaller parcel is already serving as a restaurant and small casino. This is the way things in Sihanoukville seem to be going with more and more gambling and casinos. When we were first there in 2012 much of the city was still a sleepy remote area not too

corrupted by the foreign money mongers note elsewhere in the country. There were a couple of Casinos in other distant beach areas, but they were quite inconspicuous. Today this is changing with the addition of casinos to current hotels and new casinos where a suitable partner cannot be found.

The first evening we sat down for a meal a local guide walking along this beach came up to us and asked if we wanted to go out to the islands the next day. I inquired about what he would have available for a small group coming for a final retreat of sorts before they head back to the states in May. When he realized that we were planning to come back in May, a strange look appeared in his eyes. And he focused more on selling tomorrows trip than looking for a larger pay day in May. We soon found out why.

While he gave us options of his daily boat trips to the islands, he also pleadingly shared his plight that he, as well as many other locals who walk the beach several times daily to sustain their lives, were soon to be without work. He went on to say that just after the Khmer New Year (April 12-15), all the grass shacks, cabanas, beach restaurants, bars, and touristy things, including the restaurant in which we were eating, are going to be bulldozed down, returning the beach to its new old self, whatever that meant. He definitely wanted to give us the idea that Chinese outsiders were buying up the beach. He also explained everything in a way that gave the perception of corruption involving huge tracts of land extending perhaps a kilometer in from the water and several

kilometers along the beach itself.

All I could think was 'thank you Father' for allowing us to be aware of this information BEFORE we came back here in May with our team. UGH! Processing time!



(This shows what may be eliminated soon)



Fast forward after some long discussion and we decided that I'd invite the owner of the guesthouse we were staying at to come around and share some time with us. During this conversation we learned more accurately what was forthcoming. She confirmed that some of the local people had indeed received eviction notices and focused us more on the beach area. She also explained that the local development plan was to have restaurants in the strip between the gravel road and the beach, selling food and drinks. But, she also explained that the beach front area was not zoned for overnight lodging. Yet, on every one of the buildings in question, there was a sign for rooms to rent, mostly in

small grass shack bedrooms without toilet facilities. We were not at all surprised with the plans, but are going to miss the warmth of the little grass shacks serving as bars and restaurants.

As you recall, we have mentioned the 'traffic pattern' in this country, the way the locals drive on the roads all over the place. Yup, no stop signs, no stopping at corners for that matter, drive anywhere on any side or part of the road. There are no rules in their minds we assume, that is, unless you are caught. Getting caught means paying a minimal fine if you don't have a license on your moto, a registration in hand, or are not wearing a helmet if you are driving. Move on thereafter, continue on.

Back to the 'beach' shore issue, which is apparently a zoning violation of magnitude, encompassing the whole beach area. As I said, people cannot own land in this country, but can be issued either hard or soft copies for land release. These copies come with rules, and by the general comments made, evidently the government does not like the ramshackle buildings that have given this beach its personality, its uniqueness for those who want a remote adventure, a quiet retreat, or to enjoy the beautiful unspoiled beach, unlike the others who are very commercialized and bringing in tons more money.

Yes, apparently the beach side people have all received eviction notices. This is only the beach side. We are staying across the road in a lovely French owned guesthouse. They, as well as any others up and down the road, are just fine and will be staying, untouched. What will happen to all the lovely restaurants that will not be there when we return we asked. With a broad smile on her face, our gracious hostess said that everyone on the road side will now open their own restaurants to care for those visitors into the area. For

her that will mean a menu of French and Khmer dishes on the menu. For someone else, it may mean an Italian pasta menu. Who knows, as the area swings upward, there may even be an Indian restaurant in the offing.

What will this do to the locals when and if this demolition does occur in the near future? Obviously we may not know that answer, ever. But I think it's a fair guess that these people will figure life out on another page, just like they have done time and time again over the years as they have recovered from some pretty rugged challenges. They are the people we see as we arrive into the beach area along the roadside in tin lean-to shacks. They aren't the folks living in the dump across town, but most likely their plight isn't much better than those in that area. I'm sure you can imagine their living situation. We've never seen a school in the area. Maybe that is why we see so many little ones out there selling trinkets and bracelets every day ~ on the beach.

More to pray and think about ~

## Knee Thoughts



Praise and prayers for the Immanuel Lutheran Church team coming to Cambodia at the end of this month and into April to share Jesus, be a part of and see God's ministry on the ground.

Praise for the ability to embrace the increasing daily heat index that will dissipate some time in May with the 'cold' season (as the locals call it) of reasonability.

Pray for God's blessing on the ELCC plan to put a ministry/mission center in each of the provinces of Cambodia and grow the Christian communities with it.

Pray for the busy schedule heavy upon us with many plates spinning around, that we use our

time wisely for the benefit of God's church here.



## Giving Page

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