

Due Diligence

By Ed Bachrach
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Laurie Bachrach and I returned to Cambodia for our fourth trip, lasting from February 2 through February 7, 2004. While our humanitarian and philanthropic interest are broad, we have chosen to distinguish our work in Cambodia by doing due diligence on organizations that meet observable needs and emphasize transparency. This trip was characterized by due diligence and led to some very rich experiences.

Highlights

- We spent a day and a half visiting the Angkor Hospital for Children, making rounds, shadowing the doctor on call and making two home care visits. The desperate plight of the mothers and their children, their heroic efforts to seek care and the dedication of the hospital staff left us profoundly moved.
- Guided by staff from LICADHO, a Cambodian human rights organization, we visited a prison in Kompong Thom, witnessed the deplorable conditions, and learned first hand about crime and punishment in Cambodia.
- The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, an organization that we support, took us to a village representative training session and an attempt to organize a self-help support group among some middle-aged village men, most of them probably closely involved in Cambodia's violent past.
- The elections that took place just after our last trip resulted in an inability to form a legitimate government. Elites we talked to were quite worried by this. Nevertheless, the physical and economic progress we witnessed has continued.

Political Update

By way of refresher, Cambodia has just recently emerged as a democracy. The first meaningful elections in modern history took place under UN supervision in 1993 and were considered flawed, illegitimate and did not lead to a secure peace and civil society.

National elections are scheduled every five years, but in 1997 there was a bloody coup d'etat followed by violence-plagued elections in 1998. Since 1998 the Khmer Rouge has capitulated and Cambodia has gradually become more peaceful.

The elections of 2003 were viewed as a bellwether for the progress of peace and civil society. Those we talked with and reports in the press were of the opinion that it would bode well if elections were peaceful and resulted in a legitimate government capable of addressing corruption, transparency of government action, and judicial reform.

Results of the election have been mixed. There has been sporadic violence including three killings in Phnom Penh and two in the provinces since the election. The ruling party, the CPP, and its leader, Hun Sen, got more votes than any other party, somewhere around 43%, but not the 60% required to form a government. Under the constitution a coalition of parties comprising 60% of the votes are needed to form a government. So the CPP would need to form such a coalition to continue legitimate rule. At the time of our trip no coalition had been formed and the public rhetoric of the opposing parties didn't promise easy resolution. It appears that Hun Sen is continuing to rule as he has but with less legitimacy.

Many of the people we talked to were concerned about the state of affairs and some were downright depressed. Others felt that civil society is progressing and that the size and scope of government is so limited that, short of civil unrest and upheaval, the economy, civil society, and family life will be able to continue developing free of government interference. The violence in the aftermath of the election is deplorable and of concern but for some it was less than expected.

An uneasy, inconclusive calm prevails.

Our Mission

We are often asked about the nature of our work in Cambodia. We do not have a foundation or any other organization. Build Cambodia is just a name we have given to our website so that others can find out about our efforts. We are not directly involved with a project that we are undertaking. We go to Cambodia to learn about existing humanitarian projects and then we help them financially.

In any country, including the United States, there are many needs and ways to give money philanthropically. We have chosen to concentrate on Cambodia and on the areas of health care, education, the rule of law, and building human capital. These are areas that are of particular interest to us and the needs are limitless.

So what about our effort is distinctive? We don't know whether our approach is unusual but we have committed ourselves to expending enough time and effort to see that real needs are being met efficiently. This requires that the organizations we deal with practice transparency. By this we mean that they publish financial reports, account to us for their expenditures and willingly show us their operations and projects.

The key to our effectiveness is due diligence. For every organization we support we visit their projects, talk to staff and beneficiaries (through interpreters) and inspect facilities. We do this for three reasons. First we want to make sure the organization is spending the money efficiently for the intended purpose. We have found some organizations where we didn't think this was the case and while we don't publicize this on our website, we have quietly disassociated ourselves from their effort as our work progresses. Of the many good organizations we visit, we select a few to support. Second, addressing complex, insurmountable problems can lead to some unintended consequences. Put another way, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. So we like to learn as much as we can about the target efforts to satisfy ourselves that the approach is as helpful with as little counter productivity as possible. And finally, we like to learn as much as we can first hand about Cambodia, its people, its problems and the efforts of the "aid community." We do this to broaden

our understanding and because we are fascinated by the drama of nation building going on in Cambodia. This trip had more emphasis on due diligence than our previous enquiries.

Our due diligence consisted of visiting the offices of organizations we have supported and some new groups that we are interested in. We also made a point to do more due diligence in the field to get a different and perhaps more accurate view of what some of these organizations are doing. Because we learned so much from the field visits, I'll describe our excursions first and then discuss our office visits.

Due Diligence Excursions Wednesday through Friday

Our due diligence in the field began on Wednesday morning. We were picked up at our hotel in Phnom Penh by staff members of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) for the purpose of observing two of their efforts in Kompong Thom province, a three-hour drive. Our TPO appointments were in the afternoon so we had arranged with an unrelated organization, a human rights group named LICADHO, to visit a prison in Kompong Thom in the morning.

Following Wednesday's visits we drove another three hours northwest to Siem Reap where we spent Thursday and Friday working with the Angkor Hospital for Children and visiting a local elementary school.

LICADHO and the Prison Visit - LICADHO is human rights group founded in 1992 by Khek Galabru, a woman long prominent in Cambodian affairs, including the peace reconciliation of the late 1980s. We met with the current director Naly Pilorge, Khek's daughter. With a staff of 60 in Phnom Penh and 61 in the provinces, LICADHO works in the areas of human rights advocacy, education, investigation and medical help. LICADHO is an entirely local NGO and its work centers around investigating and documenting human rights abuses and helping victims with medical care and judicial advocacy. Naly also described a sizable education program whereby LICADHO educates police, judges, schools, monks and other groups about human rights.

One way of investigating human rights abuses is prison research. There are some 7000 Cambodians in prisons around the country. About half of those in prison are convicts and the other half are awaiting trial. The percentage of the population in prison in Cambodia compared to a country like the U.S. is small. By way of comparison, the state of Illinois, which has a population about the same as Cambodia has approximately 44,000 convicts in state prisons excluding those awaiting trial. The rate of incarceration in the U.S. is more than ten times that of Cambodia. LICADHO investigates human rights abuses by visiting the prisons on a daily basis and interviewing new prisoners about the circumstances of their incarceration. They are asked if they committed the crime, how they have been treated while in custody, whether they have been tortured or otherwise forced to confess, or whether other rights have been abused.

When we visited LICADHO's offices in Phnom Penh we asked to observe one of their activities. Naly suggested we visit the provincial prison in Kompong Thom province, since we were driving through there on our way to Siem Reap. She arranged for the prison researcher and the office director of the Kompong Thom office to guide us. She also felt that it was one of the more desperate prisons and would give us a candid view of the standards for prisons in Cambodia.

Our prison visit began when we stopped at the prison director's office in Kompong Thom. The building was a small crude structure with two or three rooms. We met with the director, Mr. Thim Som Panha, in a dark cramped room with old filling cabinets and a large table that left little room for chairs and sitting. Then the LICADHO researcher, Sen Sophal, introduced us and explained that we were interested in providing aid to the prison and prisoners. In response, the director described various needs that we could fund. This introduction took a few minutes and then we were led outside and across the street to the prison compound.

We spent about 30 minutes touring the prison and talking with the director. The prison contains about 150 men and 11 women. The women are housed in a separate building separated from the men. We toured the prison yard, the crude kitchen and the women's living quarters. We were not allowed to view the men's living quarters but were given various descriptions of how inhumane those living conditions are. The yard was a large gravel and mud courtyard, perhaps a hundred feet square. When we toured the yard it was 10:30 AM and a third of the prisoners were having their midday meal. The prisoners wore dark blue pajama-like uniforms and were quiet and orderly as they sat squat in a row fixing their gaze on us intently. They were fed a meal of crudely cooked, poor grade rice and a thin vegetable soup.

As I studied the prisoners I realized that their life was as foreign to me as mine was to them. I wondered whether they were the worst of the hardcore criminals since the incarceration rate is so much lower in Cambodia or whether they were merely the unfortunate victims of a corrupt government. As I do with all Cambodians, I wondered what horrors lay in their past.

Laurie and I have visited prisons in the U.S., and the conditions in Kompong Thom were clearly deplorable compared with U.S. standards. Somehow though, the conditions were what I would have expected considering the overall standard of living in Cambodia and what I had read so much about regarding life in the Pol Pot era.

The prison visit was a dramatic view into the crude, imperfect world of Cambodian justice. Nevertheless, we came away realizing that human rights groups are keeping an eye on conditions and have a constructive enough relationship with the authorities to make it possible for Americans to visit the prison on short notice. This says something powerful about the efforts of LICADHO and the level of openness that has been achieved in Cambodian government.

Transcultural Psycho-social Organization (TPO) - TPO is a Cambodian organization set up by a Dutch-based international NGO devoted to improving the mental health of indigenous people by applying universal mental health practices in ways appropriate to local culture. We became acquainted with TPO on our previous trip and have described the organization as well as Cambodia's overwhelming psychological problems in our Sophomores (June 2003) report. During this trip we wanted to learn more about TPO and visit some of their projects. TPO had arranged for us to observe a training session for village mental health volunteers and then an attempt to form a self-help group among the men of one village.

One of TPO's efforts is to train volunteers to bring mental health awareness, knowledge and simple coping skills to the villages. Without this knowledge village members struggle with mood disorders and psychopathic behavior and often cope in

superstitious and violent ways, unaware that mental health problems can be identified, described and treated. TPO selects village members who have the literacy and intelligence to learn about mental health and the stature in their villages to be a respected resource.

TPO was conducting a three-day training program in a large pagoda in the outskirts of Kompong Thom and we observed an hour of one session. The session was led by two dynamic trainers who, while we couldn't understand what they were saying, seemed to be speaking clearly, effectively and held the undivided attention of the trainees. There were 20 trainees who appeared to range in age from 30 to 45. They were well dressed, literate, and several wore glasses. While we observed, the trainers described the concept of anxiety and then asked the trainees to divide into three breakout groups to brainstorm the possible causes of anxiety, write them down on flip charts, and report back to the larger group when reassembled. In form, this session looked like a typical management training session we would encounter in the U.S., except that the trainees were sitting on the floor and the setting was an ornate Buddhist pagoda.

The training we observed seemed effective, addressed the need for more mental health human capacity, and seemed to target capable volunteers. We feel that this effort can bear fruit as Cambodia strives to develop its civil society.

Another TPO effort sets up self-help support groups for men in the villages. Among the many social problems unique to Cambodia, there is also widespread the alcoholism and domestic violence pervasive in many other parts of the world. These related problems wreak havoc on family and social life and rob the village of valuable productivity when the people are living on the margins of subsistence anyway. TPO believes that the first step in trying to fight these problems is to set up self-help groups so that peers within the village can develop coping skills and social disciplines with the help of mutual support and the guidance of the TPO moderators.

Whether alcoholism and domestic violence can be blamed on the upheaval Cambodia has seen for the past thirty years, there is no denying that Kompong Thom province has seen more than its share of trouble. This province was one of the first secured by the Khmer Rouge before they conquered all of Cambodia and consequently, suffered the inhumanities of the Pol Pot era longer than other parts of the country. At this time Cambodians did not know that Pol Pot was their leader and were told only that Angka, literally meaning "the organization," was in charge of the country and the people. It was Angka that told the people what to do, enforced a reign of terror, and executed its enemies. Then, as the Vietnamese invaded and "liberated" Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge, Kompong Thom was an area where the Vietnamese impressed Cambodians and forced them to fight for Viet Nam. The people of this unfortunately situated province suffered disproportionately from the warfare, revolution, oppression and coercion that has characterized Cambodia's past. This is a rough area of Cambodia.

In the afternoon, after the training session in the pagoda, we drove to a remote village several kilometers from the city of Kompong Thom to observe TPO's attempt to set up one of these self-help groups. Our group included two representatives from TPO, Kang San and Bou Vannary, two TPO volunteers who were leading the discussion, our guide Tha, Laurie and me. When we arrived at the village the two

volunteers had already begun their meeting with 11 men from the village who appeared to range in age from 30 to 70.

The men were sun darkened, weathered, and wore the soil of the fields on their clothes, their hands and their brows. The village chief was the oldest and he graciously offered us tea. Some of the men were attentive and curious; others were clearly drunk. From their ages I could deduce that most of them were either Khmer Rouge cadre, KR victims, Vietnamese conscripts, or caught in the destructive civil war that raged for nearly twenty years after liberation. It is probable that many of them had been killers of someone at some time and had also witnessed the murders of loved ones. It is also probable that in the confusion of ever shifting military control and political necessities some of them had been a part of groups that were fighting and killing groups that others belonged to. If these men were at one time enemies it was not something they wanted to talk about at this time.

When the TPO volunteers had finished their initial presentation they asked for questions. At first the men were curious about my daughter and me. One man wanted to know how old I was. After this curiosity wore off the men discussed whether they wanted to form a self-help group or not. Several brought up the idea that TPO's entreaty for them to examine their lives and correct their mistakes was not unlike Angka's "reeducation efforts," which usually led to confession and execution. We couldn't tell whether these men really could not distinguish between TPO and Angka or whether this comparison was a convenient way to avoid facing their problems. In either case we could see how enormous the historical and cultural barriers are to fighting the pressing social problems of the people. We support and commend TPO for their efforts and believe they will bear fruit eventually. It won't be easy.

Angkor Hospital for Children (AHC) - We have been supporting The Angkor Hospital for Children through its parent organization, New York's Friends Without a Border since our first trip to Cambodia. On this trip we decided to spend some time in the hospital to shadow the staff and learn as much as we could about the patients, the delivery of care, and the challenges to the organization.

On Thursday we arrived at the hospital in Siem Reap and met with Jon Morgan, the Executive Director of the hospital, and David Shoemaker, a head nurse. From our arrival until lunchtime we toured the various wards of the hospital and visited every admitted patient. Patients had come from as near as the local town and as far as Kompong Thom, Battambang, and Pailin. The patients were being treated for a variety of illnesses. About a third of the children were being treated for diseases and injuries that would be common in any children's hospital in the world. Another third were suffering from tropical illnesses such as malaria, dysentery, or respiratory infections. The remaining children were suffering from tuberculosis or malnutrition associated with HIV/AIDS. In the past week there had been a team of doctors from Handicap International operating on local children to correct cleft palates and there were some admissions still recovering from surgery.

While conditions were spartan by U.S. standards, the hospital was clean and orderly, and the equipment and facilities were well maintained. From what we could see we were impressed with the quality of care being given.

We left the hospital for lunch and returned in the afternoon to spend time with one of the doctors, Thim Sarom, from Siem Reap. Dr. Thim had gone to medical school at the Patrice Lumumba Medical School in Moscow from 1987 to 1991 and then spent three years in medical school in Phnom Penh. He has been at the AHC for four years.

While there is currently very little evidence of Russian influence in Cambodia, we occasionally run across reminders that it was not that long ago when both Cambodia and Viet Nam were cool towards the U.S. and friendly toward Communist countries.

We sat beside the doctor for two hours in the afternoon while he examined and treated eight cases. It appears that the hospital triages patients in the morning and either admits them or arranges for an outpatient consultation with a physician in the afternoon. Of the eight children we observed, four involved ongoing health problems with birth defects. Two children were dealing with a problems associated with a cleft palate, one had cerebral palsy, and another had Down Syndrome. In two of the cases there was no medical problem but the mother was worried about the baby's health or had problems nursing. Dr. Thim was maintaining good medical records and was ordering appropriate lab tests, the results of which would be available later that afternoon. We were impressed with the thoroughness of the doctor's treatment and the speed with which diagnosis and treatment was being delivered.

The following day we accompanied one of AHC's chief nurses, a woman by the name of Kizumi, and a Cambodian nurse and translator as they made two home care visits. Home care or house calls that were common in the U.S. fifty years ago are now unheard of and would be even more unlikely in Cambodia. However, the AHC staff has found that for cases near enough for the hospital to reach, there is often a need to follow up when it is impossible or unlikely that the parents would come in to the hospital .

The first case we visited was about twenty minutes from the hospital and was one of the most desperate situations we have encountered in Cambodia. We drove up to a dilapidated pole and reed shack nestled in a low spot in a field of sandy scrub brush. There was no protection from the sun or from flooding. Inside we found an aged grandmother with three small children, two boys and a girl. The children's mother had married a soldier who had given her HIV and had abandoned her and the children to return to his first wife. This mother worked in a laundry in a nearby town and could only return home every ten days to two weeks to bring money and food. The grandmother was taking care of the children, trying to keep all four of them alive between visits from the mother. Both of the boys are HIV positive and are suffering from tuberculosis. Kizumi needed to make this visit to see that the grandmother was properly treating the children for the TB so they could get healthy enough to take the antiviral HIV cocktail of medicines that AHC planned to administer. The TB medicine needed to be taken at twelve-hour intervals, a challenge as the grandmother had no clock or watch. The boys were quiet, looked ill, and had runny noses and coughs. Izumi weighed the boys, checked their vital signs and talked with the woman about the treatment.

The shack was sparsely furnished with one wooden platform covered by mosquito netting for the whole family to sleep on. Cooking was done over a wood fire on the ground about ten yards behind the shack. The woman and the children were dressed in rags. As we observed, the grandmother suddenly noticed us and started rummaging through her pots and pans and sent the daughter to get some water.

She wanted to fix some tea for us. When we realized what was happening we stopped her with a polite decline but we were stunned to see such a poor helpless woman in such desperate conditions making such an effort to be hospitable to complete strangers.

As we left the family Kizumi indicated that treatment was not going well but had hope that her visit would make a difference. Nevertheless, the current plight of this family was desperate. They are surviving but only on the margins of subsistence and health. Their outlook is dim. As we walked away I asked Kizumi if I could give the grandmother some money to help her. I felt that I had money with me that meant little to me but could mean the world to this family. As compassionate and caring as Kizumi is she nevertheless told me that this woman wouldn't know what to do with the money and it might very well be stolen or extorted or swindled away from her by neighbors or strangers. The money would make no difference. Here we were face to face with one of the "giver's dilemmas." Unless we were able to take control of the complete situation, just giving money would be useless and perhaps counterproductive. We gave money to the Angkor Hospital for Children instead.

The next stop was more uplifting. We stopped at a nearby cabin and visited a Cambodian woman who was widowed and had five children. A few years earlier she had had her fifth child, with Down Syndrome, and felt her life was so hopeless that she went to AHC to give the child away. The AHC gave the woman and child help and has continued to help the family with home care visits. Now the woman lives in a well built cabin, there was plenty of food, and the children were healthy. When we met the woman she was well groomed and dressed and her happy smile shone through lips covered with lipstick. In her arms she held her Downs Syndrome child who was happy and healthy. The woman laughed lovingly at the child's antics and we all felt the joy of health, happiness and hope that was in the air. From what we had been told, here was a case where both the AHC and the home care effort had reversed the fortunes of this one family.

AHC's home care unit can cover little ground in a day and its effectiveness cannot compare to the efficiency and resourcefulness of the hospital itself. Yet, as part of a total system of care it plays a role in showing Cambodians how to build a complete home care delivery system.

Back at the hospital we met Ron Ablow, an American physician and the chairman of FWAB's board of directors. He showed us the newly completed classroom complex and described how the hospital is continuing to develop the capacity of the Cambodians to deliver health care themselves. The goal of FWAB is to turn over the hospital to the Cambodians when they are prepared to continue its operations.

The Bob and Stefan Ellis School - On our previous trip we met Bernie Krisher, who is the owner of the Cambodian Daily newspaper and the founder for many humanitarian institutions in Cambodia. One of his efforts is to develop elementary schools throughout Cambodia. At present, he has built over 160 schools. We met Bernie for dinner on Monday night of this trip and asked if we could visit a school. He suggested that the most accessible school based on our travel plans would be the Ellis school just outside Angkor Wat in Siem Reap. He warned us that this school would not be representative because it receives a disproportionate amount of aid and attention from passing tourists but we were free to stop by and see the school.

On Friday afternoon we stopped at the school, which was funded by Bob Ellis in honor of his son, Stefan. It was about 2:30 in the afternoon and there was no teacher present and no classes in session. The children were in the schoolyard and when we arrived they took a keen interest in us. The boys looked on but kept their distance while the girls were eager to talk with us, practice their English and seek attention. At one point a little girl gave us the colored drawing of a flower she had made and when we showed appreciation all the other girls had to find drawings from their desks and give them to us. Some of the older girls, perhaps 11 years old, spoke very good English and one said she hope to become a doctor.

The school had a computer that was powered by solar panels and there was evidence of a robust curriculum from the charts and drawings posted on the wall. The children looked healthy, well behaved and interested in learning. We felt that private funding for elementary education in Cambodia is effective and is having an impact in a country where all learning was destroyed and repressed for such a long time.

Return Visits and Investigations-Phnom Penh-Monday and Tuesday

The Asia Foundation - Our first appointment on Monday was with Nancy Hopkins and Annette Kirchner of the Asia Foundation. Over lunch we were brought up to date on the political situation and the unresolved status of the elections. Asia Foundation had done a lot of work helping the Cambodians to have peaceful and fair elections and is quite invested in the outcome of this issue. Nancy expressed the disappointment and apprehension we heard from others that the political process had not lived up to their expectations. In addition, Asia Foundation has encountered some difficulties in funding some ongoing projects.

As usual, Nancy was a rich source of suggestions for organizations we could investigate, and she set us on our way to meeting with LICADHO, the Cambodian Defenders Project, and the U.S. Ambassador's office.

The Center for Social Development - We made a brief return visit to the CSD and Ms. Chea Vannath. We have supported CSD in the past and have admired their work in studying corruption and advocating for fairness and transparency in government. CSD was also quite busy during the election. Now CSD continues its work but likewise feels an uneasy calm about the disappointing election process. Chea was her usual poised articulate self but seemed less hopeful than in previous meetings. CSD's new initiatives include the establishment of a Court Watch program and completion of a Survey of Corruption at the local level. This survey will sample 1500 citizens. From our experience watching court proceedings on our previous trip we think the Court Watch program will be particularly valuable.

CSD continues its good work.

Returnee Assistance Program - We had a nice visit with Bill Herod at the RAP. We complimented Bill on the favorable publicity he received in a cover story of the New York Times magazine.

The returnee flow continues and both the Cambodian government and his program are getting used to handling this difficult process. There are fewer shakedowns by government officials and Bill is becoming more experienced handling the thorny cases.

RAP has secured a housing facility in the suburbs of Phnom Penh for temporarily housing returnees in a quiet neighborhood far from the congestion and temptations of the central city. We toured this large home and yard and learned of Bill's plans to improve the compound. Bill continues his selfless and ambitious efforts to help both the returnees and all Cambodians.

Bernard Krisher - We had dinner with Bernie the night of our arrival, which was a mistake as we could barely keep our eyes open. We got a good update from Bernie covering all his efforts. We also learned that the next day he would be leaving on a personal mission to Poipet at the far end of Cambodia on the Thai border. He would be following up on the failed attempt by New York Times correspondent Nicholas Kristoff to buy the freedom of a young prostitute from a brothel and return her to her home village. Kristoff had secured the girl's release but she had fled her village and returned to the brothel in Poipet. Now Bernie was taking a team of interpreters and peers to see if with more effort the girl could be persuaded to give up her life in the brothel. This was an ambitious undertaking for a man in his 70s to spend several days on such an effort.

Note, in March, we had lunch with Bernie in Tokyo and learned that he too, had been unsuccessful in his attempt to persuade the young girl that she could have a better life outside the brothel.

LICADHO - As described earlier in this report, we got a good introduction to LICADHO on this trip. This introduction began on Tuesday morning when we met Naly Pilorge at LICADHO headquarters in Phnom Penh. We got an office tour and a lengthy chat with Naly explaining LICADHO's efforts. We also briefly met her mother Khek Galabru.

LICADHO is negotiating that fine line between investigating and advocating for human rights and yet avoiding the consequences of repression and oppression that can return from an authoritarian and corrupt government. The group seems to be learning to do this well. We were impressed with the efforts we saw that were underway. We had heard of LICADHO from many admiring sources on previous trips and were pleased to finally take the time to familiarize ourselves with Naly and the organization. We are eager to continue our support of LICADHO.

United States Embassy - On our previous trip we had by chance met **U.S. Ambassador Charles Ray**. On this trip we sought a brief appointment to invite the Ambassador to visit the dedication of the Killing Field Memorial being built by the Cambodian Association of Illinois in Chicago. We phoned the embassy and an appointment was arranged by Public Affairs Officer, Heide Bronke. In a brief meeting the Ambassador expressed interest in visiting the memorial and learning about the Cambodian community in Illinois. He has had contact with the other sizable Cambodian communities in Long Beach and Boston. We continue to appreciate the professional and attentive way in which the Ambassador represents Americans in Cambodia.

Cambodian Defenders Project - Having heard so much from other sources we finally were able to meet the staff of the Cambodian Defenders Project. Executive Director Sok Sam Oeun and other Cambodian and Western staff members spent time with us and explained CDP's programs and funding.

CDP provides legal services for the poor, training for legal professionals, and legal advocacy for legislation. The many critical legal areas that CDP is active in include family law and domestic violence, reform of trafficking law, and strengthening land rights. There is a staff of 26 lawyers, including two or more in each of the four regional offices outside of Phnom Penh. Until 2000 most of their funding had come from USAID, but as that funding has been cut back, CDP has been developing other sources of funding from Sweden, Denmark and Australia. This meeting was a good introduction and a welcome one since we are interested in supporting organizations that promote the rule of law. We look forward to learning more about and supporting CDP.

Gary and Karen Jacques - We did not have time to visit the [Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope](#) on this trip but we had a delightful evening with Gary Jacques, the medical director, and his wife Karen, director of public relations. We were updated on progress at the hospital and the Telemedicine project that the Hospital and Bernie Krisher have developed.

The Jacques and their family are adjusting to and enjoying their experience living, working, and learning in Cambodia.

As has now become customary, I paid for dinner and left my American Express card at the restaurant. Every time I do this the restaurant reaches us immediately by cell phone and I am able to return to pick up my card. I am indebted to the honest and conscientious waiters I have encountered in Phnom Penh.