

Progress

By Ed Bachrach
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Laurie and Ed Bachrach were in Cambodia for a fifth time from May 31 to June 5, 2004. This trip was less ambitious than previous trips, but it was a good opportunity to reflect on our experiences from the past two years. We see progress on many fronts.

Highlights

- The U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia dedicates the Killing Field Memorial in Chicago.
- A government is formed. Peace becomes more permanent.
- We chased the wild goose of an idea that we could help set up a milk packaging facility in Cambodia. The idea went nowhere but we learned a lot.
- We discover Hagar and Future Light Orphanage, two inspiring organizations.
- Two developments, the spread of HIV/AIDS and the efforts of the Cambodian Freedom Fighters operating out of Long Beach, leave us somewhat concerned.

Our Trip

On our previous trips, we have had the immense fortune of fruitful meetings and raid insights. This trip was more reflective. Our insights were more nuanced and our efforts found more stumbling blocks. All the same, it was another adventure in learning, humility, and above all hope.

The Ambassador Visits the Killing Fields Memorial in Chicago

A year ago we made the acquaintance of [Charles Ray, U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia](#). On a subsequent trip we visited the Ambassador at the embassy and invited him to help dedicate the Killing Fields Memorial and Wall of Remembrance that are being built at [The Cambodian Association of Illinois](#) as a tribute the millions who died during the period of Khmer Rouge domination. On May 27, the day before we left on this trip, the Ambassador came to Chicago and spoke to members of the Association, answered questions, toured the Wall of Remembrance, and visited with leaders of the Association at a buffet luncheon.

The Cambodian Association of Illinois, like its counterparts in several U.S. cities, provides education, social services and assistance to Cambodians who are struggling to settle in the area. We learned of the Association on our second trip to Cambodia. Since then we have been supporters and visitors to their center on Lawrence Avenue in Chicago. Their Killing Fields Memorial is the first such memorial to built anywhere in the world outside of Cambodia.

The Ambassador addressed a crowd of about 150 people, predominantly Cambodian American, and made some general remarks about the tragic history and recent progress he has seen in Cambodia. He was complimentary of the Cambodian-American community and the memorial. In answering questions he stated that developing the rule of law and a civil society based on trust were the two biggest challenges facing Cambodia. He commented on the adoption of Cambodian orphans by American couples and his hopes that obstacles to this can be removed once measures have been established to prevent abuse and kidnapping. When asked about returning felons he said that regardless of his personal opinions, his job is to administer the orders of the executive branch of our government. Nevertheless, he has single-handedly lobbied Congress for funds to support the returnee rehabilitation effort organized by the Returnee Assistance Program and is surprised that the Cambodian-American community in the U.S. does not have a significant lobby to voice their views on issues like this. The Ambassador feels that the U.S. is constructively engaged with the Cambodian government and he plays golf once a month with Prime Minister Hun Sen to keep lines of communication open.

The Ambassador's visit was an important event for the community and we are proud of how the U.S. State Department is handling relations with Cambodia.

A Government is Formed

In our last report we talked at length about the post-election parliamentary stalemate that had left Cambodia without a coalition government for many months. Upon our arrival on Monday morning, we learned that nothing had changed. But on Tuesday we read in the paper that a meeting was planned for late that afternoon between Hun Sen, the Prime Minister in the previous government, and Prince Ranariddh, the chief opponent, to discuss the possibility of compromising on the differences between their two parties and forming a governing coalition.

Tha, our friend, guide, and translator, is also a cameraman for Reuters and every time we work with him we have the understanding that if news breaks he will have to leave us to film the event. On Monday Tha asked us if we wanted to have dinner with his family Tuesday evening. On Tuesday, when we learned of the meeting, we asked Tha if we should postpone our dinner. He thought that the meeting would be a non-event and we had a delightful evening with Tha, his wife Sien, and daughter Su Chie Tha.

Wednesday's news, however, was that all differences had been reconciled and both parties were pushing for a fast-track ratification of government posts and the convening of parliament. The stalemate was over. We felt this was significant news but found the story down played in the local and international press.

Over the past year, there has been sporadic violence of ambiguous origin as the three political parties that received the most votes attempted to negotiate a peaceful compromise and form a government according to the constitution. This was the first time in generations that a government in Cambodia was established with such peace and order. While many people are disappointed that Hun Sen, someone they believe to be corrupt and guilty of egregious violations of democratic processes, remains the Prime Minister, in this case he seemed to play much more by the rules. Every day that peace and stability prevail in Cambodia, civil society and economic development have an opportunity to advance. This is progress.

Wild Goose Chase

During our previous trip we learned from Bernie Krisher that the [Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope](#) negotiated a grant from the U.S. government in the form of 1 million USD worth of powdered milk from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. For a limited time the hospital could 'monetize' the donation by selling it for cash on the world market and using the funds for its general operating budget. There would be one more year left to sell the milk abroad, and after that the hospital would be required to sell the milk powder solely within Cambodia.

In the time between that last trip and this one we talked with my daughter, Kris, who works for the food products division of [Archer Daniels Midland](#), about how the hospital could solve this problem of finding or creating production capacity that would utilize the milk powder. Kris put us in touch with a company called Tetrapak, the world's largest maker of pasteurizing supplies and packaging equipment. From talks with Jeff Keller at [Tetrapak](#), we learned about the technology and economics of producing liquid milk from powder, pasteurizing it at Ultra High Temperatures (UHT), and packaging and distributing shelf stable milk. We also learned that even though there is a high incidence of lactose intolerance in Asian populations, there were active milk markets in Cambodia's neighboring countries of Thailand and Vietnam. In preparation for our trip we emailed several contacts in Cambodia and set up appointments to learn more about who was currently doing this kind of processing or who could assist in it. Our lead contact was Keo Sun, who was our driver on the past four trips but who spent most of his career working for Nestle in its Cambodian dairy businesses. Sun arranged meetings our first day with his colleagues at the Lay Group of enterprises, who understand packaging and run a large rice wine distillery.

We landed Monday morning ready to learn about milk production and solve the hospital's problem.

Our first meeting was with a woman named Lay Hieng. She is the matriarch of the Lay Group and was more interested in selling us some of their industrial land to build our own factory. This was not what we had in mind and we politely thanked her for her time.

Later Monday we met Mrs. Lay's son, Lay Meng Sun, at his office at the distillery. Mr. Lay is a friend of Sun's, and he gave us a warm reception and was generous with his time and advice. He gave a frank assessment of the challenges and problems associated with producing packaged milk.

First we would have to decide whether we wanted to produce and distribute the milk for profit or as a not-for-profit NGO. If we operated for profit, we would have to pay 41% custom taxes which would make the economics of importing equipment and supplies very expensive. Custom taxes are a major source of revenue for the government, and since income and income taxes are insufficient as a source of revenue, the government is vigorous in its collection of them. The unintended consequence of this tax policy is that smuggling of just about everything, principally from Thailand, has become rampant. For these reasons, anyone who wishes to establish a legitimate business, large or small, faces almost insurmountable hurdles. Moreover, if we were to pursue the NGO route we would operate at the pleasure of the government and are more exposed to meddling and corruption.

Then there are marketing and product problems. Cambodians don't drink a lot of milk. Cambodian babies cannot digest milk fat, so whey must be substituted for fat in formulations. Most Cambodians only drink milk in coffee and tea and they use shelf-stable sweetened condensed milk. Later in the trip we shopped at a small food and snack stall in the center of the city and found that the packaged milk products were all sweetened, targeted at children, and the offering was not very impressive. There is probably not much of a significant market for a packaged milk drink.

After Mr. Lay concluded his informative but discouraging explanation, we asked for a tour of his distillery. He arranged for his foreman to show us his facility, but not before he told us of some of the challenges he was facing in the wine business. There is a shortage of rice in Southeast Asia because one of the largest producers, Viet Nam, had had a shortage in production. This shortage drove prices higher and many people may have trouble feeding themselves this year. Fishing has been hurt by unusually dry rainy seasons the past couple of years and prices have risen for fish. In Mr. Lay's business it is no longer economical to make rice wine from rice, so he is making wine from tapioca chips.

The distillery tour began as we walked through the distribution center where workmen were filling large plastic jugs with the finished wine and loading them onto trucks. The jugs were used and dirty, and this was cheap tapioca wine, not premium Japanese sake. Then we viewed the receiving area where two young men were loading tapioca chips into a hopper for grinding. The area was dusty, hot and confining. This was hard, unhealthy, dangerous work. From the hopper we climbed a crude set of iron stairs to the second level to view the boilers and distillation towers. We were told that this equipment had been there since the 1920s and we believed it. The few boilers still operating lay among a graveyard of dismantled and scavenged equipment. Gauges and valves were suspended by duct tape and wires. From the second floor I walked to the edge of the building. There were no walls or railings, just a large platform. From the edge I looked down on a large lot full of logs. This lot was next to the Tonle Sap River, a major tributary of the Mekong. It was apparent that the logs had been delivered by river and the distillery was using the water for both the wine and for the manufacturing process.

By American standards there were many social and policy issues raised by this tour. Illegal logging and deforestation are big problems in Cambodia. I wondered whether the distillery's use of logs was contributing to this. I wondered what effect the factory's operation was having on the river water. More importantly, I wondered what effect the widespread availability of cheap crude wine was having on the problems of alcoholism and domestic violence.

Here in graphic detail was a development dilemma. Milk, a nutritious diet supplement, was available for Cambodians who will have trouble buying rice and fish this year but the political and cultural environment make development difficult. On the other hand, shelf-stable cheap alcohol can be produced from crude domestic resources and has a ready market regardless of the social consequences. I am not advocating prohibition or any other regulatory measure. I merely note that the paradoxes of development and cultural tastes are as puzzling and problematic in Cambodia as they are anywhere.

We left the distillery, our heads swimming with all we had learned, and met Bernie Krisher for dinner. Before we could mention any of it, Bernie told us that there had

been a recent meeting of NGOs that received in-kind aid from the U.S. on the topic of the end of monetization, and the consensus was that milk would be difficult to develop commercially. Bernie went on to tell us that the official of Hope International who negotiated the original grant was trying to negotiate a change so that the hospital could receive some other, more commercially viable commodity. Our work was done and there was no longer the wild goose of powdered milk to chase. Nevertheless, we got our hands dirty learning about the gritty, crude way in which industry and commerce are developing in Cambodia.

Keo Sun

We have referred many times in our reports to our driver Keo Sun. Sun has driven while Tha has guided us for our last four trips. Another benefit of our wild goose chase was that it allowed us to get to know Keo Sun better and to admire the course of his life.

Sun is more than a driver to us. He is a friend, an amazing survivor, and a positive force for development even in his retirement. He was a young man living south of Phnom Penh when the King was overthrown and U.S. bombing began. When the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975 they found his mechanical aptitude and harmless disposition too invaluable to send him to the countryside. He worked in one of the few factories that remained open in Phnom Penh during the KR era, and when the city was liberated by the Vietnamese in 1979 he was evacuated to Battambang. In the chaos that followed the resettlement in the west, Sun was able to escape and return to his family in Phnom Penh. Working one job after another he was able to work into a key job with Nestle in a canned milk factory, where he retired in the past year. He is a survivor and his fortune and that of his family are quite rare. Sun is always quiet and respectful around us but he becomes animated and talkative if we start talking milk. He has started a small dairy operation in his village and is quite enthusiastic about it.

One morning we asked Sun if we could see his cows. He picked us up at 7:00 and drove us forty-five minutes out into the countryside to his small corral with ten milk cows. The cows are tended to and milked by two orphan boys who live in the adjoining village. Sun gives these boys work and his family has taken them in and is raising them. Sun takes the daily milk and sells it to an athletic club that is very near his home. This is a small operation yielding little milk and even less money. But it is Sun's passion. In his retirement he has dreams of growing his herd and business and becoming a big-time dairy farmer.

As we walked around the farmyard, watched the milking, took in the sweet smell of live cattle in the balmy overcast morning, we could see and touch what peace, stability, and freedom bring forth: milk for athletes, a home for orphans, and dreams for the spirit of a survivor.

HAGAR

As mentioned previously we began learning about the resources that existed in Cambodia to process powdered milk well before we arrived in Phnom Penh to start our wild goose chase. In every conversation we kept hearing about an organization named HAGAR. On our second day in Phnom Penh we visited HAGAR and found much more than a milk factory.

HAGAR is a Cambodian-based charity that takes in destitute mothers and their children who have no hope and nowhere to turn. Some of the women live on the streets or squat near garbage dumps. Many come from the brothels or are trafficked for sex. HAGAR takes these women into its shelter and turns their lives around. HAGAR starts by improving the women's physical condition and follows up with social, educational, and vocational development.

This remarkable organization was started by Pierre and Simonetta Tami, Swiss natives who gave up their business careers and have devoted themselves to helping homeless women in Asia. Their efforts started in Osaka, Japan where they worked for seven years before starting their operation in the early 1990s in Cambodia. The name HAGAR comes from a woman in the Old Testament, the Egyptian maidservant of Abraham and Sarah. Sarah, thinking she was barren, encouraged Abraham to father a child with Hagar, which resulted in the birth of Ishmael. Later Sarah became jealous of Hagar and banished her and Ishmael to the desert. Feeling that there was no hope and unable to bear the crying of the dying Ishmael, Hagar left the baby under a bush and went elsewhere to die. The lord saved them both and brought them back into Abraham's home. This touching tale of a homeless, husbandless mother has inspired the work of the Tamis for the past twenty years.

As we toured the HAGAR shelter we learned of the specific work done with Cambodian women. When they come to the shelter, they are not only in poor health, but illiterate and lacking basic living skills such as preventive health care, hygiene, and interpersonal relationships. Often the women were sold as a child into a brothel and have lived there or on the streets for most of their lives. They often don't know how to find nutritious, clean food, how to go to the bathroom, or how to take care of their body and their baby's health. They don't understand that sexual intercourse is what causes them to have children and know nothing about sexually transmitted diseases.

HAGAR's work begins by restoring the women and children to health and teaching good hygiene habits. The women also get individual and group psychological counseling to help them learn to cope so that they can begin to function as thinking, feeling positive people. As these women begin to heal, they start to learn to read, write, count and think. As we toured the shelter we visited a classroom, an individual counseling session, and the nursery. We saw a clean, peaceful atmosphere and the women appeared to be engaged and applying themselves.

These women are fragile and the development efforts are sometimes too accelerated for them. A short development effort is not always completely successful. To provide them with a sheltered transition into life as a working adult in Cambodia, which has high unemployment and limited economic opportunities, HAGAR has set up three for-profit enterprises to employ and continue to develop their working skills. The three enterprises operate separately, and in addition to processing soy for milk, there is an industrial catering business and a sewing factory. We visited the soy factory, about a mile from the shelter, and found it clean, well run, and efficient but employing very few people. We visited a catering project and found several of the women there operating the canteen for British American Tobacco's cigarette factory in Phnom Penh. The sewing factory is above the shelter but was not in operation when we toured it.

At the end of our trip we went to a retail store near the riverfront and Laurie bought several HAGAR handbags as gifts. The bags are beautiful and very well constructed,

and she bought them at a fraction of what they would sell for in the U.S. When we returned home we tried to make contact with the Oprah Winfrey Show to get exposure for HAGAR. We also tried to find an accessories wholesale representative to sell the handbags to high-end department and specialty stores. To date we have met with no success. We are inspired by the work of HAGAR and will continue to support their good work.

Future Light Orphanage

Since meeting Bernie Krisher we have been exposed to his many undertakings, including the Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope, the many schools he has built, the Cambodian Daily, and his telemedicine and village Internet projects. One of his first projects was the establishment of two orphanages years ago. During this trip we asked to tour one of these, the [Future Light Orphanage](#).

FLO was started by Ms. Nuon Phaly in the 1980s in Refugee Camp #2 in Thailand. In 1992 the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) helped resettle hundreds of thousands of refugees back into Cambodia from the camps in Thailand. Phaly moved the orphanage to Phnom Penh in 1992 as part of the resettlement facilitated by the UNTAC. In 1998 FLO bought land on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, which is now the spacious, quiet campus that we visited. The orphanage houses about 200 children and is one of hundreds that operate in Cambodia. Though this is the only orphanage we have visited, it is hard to imagine that very many would be as enjoyable and inspiring as this one. When we arrived in the afternoon we observed English classes and were greeted by the class reciting in unison "hello, sir and madam." We visited a computer training class and saw several boys working in English. From the computer room we could hear live music and were delighted to walk to the next pavilion to see the children play traditional Khmer music and some of the older girls practice traditional dance. The talent was so developed and the performance so pleasant we stopped to watch for fifteen minutes.

The campus included separate group dorms for the boys and girls, classrooms, fishponds, a chicken farm, and a garden. The children all appeared to be in great health and good spirits, were lively, polite, and committed to learning. FLO is a model success story and our visit was pure pleasure. While we were left with a positive impression, we know that in Cambodia the demands on the orphanage are overwhelming and the competition for limited funds is daunting.

Other Visits

Our trip also included visits with organizations we met with and supported in the past. A brief synopsis follows.

Catholic Relief Services - We met our friend Richard Baldamier for lunch and got updated on current CRS activities. CRS continues to develop agricultural capacity and has received a USDA grant to do so. New work is being done for AIDS care and to combat infant mortality, which is now on the rise after having fallen from 1980 to 1990. While there are reports of a leveling off in the rate of HIV infections, Richard is skeptical of the findings and this conclusion.

The Asia Foundation - We always start our trips with an update from the Asia Foundation and learned a lot in our meeting with Nancy Hopkins and Annette

Kirchner. In addition to helping us with organizations we have already visited, AF introduced us to the Documentation Center and FIT Media.

Nick Rine - Our friend Nick Rine was spending the summer in Cambodia and we were able to meet him and get an update on rule-of-law issues. Exchange programs between U.S. universities, principally the University of Michigan, continue and provide assistance and contact between American students and various organizations and government ministries in Cambodia. Establishing a judiciary independent from the Ministry of Justice, which is part of the Executive Branch of government, remains a problem but Nick thinks this could improve as the government evolves and new players emerge. In our conversation we noted that the U.S. was decades old when the Supreme Court finally asserted its independence from the Executive branch. Nick continues to work on the front line to advance rule of law in Cambodia. He sees some progress and is hopeful.

Returnee Assistance Program - Bill Herod, our hero at RAP, met with us again this trip and gave us a progress report. We noticed that he wore sunglasses as he talked with us even though we were inside. As the conversation unfolded we learned that his eye had been damaged when Drano splashed into it as a result of an altercation with a drunken returnee. Bill continues to do this thankless work with faith and grace at a tremendous cost to himself and his person. The problems and difficulties RAP deals with continue to mount and funding from the U.S. remains tenuous. Bill also questions the statistics that claim the HIV infection is leveling off.

The Documentation Center of Cambodia - During this trip we made our first visit to the Documentation Center of Cambodia (www.dccam.org). This impressive center is dedicated to documenting the people, events, and places that make up the history of the Khmer Rouge genocide. The center is doing this so that Cambodia never forgets what happened and to support international tribunals whenever they take place. The center's founder Yuok Chhang met with us and described the work they were doing. The work of the center is gaining acceptance but there are many people in Cambodia that would like to forget, or would like others to forget, what happened. The center is in contact with our friends in Chicago at the Cambodian Association to provide names for the Wall of Remembrance.

Community Legal Education Center - The CLEC was supported in the past with significant foreign aid and was instrumental in establishing what rule of law exists in Cambodia. Many Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like CLEC were started with significant foreign aid and management with the understanding that eventually the effort would sustain itself with local funds and Cambodian staff. In 2002 CLEC underwent this localization and foreign aid has been reduced. Therefore the current projects are more modest in scope and the organization is partnering with other NGOs help advance legal education.

Cambodian Defenders Project - Revisiting CDP and its director Sok Sang Un, we got an update on the important work this organization has under way. Defending the poor, training police and other justice workers, and providing commentary on the drafting of laws remain the CDP's focus. One of CDP's visiting staffers is doing investigation work for the anticipated genocide tribunals.

LICADHO - We had a nice visit with Naly Pilorge and learned more about what was going on in Cambodia than about LICADHO's current work.

Transcultural Psycho-social Organization (TPO) - We made a brief stop at TPO and met our friend Sotheara Chim. TPO continues to face the overwhelming task of trying to expand the basic capacity of Cambodians to understand and deal with psychological problems. Despite this difficulty, Sotheara is trying to develop some more advanced programs to help people who have experienced trauma deal with its aftermath. Along these lines TPO is considering setting up a counseling service for victims of the Khmer Rouge.

F.I.T. Media - We learned of F.I.T. Media from our friends at the Asia Foundation and visited F.I.T.'s offices on our last day in Phnom Penh. This NGO is run by Lisa Miller and Daniel Littlewood and is committed to using video and media for social change. They have produced a documentary meant to convince Cambodians to turn in their weapons and recently documented two days in the life of two little girls as they collected garbage. F.I.T. is currently finishing a film called "The Voices of the Khmer Rouge." This current footage of interviews with former Khmer Rouge underlings will highlight how the Khmer Rouge cadres were victims themselves and will add complexity to the issues of who to try when the tribunals take place. We are quite interested in this project.

Continuing Concerns

HIV/AIDS - Despite enormous problems, progress can be observed on many fronts in Cambodia. However, on each trip we continually come into contact with sufferers of HIV/AIDS and hear of the toll it is taking on the people and the country's resources. Sex trafficking and prostitution are becoming well entrenched in the society and are resistant to the efforts to counteract them. For example, Bernie Krisher and Nicholas Kristoff, a journalist for the New York Times, recently attempted to buy the freedom of two young women from a brothel in Poipet only to have one of the women run away from home to return to the brothel. Soldiers and truckers continue to bring HIV home from the brothels to wives and lovers and their children. There are reports that infection rates are leveling off in the high-risk categories; however, most of the people we talked with question those statistics. It is also possible that a high-risk category like prostitution might show a leveling off only because there are so few prostitutes left who have not been infected. For all of these reasons we have to note that the spread of HIV is not an area where we see progress.

Cambodian Freedom Fighters - On our flight back to the U.S. we read an article from the New York Times Magazine about the emergence of the Cambodian Freedom Fighters (CFF) in Long Beach, California. This small group is committed to the violent overthrow of the CPP government headed by Hun Sen in Cambodia. These freedom fighters attempted a bloody coup in Phnom Penh in the fall of 2000.

While we do not necessarily regard Hun Sen as a beacon on democracy and transparency, we give him some credit for presiding over the most peaceful election the country has ever experienced. The days and weeks of peace and stability add up as the government and the international aid community do the gritty work of true nation building. It is our opinion that the very last thing Cambodia needs right now is a violent coup. By contemporary standards an organization that works covertly to violently overthrow a democratically elected government would be considered a terrorist organization. The article goes on to say that the CFF has the explicit support of their U.S. congressman, Dana Rohrabacher of Huntington Beach, California, and

implies that certain influential lawmakers tacitly support regime change in Cambodia. While Laurie and I are no experts we are pretty sure that most of the problems that have piled up in Cambodia for the last 35 years have stemmed from illegitimate and violent regime change.

Roads Not Traveled

When we planned this trip, we were hoping to take two excursions out of Phnom Penh. Unfortunately, travel schedules did not permit us to take either of these side trips.

First, we were very interested in visiting Ratanakiri Province in northeastern Cambodia. We read that Ratanakiri is one of the most beautiful and quaint areas of Cambodia. In addition, our most recent contribution to the Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope was designated to pay for a telemedicine facility in Ban Lung, the province's major city. This facility allows doctors in the provincial clinic to send medical histories and physical exam findings via the internet simultaneously to the hospital in Phnom Penh and to the Harvard Medical Center / Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston for review and suggestions on further diagnosis and treatment. We are proud to support this effort and had wanted to physically observe the clinic, observe the examinations, and follow selected cases. As we were unable to make it to the provincial clinic, we instead were given an overview of the communication between physicians and saw how some of the cases were handled at the Telemedicine office at the Center of Hope. It was a good glimpse into the educational and material challenges that the provincial providers face, and we were inspired by the efforts and successes of the collaboration.

We also learned that Ratanakiri Province has recently been witnessing very unsettling human rights developments involving Montagnards, a minority hill people from Viet Nam. Montagnard is a French term for various ethnic minorities that live in the highlands of western Viet Nam. Ethnic Vietnamese have persecuted minorities for centuries, and antagonism toward the Montagnards was aggravated by assistance they gave to the U.S. and South Viet Nam during the Vietnam conflict. Persecution is reemerging and we are told that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of hill people have crossed over into Cambodia to seek refuge. The refugees are finding an unfriendly reception by the Cambodian government and are being returned to Vietnam as they are discovered. There are reports of bounties being placed on the heads of the Montagnards from undisclosed sources in Phnom Penh. We suspect that Cambodia's refusal of these refugees stems from Cambodia's official allegiance to Vietnam. Recall that the Cambodian people and the current government owe their existence to Vietnamese liberation from the Khmer Rouge. While in Cambodia we tried to meet with Sarah Colm, the country researcher for Human Rights Watch, but were told that she was in Ratanakiri investigating rights violations.

Second, we had hoped to fit in a few days in Lao. We have become friendly with Chuck Theusch from Milwaukee, who is developing libraries in [Viet Nam](#) and [Laos](#). The scope and meaning of Chuck's work are awe-inspiring and we wanted to see some of these libraries. We will have to do this on a future trip.

Instead, we focused this trip on learning about new efforts in and around Phnom Penh and chasing a wild goose, but a fruitful wild goose at that.