



**KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA**  
PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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**Opening Statement**

**by**

**H.E. Dr. Chem Widhya**  
**Ambassador, Permanent Representative**  
**of the Kingdom of Cambodia**  
**to the United Nations**

**at the**  
**Opening Reception of the Joint Photographic Exhibition**  
**“The Faces of Angkor”**

**United Nations**  
**General Assembly Lobby**  
**June 22, 2006**

Madam Alicia Barcena, Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary General,  
H.E. Ambassador Kenzo Oshima, Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations,  
H.E. Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Vice-Chair of the “Faces of Angkor” Executive Committee,  
Ms. Hélène-Marie Gosselin, Director of the UNESCO office in New York,

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Before I start my speech may I deliver to you the synopsis of the Apsara Dance, which was just performed to you, and share with you the main message of this classical dance from the Royal Ballet of Cambodia.

The term “Apsara” is literally translated as “water of essence”. In Cambodian mythology all Apsaras were born from the foam surface of the milky way caused by the churning activities among the two opponent forces from the Kingdom of gods or heavenly beings (teveda) representing good and demons of evils (assura) in their search for Holy Water or elixir of immortality.

In numerous bas-reliefs of more than one thousand stone monuments of Angkor, there are 1,737 Apsaras. This dance is an interpretation of these bas-reliefs. The Apsara Dance portrays the Deity Mera dancing in her garden for the happiness and prosperity of the Kingdom. She is joined by her maidens, also Apsaras, who present her with flowers as expression of love and devotion of the people and the country to the gods and the force of good over the force of evil. The Apsara Dance reflects our own work at the United Nations symbolizing the struggle to unite the force of good to prevail over the force of evil.

2. Tonight is an especially auspicious time for me. This is the first time that the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Cambodia plays host to a cultural event at the United Nations since at least thirty six long years ago, reflecting the long road that this country and its people have taken to regain place in the centre of international diplomacy though that the Kingdom of Cambodia became member of the United Nations 51 years ago exactly in December 15, 1955.

3. This honour is the more profound to me as I have had a unique chance and opportunity to co-host this event, with my very distinguished Colleague and Friend, Ambassador Kenzo Oshima of Japan, who on his side is celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Japan's membership in the United Nations. I am very grateful to Ambassador Oshima for co-sponsoring this exhibition.
4. I would like to thank Ms. Barcena and Ms. Gosselin for their valuable presence at this momentous occasion. No doubt, the United Nations through UNESCO as well as Japan have played a very active and significant role in the preservation of Cambodia's magnificent cultural heritage, be it its ancient grandiose monument, its silk tradition or the classical Royal Ballet, the performance of which done by our exquisite Apsara Dancers earlier, graces tonight's event.
5. Among our Guests, to whom I feel greatly honoured for their distinguished presence, I wish particularly to welcome His Excellency Mr. Yasushi Akashi, former Head of the United Nations Transnational Authority in Cambodia – UNTAC, whose dedication and diplomatic skills have helped steered Cambodia from the abyss of destruction to its rebirth from its own ashes, like the phoenix in ancient legend.
6. I have had a unique and truly cherished opportunity to work in very close cooperation and coordination with UNTAC for peace and national reconciliation in Cambodia through my then official duty as Member of the Secretariat of the Supreme National Council, which at the time, was the sole legitimate Body of Cambodia pending the historical general elections of May 1993 which saw the birth of the new Cambodia in peace with itself and in peace with its neighbors. My closest counterpart and friend was Mr. Takahisa Kawakami, Mr. Akashi's representative to the SNC Secretariat. I have regained touch with Mr. Kawakami here in New York as he works for the Mission of Japan.
7. May I pay tribute to Mr. Baku Saito who was the source of this cultural exhibition. He, together with Mr. Chris Rainer, is the author of the amazing display of pictures of the Faces of the Angkor. From single towers made of bricks to stone temple complexes covering about 40 miles area, the temples of Angkor were originally built from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a place of worship by the Kings of the Great Khmer Empire. These statues, in their grandness and splendor, silently watched the turning of events over the centuries. In the modern days, apart from the exquisite beauty and intricate

carvings, these temples are a true testament of the culture and spirit of the Cambodian people; poise yet resilient in the face of challenges and difficulties. People who visit these temples often not only see the physical beauty, but also the spirituality that exists in these historical sites.

8. My gratitude is also conveyed to UNESCO, which has worked so hard over the years for preservation of various historical sites in the world, including the Angkor, as well as for its support for tonight's occasion. I also would like to thank the United Nations Department of Public Information and Executive Committee of the "Faces of Angkor" for their full support and involvement in the preparation of this event.

To all of them and to all of you, may I say from the bottom of my heart.

Thank You.