



# Position Paper: Thailand-Cambodia Disputes

Union for Civil Liberty (UCL)

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## 1. Preamble

This position paper is produced by the Union for Civil Liberty (UCL) to demonstrate and explain our official stances as far as the disputes between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Kingdom of Cambodia are concerned. The problem can be attributed to highly complicated historical roots and does have a ramification on the bilateral relations between Thailand and Cambodia and stabilities in ASEAN as a whole. The impact also falls on the livelihood of people in both nations, particularly those living along the border area. Stances and opinions expressed in the paper are focused on exploring sustainable and peaceful solutions based on international laws, mutual benefits and good relations of people in the two countries as well as the empowerment of ASEAN community.

**Background of the problem:** Border disputes between Thailand and Cambodia have stemmed from a lack of clarity of the demarcation lines stipulated in the treaty made during **the French colonial period**, particularly **the 1:200,000 scale map** adopted for the delineation of the border lines. This has given rise to questions regarding its authenticity and interpretation. In a turning point, a verdict has been delivered by the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** in the Preah Vihear Temple in 1962 in which it was adjudicated that the Preah Vihear Temple falls under Cambodia's sovereignty. In a subsequent verdict made in 2013 to interpret the previous verdict, it was ruled on the demarcation lines of the adjacent area of the Preah Vihear Temple and that has led to sporadic armed conflicts between the two parties.

**Current situation:** An armed conflict took place on 28 May 2025 at the Emerald Triangle (Chong Bok) which has since escalated into a fierce exchange of gunfire on 24 July, particularly in the province of Si Sa Ket and resulted in casualties of soldiers of both parties. Thailand's civilians bore the brunt from the use of heavy weapons by the Cambodian soldiers causing several injuries and deaths and damage to homes and hospitals. Meanwhile, in Cambodia, no damage has

reportedly inflicted on its civilians. The military clashes have led to border closure causing business transaction of the countries to stall. A diplomatic spat and the use of media, both social media and official communications have occurred. The Cambodian authorities urged their citizens who worked in Thailand to return to their country as news has been spread that if they did not return, their property would be seized by the authorities and their families would suffer. As a result, a large number of Cambodian workers have made their trip home.

Even though a ceasefire has been agreed by both parties since midnight of 28 July 2025, brokered by Malaysia as ASEAN's Chair, still the military tension persisted, while border closure and exchange of word to attack each other continued causing impact to people of both nations.

**Stances:** UCL supports solutions to peacefully settle the dispute between Thailand and Cambodia through negotiations, cooperation and respect of rights of the people in the border area. This position paper asserts that any solution must be made based on **regular and peaceful negotiations** underpinned by justice and transparency with the following reasons;

**1. Peaceful Settlement of Disputes:**

Negotiations are a key mechanism according to the Charter of the United Nations and international law. By adopting negotiations, it helps to minimize political tension and prevent military confrontation.

**2. Respect of sovereignty and national interest:** Negotiations give both nations a chance to explore ways and fully protect their sovereign rights based on historical evidence and correct technical information.

**3. Importance of joint-development:** Cooperation in border area including the development of special economic zones or projects to manage common historical heritages together helps to transform an area of conflict into an area of economic, social, and cultural opportunities and sustainable development. This will bring about mutual interest of people in both countries based on common historical background topographically and culturally.

**4. Setting sight on empowering ASEAN community:** Both Thailand and Cambodia are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with a major aim to ensure cooperation to empower ASEAN community in terms of political and security community, economic community, and social and cultural community to become one community with peace, stability and economic prosperity and good livelihood of people in the region based on respect of friendship and cooperation and the principle of sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, non-interference, consensus and unity in diversity.

## 2. Analysis and rationale

**1. Human rights:** Conflicts have exposed border people to violation of rights including the right to life and safety of body, right to housing and economic and livelihood right, and people in general have been deprived of their right to have access to correct information, to be free from fraudulent acts, manipulation and incitement for violence, domination and the perpetration of hatred.

**2. International law:** Thailand Cambodia are a member of international treaties which prescribe peaceful solutions to disputes with other nations including the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law.

**3. International relations:** The perpetration of problems can have huge ramification on economic, trade and tourism cooperation which mutually benefit both countries. It paves the way for interference of superpowers, causes division in ASEAN and destabilization in the Southeast Asian region.

**4. Economic, social and cultural impact:** People of both countries have enjoyed good relations. Thai people operate businesses and invest a lot in Cambodia. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Cambodian workers are engaged in work in various manufacturing sectors in Thailand. There is also robust trade along the border. People of both countries enjoy close relationships, historically, ethnically, socially and culturally based on a regular exchange that has lasted for a long time. The arising conflict and violence dismantle such relations, and if it is left undone, it would be difficult to restore such healthy relations.

## 3. Recommendations

To attain sustainable solutions, in this position paper, UCL has these policy recommendations to offer;

### 3.1 Short- term policy recommendations

1. May the Thai and Cambodian governments strictly adhere to the ceasefire agreement, cease military reinforcement and provocation and genuinely act in compliance with various stages agreed to achieve the settlement of the conflicts based on nonviolence and the restoration of normal relations.

2. May the Thai government demand the Cambodian government to immediately remove permanent buildings or construction in the disputed area.

3. May militaries of both parties withdraw from the disputed area and return to their bases prior to the latest armed conflict to prevent any provocation and to mitigate the risk of misunderstanding and unintentional use of violence.

4. May the Thai and Cambodian authorities refrain from harboring political discourse or public media including social media and other alternative media to disseminate fake news and information which may give rise to hate speech, particularly racial hatred or misunderstanding among people of both countries

5. May the Cambodian government act in compliance with the Ottawa Convention by removing all anti-personnel landmines in the disputed land since it might affect the bilateral negotiations which are progressing.

6. May the Cambodian government provide compensation for damage done to lives and property of citizens, hospitals and buildings in Thailand which cannot be treated as a target of the use of arms according to the international humanitarian law.

7. May the Thai and Cambodian authorities take steps to ensure the border opening to allow people of both countries to travel and conduct their economic, trade, social and cultural transaction as in normal time.

8. May the Thai and Cambodian authorities refrain from taking action opposite to an effort to empower ASEAN community, particularly by giving the chance for superpowers to interfere or to expand their influence in their counties and in ASEAN.

### 3.2 Intermediate term policy recommendations

1. Elevate bilateral negotiations: The Thailand-Cambodia Joint Boundary Committee (JBC) should serve as a key mechanism to settle border disputes since it is composed of experts on law, academics, and technicians to can together explore issues concerning the delineation through comprehensive debate and to explore and propose the sustainable solutions.

2. The Thai government should adopt diplomatic communication tools to officially raise the issues to international mechanisms in a more assertive and prompt manner.

3. Promotion of economic and social cooperation: The government should promote economic and social development projects along the border including the development of infrastructure, tourism, and border trade to preserve the good relations and to mitigate inequalities in the local area.

4. Enhancing understanding among the people: An effort should be made to promote cultural exchange, education and cooperation among civil society organizations in order to enhance good understanding and affinity among the people.

### 3.3 Long-term policy recommendations

To ensure the relations between Thailand and Cambodia can transcend the historic conflict and to forge a sense of robust strategic partnership in the future, UCL proposes the following five steps and urge both parties to adhere to them strictly;

1. **Adopting the Permanent Thailand-Cambodia and Regional Joint Committees** including the Joint Boundary Commission (JBC), the General Border Commission (GBC) and the Regional Border Commission (RBC) as a mechanism to settle border disputes nonviolently. Such delineation should be made based on the historical evidence and maps made possible by modern technologies which can be accepted by both parties.
2. **Adopting international mechanisms** including ASEAN as an observer to ensure transparency and trust.
3. **Humanitarian protection for border people** through the establishment of a due diligence to monitor human rights violence and any armed conflicts which may breach international humanitarian law and to provide assistance to the affected people.
4. **Promotion of economic and social cooperation** including border trade, joint development projects, cultural exchange and education.
5. **Management of Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand** who should receive more assistance. i.e., the dissemination of correct information to one's own citizens to prevent illegal immigration

## 4. Conclusion

UCL insists that the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia should be solved through nonviolence, respect of international human rights and humanitarian law and other concerned treaties including the Ottawa Convention. By forging cooperation and mutual trust, it can pave the way for sustainable peace and the promotion of good relations among people of both countries and the empowerment of ASEAN community. It is therefore necessary to rely on strong political will and genuine cooperation of both parties, the adherence to peaceful negotiations along with the promotion of political, economic, social and cultural cooperation. This can provide a sound foundation based on which peace and prosperity in the region can thrive.

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## History

With the desire to see Thai society progress with freedom, equality, and fraternity among its people, it is essential to create and promote the concept of human rights to be absorbed into the lives of the people. Past lessons have taught us that "only when human beings respect the value and dignity of their fellow human beings and honor each other, will peace be brought to society".

On November 24, 1973, students, academics, lawyers, and people from various professions who were aware of the value of rights and liberties came together to establish the Association for Civil Liberties (สสส.) under the name "Union for Civil Liberty (UCL)". This was done to create an organization that would assist and protect the fundamental rights and liberties of people whose rights had been violated. It was also intended to disseminate ideas and suggest solutions to human rights issues to relevant government and private sector agencies, as well as to the general public.

The UCL has continuously carried out activities to protect and promote people's rights and liberties, such as providing legal services, disseminating legal knowledge, campaigning for the abolition of unjust laws, and supporting the formation of groups for people to protect their due interests.

Later, on February 8, 1983, the UCL was granted permission to be established as an association, and its name was changed from "Union for Civil Liberty" to "Association for Civil Liberty (UCL.)". However, the English name "Union for Civil Liberty (UCL)" was kept the same.

## Objectives

1. To study and disseminate knowledge about human dignity, human rights, and the rights and liberties of people in a democratic system.
2. To provide general services to eliminate the deprivation of human dignity, human rights, and the rights and liberties of the people.
3. To cooperate and coordinate with agencies, organizations, or other associations that have similar objectives.

4. To encourage people in various localities throughout the kingdom to be aware of democracy, human dignity, human rights, and liberties in order to spread the ideas and practices to the local level.

5. To seek, establish measures, guidelines, and operational models to promote and protect human dignity and human rights, as well as to safeguard the rights and liberties of the people.

6. To protect consumer rights, conserve and protect natural resources and the environment, and promote the ecological rights of the people.

### Operating Principles

1. Membership is based on voluntary participation as a private Thai citizen.
2. It is a private organization that operates independently.
3. It does not act as a representative or spokesperson for, or for the benefit of, any specific group, but operates for the general rights and liberties of the people.
4. It is politically neutral, meaning it is not a tool for seeking political power or supporting a specific political group or interest group.

### Activities and Operations

1. **Campaigning and promoting the protection of people's rights and liberties** includes building a network of human rights lawyers, providing legal advice to people whose human rights have been violated, offering legal assistance, and disseminating human rights knowledge through the media.

2. **Education and research** The UCL conducts policy and legal studies and research related to the promotion and protection of human rights, freedoms, human dignity, and the death penalty.

3. **Drafting laws** The UCL drafts laws that are important for promoting and protecting people's rights and liberties to serve as a tool for operation and a guarantee of rights for the people. It also proposes amendments to laws that contradict human rights principles or violate people's rights.

4. **Preparing reports and disseminating human rights knowledge** The UCL prepares reports on the human rights situation in Thailand according to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), annual human rights situation reports, and publishes books and operational manuals to present to relevant agencies and disseminate to the public.

**5. Coordinating with networks and organizations** that have similar objectives to achieve the organization's goals. Currently, the UCL coordinates with various organizations and agencies such as the Department of Rights and Liberties Protection of the Ministry of Justice, Amnesty International Thailand, and the Senate Committee on Human Rights, Freedoms, and Consumer Protection.

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