

Chapter 16

The Crisis in Kampuchea

The turmoil in Indo-China in the generation after the second World War was the most protractedly painful of all the post-colonial disentanglements. To the world at large, the high point of the South-East Asian drama was reached with the build-up and engagement of US military forces in Vietnam, and their subsequent withdrawal from the peninsula. But for the humanitarian organizations, the ultimate challenge came with the crisis which consumed Kampuchea during 1979 and 1980.

Many believed that a long train of nightmarish events had brought an entire nation to the brink of extinction, and that only a massive international rescue operation had any hope of saving it. The scale of the emergency was not the largest to date: more people were affected in Bangladesh following the civil war and natural calamities of the early 1970s, as during the long years of African drought. But in degree, the crisis in Kampuchea was more intense, a black hole among emergencies, terrible in its unfathomable currents. By the natural law of humanitarian relief, the more acute the human needs and the more tangled their political context, the more difficult the task of emergency assistance, and the more subject to error and public criticism. From the crisis in Kampuchea, nobody emerged unscathed.

On 7 January 1979, the Vietnamese Army entered Phnom Penh, the capital of Democratic Kampuchea, and overthrew the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge, under Pol Pot, had been in power since April 1975 and, over the course of nearly four years, they had carried out a ruthless revolutionary experiment. Within days of their victory they had emptied the cities at gunpoint, including the hospitals whose most severely-ill patients were propelled onto the streets in their beds. They had then proceeded to dismantle the country's intellectual and administrative structure; outlaw religious worship and all kinds of learning; abolish money; and force every man, woman, and child to live under a rigid system of collective farming. The most trivial infringement of the rules—wearing eye glasses, reading a book, eating at the wrong time of day—was subject to fearful punishment, even death.

Only a few outsiders were invited to witness the 'new miracle' of Democratic Kampuchea. The interpretation of their accounts and the contrasting

stories of refugees fleeing to Thailand fell victim to the ideological polarization which afflicted all viewpoints on events in the peninsula. Until the Khmer Rouge fell in January 1979, the full dimensions of their experiment had been largely a matter of conjecture in the rest of the world. As the scale of the atrocities suffered by the Kampuchean people was gradually revealed after the Vietnamese invasion, no-one could question that liberation had been necessary. But the Kampucheans' misfortune was that their liberator was their own traditional enemy, as well as one feared and disliked by many countries in Asia, and distrusted by their Western allies. The exodus of boat people from Vietnam was reaching its peak at this time, and international tempers had been inflamed by their treatment. Attitudes towards Vietnam's new client regime in Phnom Penh were sharply divided along the East-West axis, with the result that the People's Republic of Kampuchea, headed by Heng Samrin, failed to gain recognition as the country's legitimate authority by a majority of UN member States.

While Western diplomatic circles tied themselves in knots between revulsion against the Khmer Rouge and condemnation of Vietnamese aggression, the people in Kampuchea awoke as if from a long and hideous dream. During the first months of 1979, the agricultural camps were disbanded and people began to criss-cross the country, coming out of hiding, returning to their villages, looking for family members whom they had lost. Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge forces retreated towards the border with Thailand and fighting continued in the north-west.

Kampucheans trapped by the continuing warfare, whatever their sympathies, began to flee across the Thai border, or to take refuge in makeshift camps nearby. The two dimensions of the Kampuchean crisis were beginning to crystallize. The number of Kampuchean refugees seeking sanctuary in or close to Thailand was growing, and their fate was inextricably tangled with Khmer Rouge action against the Vietnamese from bases near the Thai border. Within Kampuchea, a people was emerging from collective trauma, trying to piece together lives and families shattered by the Khmer Rouge, and a skeletal People's Revolutionary Council was trying to impose some kind of order. The Khmer Rouge had described 1975 as 'year zero'. Four years later, another 'year zero' had dawned.

Help from outside was essential. But since the rest of the world was anti-pathetic towards the Phnom Penh regime, it relied exclusively on the Vietnamese and their Socialist allies. In January 1979, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Unicef both began offering aid to Kampuchea, through their offices in Hanoi. These two organizations formed the natural vanguard of international humanitarian assistance in a situation enmeshed in political complications, as they had previously done during the Nigerian civil war and in other crises. Their respective mandates, and established precedent, exonerated them from taking factors other than human need into consideration. The UN itself and most of its system of

agencies was inhibited by the principle that the normal procedure is for a member State to request their assistance. In the case of Kampuchea, the member State was Democratic Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot, not the new People's Republic under Heng Samrin.

The months went by and neither the ICRC nor Unicef received any positive reply from the Heng Samrin authorities. By May 1979, the handful of journalists and diplomats allowed to visit Kampuchea began to raise fears of impending famine. The tremendous dislocation of people in the early months of the year had coincided with the premonsoon and early monsoon planting season. Millions of acres of rice paddies had been left unplanted at a time when planting should be far advanced. Estimates of the probable consequences on the 1979 crop were pure guesswork. If anything resembling a survey had been undertaken, no-one in the international aid community was aware of it. Anxieties began to mount.

In May, Unicef held its annual Executive Board session in Mexico City. It decided to lend its support to the current ICRC attempt to send a survey mission to Kampuchea, and set up a special fund for a joint emergency programme. Labouisse instructed his representative in Hanoi, Bertram Collins, to step up his overtures to the Vietnamese to gain permission for a Unicef visit. In early July, the authorities in Phnom Penh at last asked for help from the UN. They wanted food for more than two million people—half the remaining population—who, they said, were threatened by famine. At the same time, word finally came from the Kampuchean ambassador in Hanoi that a representative from both Unicef and the ICRC would be welcomed in Phnom Penh. The two men selected by their respective chiefs were Jacques Beaumont from Unicef, a Frenchman with an astute grasp of political sensitivities and extensive relief experience in Indo-China, and François Bugnion, a lawyer and longtime ICRC delegate. Aware of the damage publicity could cause to such a tricky endeavour, Labouisse imposed complete discretion about the mission to Kampuchea. No announcement should be made; only those who had to be—UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, for example—would be kept informed.

On 17 July, Beaumont and Bugnion flew to Phnom Penh from Ho Chi Minh City with suitcases full of medicines and visas valid for two days only. In the forty-eight hours allowed them by the Heng Samrin authorities, they had to try and assess the needs of a destitute country, and negotiate with a tiny handful of suspicious and inexperienced officials a relief operation more intricate, more wide-ranging and potentially larger than anything ever before undertaken. On their visit, a great deal depended.

Labouisse and his senior staff had experience in the delicate manoeuvres required to open doors to Unicef assistance in Communist Indo-China. At the 1967 Executive Board session, Dr Mande, the delegate of France, had

raised the question of assistance to both parts of Vietnam, North as well as South. For many years up to this time the Board had routinely agreed to support maternity care, tuberculosis control and other typical Unicef-assisted projects in the South. The first allocations dated from 1952, when it had been intended that aid for children's hospitals would reach provinces throughout Vietnam. But after the country was 'temporarily' partitioned by the Geneva Accords in 1954, it had proved impracticable to extend help to the North. President Ho Chi Minh's regime in Hanoi was not recognized by the UN and he sought no relationship with any part of a body he regarded as a creature of the Western alliance.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Unicef continued to deliver maternity kits, BCG vaccines, dried milk powder, school books and furniture to the Government in Saigon, where their use was overseen by one of Sam Keeny's key lieutenants, Margaret Gaan. Difficult as it was to ignore the erupting turmoil, Gaan tried always to stress the longterm nature of whatever assistance was offered, to ensure that midwives were trained, paediatric wards equipped, and newborn babies visited in the villages whatever was going on politically and militarily. Up till 1965, Unicef spent more than \$1.5 million on these programmes. But war increasingly intruded, disrupting health services and drawing medical staff away. From 1964, when the scale of the war accelerated sharply, Unicef also gave help for children who had been wounded, orphaned or abandoned. By 1967, it was no longer possible to pretend that the emergency was simply a background noise.

American bombing of North Vietnam began in February 1965. The theatre of military engagement had been extended, with all its international consequences. For Unicef, the critical aspect was that children were now suffering the direct effects of war in the North as well as in the South. Apart from questions of need, there were also the inevitable political ramifications, from which no humanitarian démarche in Indo-China was immune. A large proportion of Unicef's resources came from the US and its Executive Director was a US citizen. If Unicef failed to be even-handed towards all the children of Vietnam, it risked accusation of partiality. Senior delegates to the Executive Board from countries who disapproved of the war's escalation, notably Robert Mande of France and Nils Thedin of Sweden, were privately beginning to express anxiety to Labouisse; others who backed the North Vietnamese were unlikely to tolerate continued assistance to the children of one side only. Labouisse was deeply concerned to uphold the principle of non-discrimination and give humanitarian relief wherever it was needed. But there was a problem: the North Vietnamese had not requested help. *Nor did they seem likely to do so. They did not believe that the UN was an impartial body and were in no hurry to become a supplicant for anything it offered.*

For any UN organization, including Unicef, to send relief to any country

there normally has to be an invitation from the government, or at least a nod in its direction. To send help to a country that does not want it can be interpreted as interference in its sovereign affairs. Principles aside, no agreement to the receipt of relief supplies means no consignee for their delivery nor any guarantee as to whether they will be distributed or to whom. In the case of North Vietnam, Unicef might have used the North Vietnamese Red Cross Society through the League of Red Cross Societies as a third party; but Hanoi's attitude towards the international nongovernmental establishment seemed no more favourable than towards the inter-governmental. Neither the League nor the International Committee of the Red Cross had been asked for relief; as a channel for Unicef supplies they too were inoperative.

Somehow, a way must be found to penetrate the psychological armour of the North Vietnamese. Early in 1967, Labouisse talked with the ICRC and the League, both trying to open a route to Hanoi. He hoped that if either was successful, Unicef supplies could go in on Red Cross coat tails. When they made no progress, Labouisse realized that an independent Unicef initiative should be tried.

When Dr Mande proposed in the Executive Board that Unicef should find a way of helping children in both theatres of the war, the way was officially cleared for Labouisse to take the first steps. The move also helped to pre-empt a political row in the Board over aid proposed for Saigon. Although the projects in the South to which approval was being sought were described as longterm—mere extensions of existing programmes—it took no great insight to realize that the reason they were being extended yet again was that war was constantly wrecking their progress. The USSR was outspokenly opposed to further aid, and the Polish delegate, Dr Boguslaw Kozusznik, had 'serious doubts'.

In this question of opening up Unicef contacts with North Vietnam, the role of the Executive Board was critical. The senior statesmen—Nils Thedin, Robert Mande, Senator Avocato Montini of Italy and Hans Konzett of Switzerland—knew how to raise highly controversial issues in a non-controversial way. They and their predecessors had made it an unwritten rule of Executive Board proceedings that to introduce comments of a political nature was a shameful breach of etiquette.

In 1967, no subject generated more international heat than the war in Vietnam. Yet the discussion of Mande's proposal in the Unicef Board was almost serene. Even the US expressed cautious interest. The outcome was that Labouisse was instructed to 'study ways and means whereby the help of Unicef could be extended with the co-operation of Red Cross organizations, in emergency situations, to both parts of Vietnam'. Without this clear sanction from the Board, he would not have been able to proceed.

Labouisse's first step was to send an aide-memoire to the North Vietnamese authorities, suggesting that the Red Cross might help deliver Unicef assist-

ance. He received no answer. At the end of the year, his diplomatic antennae picked up signals that the North Vietnamese were willing to discuss the idea. Charles Egger went to Paris in January 1968 and held discussions at the North Vietnamese mission. Another aide-memoire was sent. More silence. And there, for the time being, efforts stalled.

By the time the next Board session came round, the fortunes of the war in Vietnam had changed. In late January 1968, communist forces in the South mounted the Tet offensive. The ferocity of the fighting and its mounting unpopularity in the US were gradually pushing the combatants towards the conference table. By now Unicef's representative in Saigon, Bernard Klausener, was devoting all his energies to emergency relief. In the even more highly-charged political atmosphere, Labouisse brought Klausener to New York to present to the Executive Board a reassuring description of Unicef's work. Thousands of children were daily receiving milk from kitchens set up in and around Saigon by government social workers and Red Cross committees. Some Board members protested: not at the feeding of children, but that some of the supplies were being handed over to government authorities rather than to the Red Cross. More contentious yet was the fact that no progress had been made in arranging for aid to be sent to the North.

Since the Tet offensive, US bombardment of the North had reached a new intensity and suffering was thought to be acute. Certain delegates wanted to push Unicef into sending relief supplies to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam without the formal invitation and plan for distribution stipulated as a precondition. An important principle was at stake: if normal procedures were to be waived in one set of circumstances, they might have to be waived in others. At this time, Labouisse was equally embroiled in diplomatic manoeuvres to provide help to the victims of the Nigerian civil war. Without the most strict adhesion to regular practice, the ability of Unicef to give emergency relief according to its mandate could be permanently compromised. After a long wrangle in which draft resolutions and amendments poured down like confetti, the Board agreed to a compromise which essentially repeated the *status quo*—to study ways and means to send aid to both sides—established the year before. Dr Boguslaw Kozusznik, the Polish delegate, was one of those who did not feel that enough was being done to open up the channels for sending aid to North Vietnam. Along with some others, he abstained.

As a result of this debate, the seeds of a new manoeuvre were planted. Poland had shown itself determined that Unicef assistance reach North Vietnam; Kozusznik himself, through friendly contacts between the Socialist countries, might be able to obtain the necessary agreement by visiting Hanoi. Labouisse enthusiastically encouraged this proposal; but it took time. Hanoi's invitation to Kozusznik finally arrived the following spring. In May 1969, the Secretary-General of the League of Red Cross Societies

visited Hanoi and arranged with local officials of the Red Cross Society to send in drugs and medical supplies. Kozusznik's visit followed shortly afterwards. He thereby took the first concrete step towards an agreement between the Hanoi authorities and Unicef, but his report was couched in terms which did not assuage US ambivalence about the idea of Unicef aid to North Vietnam. With suspicion still dominating the attitudes of both sides, the process of agreement was still far from complete. In the meantime, Unicef provided some assistance to the North through the channels set up by the Red Cross. Special contributions of \$200,000 from the Netherlands and Switzerland were used. On Kozusznik's recommendation, the money was spent on cloth for children's clothing. It was a gesture, but it was something.

Throughout this period, peace negotiations were dragging on in Paris. In late 1972, it finally began to seem as though, in Kissinger's phrase, peace was at hand. Early in 1973, agreement was reached and a cease-fire declared. Within the UN, discussions began about a possible joint programme of Indo-Chinese rehabilitation, along the lines of that headed by Sir Robert Jackson in postwar Bangladesh. Labouisse then set up a special headquarters staff group for Indo-China whose task was to analyze the needs of children in all parts of the peninsula and start new initiatives. It was a particular response to a particular, and very sensitive, situation. The withdrawal of US troops from South Vietnam—the principal outcome of the Paris Agreement—did not at all mean that peace had arrived. The war had merely been handed back to its Indo-Chinese protagonists.

By now both Laos and Kampuchea were engulfed in their own offshoots of the Vietnamese turmoil. In his quietly unshakeable way, and in the knowledge that he would provoke great disapproval from the US, Labouisse reaffirmed the principle that Unicef aid was available to any administration, legally-constituted or otherwise, that wanted to do something for children in whatever territory it controlled. At the head of his Indo-China Peninsula Liaison Group, he placed a longtime career officer, Martin Sandberg, a Norwegian who had just concluded a tour as his representative in Indonesia. Jacques Beaumont of France was his deputy. In all its aspects—negotiating, estimating needs, drawing up programmes, public information (or non-information), fund raising—the group operated along special lines and reported direct to Labouisse. Dick Heyward and Charles Egger were also closely involved.

Discretion was vital. The first task was to try and find ways to provide assistance for children in all areas; this entailed making contact with groups occupying and administering territory not under government control: the Pathet Lao in Laos; the Khmer Rouge in what was then still Cambodia; and the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam. The conduit to all of these, and the most important administration in its own right, was the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

A series of diplomatic moves were made in Paris and in Stockholm. In due course, Hanoi reacted.

At the end of June 1973, Sandberg and Beaumont flew to North Vietnam. For both men, to be the first UN officials ever to be received in Hanoi was an unforgettable experience. They explained how Unicef worked and tried to win the confidence of officials. These were introduced as members of the North Vietnam Red Cross; but they were also officials of various ministries. Negotiations opened with the presentation to Unicef of a shopping list of medical items. Treading carefully, Sandberg and Beaumont began to question the rationale behind the request: they wanted to show that Unicef expected to be brought into a discussion about the nature of programmes and not simply treated as a source of free imported goods. It was to take some years before this aspect of the Unicef *modus operandi* was fully appreciated. A list of emergency supplies was agreed, and the two Unicef officials flew back to New York with a tremendous sense of achievement. It was a breakthrough. After six years of treading on eggshells, Unicef had finally managed to open up a direct channel of aid to the children of North Vietnam.

Over the course of the next two years, Unicef gradually expanded its Indo-Chinese programme. The 1973 Executive Board agreed to expenditures of up to \$30 million over two years, and the 1974 Executive Board raised the figure to \$44 million to the end of 1975. Most of the resources were provided by special contributions; Federal Republic of Germany, Norway and Denmark were the most generous donors. The Board also committed some of Unicef's regular income, over the protest of the US, which tried to prevent any of its contribution going to children in North Vietnam. Until 1975, almost all Unicef aid went to education; many primary schools had been destroyed or damaged by bombardment. Jacques Beaumont paid periodic visits to Hanoi to check on progress, and he also opened up contacts there with representatives of the South Vietnamese PRG and the Khmer Rouge.

In Laos, although the situation remained unstable, programmes with some long-lasting benefit began to inch forward following the cease-fire negotiated in January 1973. A Unicef office was set up in Vientiane in September 1973. The following April, when a provisional government divided the country into two zones administered respectively by the Royal Lao Government and the Pathet Lao, Unicef was able to maintain working relationships with both sides and channel some assistance to both parts of the country. Local hospitals and maternal and child-health centres were reconstructed, and well-drilling and classroom repairs began.

The end of the war in Vietnam finally brought to a conclusion the long struggle for ascendancy in Laos. The country was reunified, the monarchy abolished, and the Lao Democratic Republic declared in December 1975. When a longterm plan for the development of health and education

services throughout the country was prepared early in 1976, Unicef was poised to offer substantial assistance.

In South Vietnam and Cambodia, reasonable progress was sustained during 1973 and most of 1974. The Cambodian Government, first under Prince Sihanouk and later under Lon Nol, welcomed Unicef assistance. A Unicef office opened in Phnom Penh in November 1973 under Paul Ignatieff, a young Canadian; the Saigon office expanded under the leadership of Ralph Eckert, a Swiss national of long-standing Unicef experience. Amidst all the insecurity of ongoing warfare, efforts still went on to build classrooms, train teachers, organize kindergartens, run immunization campaigns and provide rehabilitation for wounded children. Some help was given to areas under the respective control of the Khmer Rouge opposition in Cambodia and the Provisional Revolutionary Government in South Vietnam, through their offices in Hanoi. But most went through 'normal' channels: the internationally-recognized governments clinging to control over shrinking territory.

At the end of 1974, hostilities began to intensify once again. In spring 1975 the North Vietnamese began their final offensive towards Saigon; simultaneously, the Khmer Rouge were driving towards Phnom Penh. In what had become a familiar and agonizing pattern, programmes originally designed to help restore permanent services for children ground to a halt and relief was hastily substituted. As the gunfire drew closer and closer, immediate needs for food and shelter for families desperately fleeing the countryside for the safety of the cities were all that counted.

At Unicef headquarters, the Indo-China Group assumed that sooner rather than later the fighting would cease, and programmes of rehabilitation would be needed. Contacts with the expected victors in both countries were already favourably established and aid had already been accepted by them. Sandberg and his colleagues estimated that up to \$50 million would be needed for Unicef's part in the postwar rehabilitation in Cambodia and South Vietnam. In the uncertainty of events, they tried to make whatever preparations were practicable.

April 1975 saw the war come to its bitter conclusion, first in Phnom Penh and then in Saigon. Throughout the final weeks, Unicef stepped up emergency aid with airlifts of shelter materials, children's food and blankets, and medical supplies from stocks held at its main warehouse in Copenhagen and others in Bangkok and Singapore. On the ground, its staff worked with Red Cross medical teams and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Secretary-General Waldheim, responding to desperate appeals from Saigon, made an appeal for international aid to be channelled through Unicef and UNHCR. On 17 April, he announced that he had set up a special UN fund for Indo-Chinese relief under Sir Robert Jackson, who would co-ordinate the emergency programme for the whole UN system. When the North Vietnamese streamed into Saigon at the end of April, air

access was suspended and all international aid came temporarily to a halt. Ralph Eckert, Unicef's representative in Saigon, stayed on in the hope of working out a rehabilitation programme with the new authorities. He waited in vain. A few weeks later the PRG asked him to close the office. All aid for the South would now be channelled through Hanoi.

The final victory of the Communist forces in the peninsula meant a re-arrangement of Unicef's activities. Previously there had been 'the Indo-Chinese emergency', in which *ad hoc* arrangements, mostly for emergency relief, were made from day-to-day with whomsoever was in control in a given area. Now this loosely-knit programme for an entire region must give way to a set of regular country programmes. Given the decisive political reorientation, the critical theatre of operations was now in North Vietnam. Building on the good relations established by Beaumont, Sandberg and the existing programmes of Unicef assistance, Labouisse managed to obtain the agreement of the North Vietnamese to a permanent Unicef set-up in Hanoi.

The 'Unicef mission'—a room in the hotel inhabited by the handful of foreign missions and delegations in Hanoi, with no separate telephone, vehicle or any office facilities—was opened in April just before hostilities ceased. Dr François Rémy, a Frenchman who had been with Unicef since the late 1960s and was then serving in North Africa, was asked by Labouisse to take charge; he was to be assisted by a young Welshman, Ian Hopwood. Rémy arrived in early July, by which time Hopwood was installed and relief supplies jointly administered by Unicef and UNHCR were on their way to the South. After visits to Saigon and the provinces worst affected by the long years of war, Rémy set in motion Unicef assistance for the rehabilitation of health and education services.

Until the reunification of Vietnam in July 1976, Rémy's dealings concerning Unicef assistance to the South were with the PRG. He and Hopwood found their relationship with the North Vietnamese much more difficult. For many weeks, they waited in their 'office' in Hanoi in the company of two veteran Vietnamese campaigners assigned to look after them, and received rare and inconclusive visits from Red Cross officials.

Now that the emergency was over, Rémy was unwilling to accept any more shopping lists for imported supplies. Over the course of the next three years, Unicef expected to spend around \$20 million in the North. Different criteria had to be applied. Up to now, the main item on the list had been prefabricated primary schools from Switzerland. Rémy did not regard these as cost-effective. Hundreds more classrooms could be built if local materials and construction methods were used. The North Vietnamese did not appreciate Rémy's cancellation of further prefabricated schools, and took time to understand that no sinister motive inspired his wish to be involved in planning how Unicef's assistance would be used.

Rémy was deeply impressed by the way in which the North Vietnamese

had, since independence in 1954, applied the policy of basic services, just now being articulated by Unicef. Even while waging a protracted war, they had brought medical care, unsophisticated though it was, to almost every mother in every rural hamlet. In two years, Rémy's eye, practised by years of service in the French colonial medical services in North Africa, saw only one case of serious undernutrition in a small child. The contrast with the South was dramatic, where such sights were commonplace. But health and nutrition services were carried out in the most threadbare circumstances. Rémy sought to use Unicef support to upgrade medical facilities, equipment, drugs and training, and similarly make modest improvements in day-care and primary schooling. In time, he penetrated Vietnamese reserve and won the confidence of officialdom. His place was taken in 1977 by a Guyanan, Bertram Collins, whose task it later became to try and smooth Unicef's path into a Kampuchea that had now become a client State of Vietnam.

In Cambodia, conquered by the Khmer Rouge and renamed the Democratic Republic of Kampuchea, the aftermath of the Vietnam war led in a very different direction. There too, until the encirclement of Phnom Penh during the final weeks before their triumphant entry on 17 April 1975, every attempt was made to maintain some kind of programme operations. Up until the last throes of the conflict when all was subsumed in emergency relief for the vast numbers of people flocking to Phnom Penh, classrooms continued to be built, teachers trained, text-books and note-books distributed, new kindergartens organized, playthings given out, drugs and diet supplements sent to hospitals, along with prosthetics for physically-handicapped children. Because of the conflict in the countryside, most of the work was confined to Phnom Penh and areas nearby. As government disintegrated, Unicef worked more closely with CARE, the US voluntary agency, and Save the Children of the UK.

In retrospect, the careful accounting of all the Unicef inputs seems pathetic; at the time there were clear indications from the Khmer Rouge that they would welcome Unicef's co-operation in their rehabilitation of the wartorn country. In the event, all was razed, abolished, burned, and everything to do with Western ideas or institutions made a cause for persecution in the months to come.

In the days following the Khmer Rouge takeover, the two Unicef officials who stayed to see things through—Paul Ignatieff, the representative, and Joseph Acar, a young Lebanese colleague—witnessed the evacuation at gunpoint of the entire city of Phnom Penh. Along with other remaining expatriates, they took refuge in the French Embassy compound. There, they did their best by arranging French passports and instant marriages to protect the lives of their twenty Cambodian colleagues by enabling at least some of them to leave the country: to no avail. In early May, the two men were driven by truck to the Thai border. Two weeks later, Ignatieff

addressed the Executive Board. He tried to speak unemotionally about the events in Phnom Penh, and of the superb performance of the local staff they had left behind. He expressed his hope that the new authorities would soon invite Unicef to resume its aid for the stricken children of Cambodia.

The new authorities did no such thing. Unicef's presence in Democratic Kampuchea, like that of all other international UN and nongovernmental organizations, was not wanted. Pol Pot's revolutionary experiment in government was to be an entirely Khmer affair. It took an invasion by Vietnam in January 1979 to end the nightmare of national self-destruction, the most extraordinary infliction of suffering by a people on its own in the name of a 'better order' that can ever have been systematically carried out in the history of Mankind.

And then another chapter of agony began.

The two-day visit of Jacques Beaumont of Unicef and François Bugnion of the ICRC to Phnom Penh in mid-July 1979 must rank as one of the most bizarre and frustrating quests in the history of international relief. It was the second time in Beaumont's life that he had been the first UN official granted a tiny glimpse into a closed and mysterious country, believed to be the victim of tremendous suffering—but unwilling for its own reasons to display it, even to those trying to come to its aid.

If there were parallels with his 1973 trip to North Vietnam, the difficulties of interpretation were much more acute, as were those of winning the confidence of officials. Beaumont and Bugnion did not leave the capital. What they saw was the city's total dereliction; hospitals, with no drugs and almost no medical staff, flooded with patients; hunger in the faces of children in hopelessly overcrowded and filthy orphanages; people everywhere weak and still glazed with trauma. They were convinced that the grimmest predictions of disaster in the whole country had to be taken seriously. But they were unable to persuade President Heng Samrin to allow them the permanent presence in the country required to oversee the aid they wanted to bring in. Obligated to return to Vietnam without any agreement, they began to organize shipments of supplies with no certainty of ever being allowed back in.

At the time of Beaumont's and Bugnion's visit, officials of the new regime had declared that two-and-a-quarter million people in the People's Republic of Kampuchea—the country's new designation—were in imminent danger of starvation. They had appealed to the UN World Food Programme for urgent delivery of 108,000 tons of rice and quantities of other foodstuffs. This crude statement of need was the only one available to officials of the international organizations, and remained so for many months. By their calculations, it required a delivery and distribution rate of 1000 tons of food a day to save more than half the four million people said to have

survived the rigours of Pol Pot's social experiment. Not until 13 October—three months to the day after Beaumont and Bugnion flew out of Phnom Penh after their first visit—was the machinery in place to start moving into the country a volume of food which even approximated to this amount. Every conceivable obstacle had blocked the progress of the two organizations' joint attempt to mount a relief programme corresponding to the tradition of political impartiality lying at the heart of their respective mandates.

Labouisse believed that navigating the obstacles in the way of mounting the major relief operation required for Kampuchea required an almost total information blackout on the Unicef/ICRC diplomatic manoeuvres and everything to do with them. ICRC was in full agreement. But events nearly derailed the entire enterprise.

In early September, mounting alarm in the international press about the prospect of famine in Kampuchea reached a crescendo. The British aid agency Oxfam fuelled the outcry by giving maximum publicity to the report of their own representative, Jim Howard, just returned from Phnom Penh with a tale of horror. Howard had seen what Beaumont—who had by now been twice to Phnom Penh—had seen. But where Unicef and ICRC opted for discretion in order to make possible a dialogue in Phnom Penh, Oxfam put Howard on the most public of platforms. His searing accounts were published everywhere.

As in the case of the Nigerian civil war, strong passions were aroused by the repeated use of the words 'genocide' and 'holocaust' to Khmer Rouge atrocities, only now being revealed in all their grisly detail. Moral outrage about these crimes, crimes from which the Kampuchean people had been released by the Vietnamese, had a potent influence on the way the world now responded to the threat of famine. An assumption developed that it was only the antipathy of the Western countries and their South-East Asian allies towards Vietnam which stood in the way of the desperately-needed rescue operation. The international organizations—UN and Red Cross—were perceived as dragging their feet and openly criticized. The need for absolute discretion, seen by Labouisse as vital to the still-undecided outcome of Beaumont's and Bugnion's overtures to the Heng Samrin regime, inhibited Unicef from any public defence. The situation for both Unicef and the ICRC was extremely uncomfortable.

The core of the problem lay in the refusal of most of the governments in the world to recognize the Heng Samrin regime as the legitimate government in Kampuchea. The fact of Khmer Rouge atrocity was weighed in the international balance, and found not to justify armed Vietnamese aggression. Some Asian countries were anxious to keep armed resistance against Vietnamese forces in the field. If a principal organ of that resistance was the Khmer Rouge, so be it. When the UN General Assembly opened in New York on 18 September, it spent three days discussing who should

represent Kampuchea; finally, the Khmer Rouge representative took the seat.

To many around the world, with revelations about camps, mass graves and torture chambers fresh in their minds, the UN had forfeited all claim to morality. The Khmer people had desperately needed liberation and the Vietnamese Army had provided it. But the 'act of aggression' required to do so seemed to many to be all that the UN was prepared to notice. Scepticism that any UN organization could be trying its best to mount a relief operation in co-operation with the regime in Phnom Penh reached its peak. Ironically, this was the same session of the General Assembly which later spent three days extolling the merits of all the initiatives taken for humanity during the course of the International Year of the Child.

Labouisse and Charles Egger, chief lieutenant throughout the crisis, did not enjoy seeing Unicef's name dragged through the mud. But they and their counterparts at ICRC headquarters in Geneva were becoming increasingly agonized by the failure of Beaumont and Bugnion to obtain agreement from the authorities in Phnom Penh to the start of a major relief operation. On 9 September, the UN Secretary-General had designated Unicef the lead agency in the UN system for the delivery of relief to Kampuchea. This decision, about which both Labouisse and Egger expressed misgivings to Waldheim, was inspired by Unicef's record of providing relief on both sides of a civil conflict, which—from the perspective of the UN—over-rode the problem posed by the lack of recognition for the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Thus, although the World Food Programme would procure and ship the necessary food and although other UN organizations—notably FAO—would give vital assistance in the months to come, relief would enter the famine-stricken country under the joint Unicef/ICRC umbrella. But while, in UN eyes, Unicef's humanitarian mandate immunized it from the charge of political discrimination, the authorities in Phnom Penh took a very different view. They and their Vietnamese patrons placed a high premium on international respectability. The decision in the UN to seat the Pol Pot representative was a major setback; it coloured, not surprisingly, their attitude towards everything undertaken in the name of the UN.

Simultaneously with the events unfolding at the UN, Beaumont and Bugnion were once again in Phnom Penh, ignoring requests that they leave the country on the aircraft which had been allowed to land a few relief cargoes. On 28 September 1979, the two men were informed in writing for the first time that the Phnom Penh authorities accepted their plan for a relief operation and a continuing presence in the country on three conditions. The first was that they should submit detailed plans; this was perfectly agreeable. The second was that all distribution would be carried out by the authorities; this did not facilitate the free and independent monitoring they had been asking for, but this they felt they had to concede.

The third was that they undertake not to give any relief to Kampucheans, wherever situated, including in areas of the country still controlled by the Khmer Rouge, except through Phnom Penh. This was inadmissible. Unicef had always upheld the principle of giving aid to children on both sides of a conflict. Under the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC was similarly obligated. This was a condition which neither organization would ever accept.

At the time it seemed as though little more than a principle was at stake. Although it was known that there were Kampucheans trying to cross the border into Thailand, the Thai Army was holding them back and only a trickle were getting through. Back in July, at the time when Beaumont first went to Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge representatives at the UN in New York had paid a call on Labouisse. They had protested Beaumont's visit and objected to Unicef giving any aid through the 'illegal' government of Heng Samrin. They had also told Labouisse that there were mothers and children in the north-west of the country, just across the Thai border, who were suffering as acutely as any elsewhere. Labouisse replied that it was Unicef's policy to help all children in need that it could reach, no matter where they were; he also pointed out that Unicef had wanted to go on providing assistance for Kampuchean children during 1975-79, but had been forcibly ejected by the Pol Pot regime.

Following this encounter, Labouisse enjoined Roberto Esquerva-Barry, his Regional Director in Bangkok, to reconnoitre quietly the truth of the Khmer Rouge report of suffering children in the north-west, and see what Unicef could do. The first Unicef/Red Cross mission into Kampuchean territory under Khmer Rouge and other opposition control took place on 17 September. The pitiful condition of the thousands of women and children harboured there for whatever reason was profoundly shocking, matching in human misery any eyewitness account from Phnom Penh itself. Following this discovery, Labouisse authorized relief on a modest scale but instructed that no public statement should be issued concerning Unicef's action. He was fearful that if the authorities in Phnom Penh heard of it, they would pull the rug out from under Beaumont.

The widespread view was that, although some relief was clearly needed around the border, the main effort to save the Khmer people from extinction must go into Kampuchea itself. The Director-General of Oxfam, Brian Walker, who flew into Phnom Penh at the end of September in the third plane-load of relief goods sent by Oxfam, was put under pressure by the Heng Samrin regime to sacrifice the principle that Unicef and ICRC insisted upon. Walker finally agreed, as a condition of a relief effort being mounted by a consortium of voluntary agencies under Oxfam's leadership, not to feed Kampucheans up on the Thai border under the protection of the Khmer Rouge.

Walker was also prepared to disassociate the Oxfam relief operation from that run by Unicef and the ICRC. The fact that, however many

voluntary organizations joined in, he could never command international resources on a remotely comparable scale to the combined weight of the UN and the international institutions of the Red Cross, seemed less important to Walker than to open up channels for the Oxfam consortium programme. The comparative strengths of the two sets of organizations were imperfectly understood by Heng Samrin's inexperienced officials. The satisfactory agreement they reached with Oxfam was yet another temporary setback to Beaumont and Bugnion's own negotiations. The international humanitarian community was splitting into two camps, and there was a clear danger that one group might be played off against the other.

Meanwhile, on 10 October the Vietnamese Army launched a new offensive against the Khmer Rouge resistance. Within seventeen days, 130,000 Kampucheans, the vast majority ordinary people trapped by the fighting, had fled across the border into Thailand. Another 120,000 were right behind them, only three miles away. They were sick, starving and in a lamentable state. On the principle that Unicef and the ICRC refused to concede in Phnom Penh hung the fate of these people, and hundreds of thousands more.

In Phnom Penh, Beaumont and Bugnion continued their nerve-racking negotiations. In the end, the impasse on the Heng Samrin condition that no aid be given through opposition forces was broken by a formula to which neither side formally assented: they simply agreed to disagree, and understood, warily, that this constituted 'agreement' of a sort. Although the Kampuchean officials never withdrew the condition, and continued to protest to Unicef and ICRC representatives in Phnom Penh about what gradually developed into a major operation on and near the Thai border, the programme inside the country now began to go ahead in force. On 13 October, daily relief flights began, using an RAF Hercules loaned by the UK. The airlift out of Bangkok and Singapore gradually increased in volume as other countries lent planes, and at its peak flew five missions a day.

Also on 13 October, the first major Oxfam relief consignment—and the first of any to be sent by sea—arrived by barge from Singapore, under the redoubtable captaincy of Guy Stringer, Oxfam's Deputy Director. Stringer, who realized that the Phnom Penh officials did not after all intend to refuse aid from Unicef and ICRC, forgot about Oxfam's commitment not to work with the international heavyweights and made peace with his Unicef and ICRC colleagues. The danger of two competitive and overlapping programmes was averted.

During the next weeks, the various organizations managed to increase their staffs in Kampuchea and, for the first time, to visit a few areas outside Phnom Penh. Beaumont, sick and exhausted, had seen the Unicef mission through the perilous negotiating phase. He left Kampuchea, and John

Saunders, a recently retired and very experienced senior official of UNDP then took charge of UN relief operations in Kampuchea. Food and medical assistance began to flow in by air and sea, as well as some of the means to unload it and move it around the country. At last it seemed that the effort needed to avert catastrophe was underway.

In mid-October, along the border with Thailand, the trickle of refugees trying to cross the Thai border turned first into a stream, and then into a flood. Many thousands of sickly and emaciated mothers and children were using their last breath to reach help. On 17 October, the Thai Government, which had previously turned back the refugees, announced a change of policy. After obtaining the agreement of the UN Secretary-General to accept responsibility for providing them with food and shelter, they announced an 'open door' policy. Waldheim then asked Unicef and the World Food Programme to shoulder the urgent task of providing food and water to the populations under the control of Khmer Rouge and other resistance groups just across the Thai border, while UNHCR maintained holding centres for 'illegal immigrants' inside Thailand.

As the numbers mounted alarmingly through late October and November, reaching around 650,000 in early December, a programme of a type and magnitude Unicef had never previously organized was set in motion. The food for the people in both border camps and holding centres, much of which was purchased in Thailand, was provided by the WFP. Medical care—doctors and nurses, camp hospitals, medicines—was provided by the ICRC, and teams from many voluntary organizations. But the delivery of the means of survival to the border camp populations was Unicef's responsibility.

The task extended way beyond Unicef's normal mandate for mothers and children. But, in the light of the Secretary-General's request, it had no alternative. Ulf Kristofferson, a young Swede who had served Unicef in Phnom Penh before the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975, became the major domo. His expertise was in moving supplies around, and he now deployed it to effect. He set up an office and warehouses in Aranyaprathet near the border, a sleepy nonentity of a place swiftly being transformed into a freak boom town. Kristofferson was tough, energetic and enterprising. He hired fleets of vehicles, took on 200 Thai staff, and enlisted 2000 helpers among the Khmer population in the camps to distribute food and water. Every day, huge convoys of food trucks and water tankers—sometimes over eighty vehicles to a convoy, carrying half a million litres of water and hundreds of tons of rice—moved out from Aranyaprathet to locations north and south.

In early December, one border camp became the site of a 'land bridge': tens of thousands of Kampucheans who had trekked to the border on foot, by bicycle or in ox-carts were given twenty kilos of rice and fifteen kilos of rice seed per person, and were swallowed back into the country. Thousands

of tons of rice seed were funnelled across the border by this route during the next two months. For many of the farmers in the west and north-west of Kampuchea, this made it possible for them to plant and harvest a reasonable crop for the first time in several years. These operations went as much like clockwork as possible under the circumstances.

Much more of a nightmare was the problem of seeing that, in the camps, the food went into the hands of civilians, particularly the most needy, rather than to Khmer Rouge and other armed fighters. They controlled the camps, and their guns and orders were the only law in their land. To begin with, the civilian camp population figures they provided were taken on trust, as was their word about distribution. But profiteering and black-market dealings soared, partly on the basis of gold that many Kampucheans smuggled out of their homeland with them.

To reassert some control, Kristofferson sent his own teams into the camps to try and verify population figures, prevent the diversion of supplies, weigh and measure children and talk to mothers. On occasion, supplies were temporarily withheld from a camp to elicit co-operation from the warlords. In an area where illegal fortunes were being made, where the only other authority in the vicinity was the Thai Army, and with Vietnamese forces pressing on Khmer Rouge sanctuaries from only a few miles away, the operation was fraught with danger. Camps sometimes came under armed attack. Kristofferson, fortunately, thrived on a situation that would have driven many to the edge of breakdown. The extraordinary feat was that it worked as smoothly as it did, whatever the rate of diversion and loss.

By the end of the year, when the Unicef convoys were providing rations for 450,000 people, nutritional surveys had proved that the condition of the women and children had much improved. Despite the daily turmoil, the Unicef team also managed to arrange some schooling for 30,000 children in the camps, recruiting teachers from among the refugee Khmers. Whoever else had profited, the principal goal of saving helpless people's lives and reintroducing some degree of normalcy had been attained.

In October and November, when the refugee crisis was erupting, the real state of conditions in the Kampuchean countryside was still somewhat shrouded in mystery. Relief officials in Phnom Penh, whose numbers were heavily restricted, were still relying mainly on estimates provided by the authorities. At the end of November, the figure of two-and-a-quarter million people in need was raised to three million: three-quarters of the supposed population, minus those who had fled. But no relief official had yet been allowed to travel widely in the country to confirm this scale of need at first hand. Few Western journalists had been allowed into the country.

By contrast, the wretched condition of the refugees in Thailand was filmed, photographed and beamed all over the world by the international press corps based in Bangkok, whose access to the camps was unrestricted.

In the UK, a television film by Jon Pilger was screened at the end of October and unleashed a tidal wave of generosity towards the hapless Kampuchians. It was soon echoed by similar outpourings in other Western countries. On 19 October, as confident as he could be that Heng Samrin would not at this stage renege on the tacit 'agreement' Beaumont and Bugnion had reached with the Phnom Penh regime and at Labouisse's request, Secretary-General Waldheim launched a joint Unicef and ICRC appeal for funds at the UN in New York. Two weeks later, member States met for a special conference to pledge resources. The statements of many of the delegates were strongly influenced by the reports of journalists and embassy officials in Bangkok. Everyone had drawn the same conclusion: the misery of those at the border was typical of millions more inside the country. The country and its people were in their dying throes.

The relief officials in Phnom Penh, isolated from normal communications channels, were unaware of the mounting fracas. They were still trying to connect the pieces of a major programme—under the strain of continuing lack of confidence from the authorities and their Vietnamese advisors, and a lack of proper information in every respect. The destruction wrought in the country over the previous several years meant that almost nothing worked, and even the smallest task—unloading a bargeful of supplies—was problematic. Handling equipment, such as cranes and forklifts, was nonexistent. The weakened state of many of the Kampuchians on dock duty meant that supplies had to be packed in bags no heavier than fifty kilos; otherwise they could not be lifted. As well as equipment, hundreds of trucks had to be shipped or airlifted in to move supplies around the country. These problems emerged, and had to be addressed, in a cloud of incomplete understanding and conflicting assurances from Kampuchean officials, all of whom were functioning under conditions of similar confusion and duress.

Early in November, Labouisse made a personal visit to Phnom Penh in an effort to exert pressure on the various governments involved, and to unblock some of the logjams. Like others before and after him, he was deeply affected by experiencing at first hand how completely the Pol Pot regime had destroyed the social and economic fabric of their own country. He met Heng Samrin, who predictably raised the vexed question of the 'third condition'; again, it was left unresolved. There was some progress on other matters: suggestions for improving logistics and transport were well-received. At the conclusion of his visit, Labouisse went on to Hanoi, where Unicef's stock was relatively high thanks to its continuing programme of co-operation. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong gave Labouisse various undertakings to do with helping move supplies into and around Kampuchea; few materialized over the forthcoming months. This process of backing and advancing through diplomatic hoops was the most exhausting and frustrating of all the problems associated with Kampuchean relief.

By mid-December, the target of moving 1000 tons of food a day into the country was reached: by this stage the joint Unicef/ICRC programme had delivered 29,000 tons. Now a new problem arose. Warehouses in the port of Kompong Som, the main entry point for relief sent by sea, were choked with 35,000 tonnes of food. Vehicles were arriving from Unicef, Oxfam and from the USSR—eventually their total exceeded 1500—but there was little sign of their urgent deployment to prevent mass deaths from famine. The authorities had insisted that they would undertake distribution of relief, and furnish reports to Unicef and ICRC. There were no reports. John Saunders and François Bugnion, the one low-key, the other irate, remonstrated with Kampuchean officials and besought their respective headquarters to put diplomatic pressure where it might count.

As this new turn of events filtered into the press in early 1980, the organizations once more began to feel the heat of worldwide outrage, indirectly against themselves, directly against the authorities in Phnom Penh. The sense, earlier so potent, that, given their liberation of the Kampuchean people from genocidal fanatics, the Vietnamese deserved the benefit of the doubt about their intentions in Kampuchea, began to evaporate. The new regime had declared a famine and asked the world for help. The world had sent help, and most of it was sitting in warehouses. Many explanations were offered, few of them sympathetic to the Heng Samrin regime. Unicef and ICRC, trying to calm the storm, found it difficult to avoid charges of evasion and naivety.

Was there a famine in Kampuchea or was there not? In the world outside Phnom Penh—a world whose primary source of information was Bangkok—the answer to the question seemed almost less important than the sense of outrage that the Western world, so generous in the Khmer people's latest hour of need, had been duped. In Phnom Penh itself, the relief officials knew the answer to the question: at least on the scale threatened, the famine had retreated, at least for the time being. They had finally begun to travel in the countryside; they saw hunger, malnutrition, ill-health, rural breakdown on a severe scale; they also saw starvation. But not as much as expected; certainly not enough to justify earlier fears about widespread death. With all the intense public pressure and media exposure, some of which they continued to feel at second hand through their headquarters, they found it hard to persuade senior colleagues in New York and Geneva that, given all the circumstances, the situation was relatively in hand.

In a country whose whole social fabric had been through intense disruption; where trained and competent administrative people were few and far between; where no map was left extant in any government office in Phnom Penh at the end of the Pol Pot period; where there were no survey data or up-to-date statistical information, nor any means of printing and distributing them even if there were; it was not surprising to those with long experience of this kind of situation that the picture was more fluid,

less clear-cut and a great deal less lurid than depicted in stories threatening 'two million dead by Christmas'.

The main reason that the famine was not as severe as forecast was that the tropical climate and natural productivity of Kampuchean soil produced food, willy nilly. People had cultivated maize, cassava, bananas and other crops in garden plots; and they harvested fish from the many rivers and from the large lake of Tonle Sap. They did manage, in addition, to grow some kind of a rice crop. In November, they brought in a harvest thought to approximate 300,000 tons, or one-third of the 900,000 tons needed: considerably more than the one-fifth earlier expected in a land where no estimates were accurate. So long as more food arrived within the next three months, disaster could be averted.

The policies of the Phnom Penh authorities was the other reason why famine on a mass scale was avoided. In normal times, a grain tax was traditionally levied on the farmers; the grain thus taken by the authorities was sold in the towns or for export to raise revenues. In November 1979, and during the two harvest seasons in 1980, the grain tax was suspended. Instead, following negotiations with Unicef and FAO, the Heng Samrin regime used relief food supplies to feed and pay government servants and party officials (rice was still the only medium of exchange in 1979 and early 1980). They also used the imported relief food for urban dwellers, putting it in the markets of the gradually re-emerging towns and cities. This meant that those who had planted rice kept their entire crop; there was no movement of food out of the countryside. It also alleviated the critical logistical problem of moving food around the country. The one stipulation made by the Unicef/FAO negotiators was that none of their rations go to the Vietnamese Army. For this purpose, grain sent by the USSR and other Socialist allies was used.

Although moving food from one area to another within the country continued to present great logistical problems for many months, the shortfalls in its distribution in the months before and after Christmas 1979 did not mean the difference between life and death for the entire country. The people in the worst-affected part of the country, the north-west, had suffered extreme hardship; and it was the pitiful condition they were in when they reached the Thai border which had led the world to imagine that there was a country full of starvelings behind them. The feeding operation run from Thailand which saved and recuperated many lives from this area also made a vital contribution by sending food and rice seed across the border via the land bridge. The stamina of the Kampuchean people also played its part, as did their ability—proved over the Pol Pot years—for survival in adversity.

While relief officials in Phnom Penh were beginning to feel as though the situation was under some degree of control, the roused passions of public, press and donor governments put the organizations' Western-based

headquarters under great pressure. Unicef, in particular, was making heavy weather of the lead agency role the Secretary-General had thrust upon it. Not only were Labouisse, Egger and many other senior staff devoting much of their energies to the crisis, but the work of the whole organization was being affected. In one critical dimension, the lead agency role was hobbled from the start. Unicef did not have the power of the purse. When UN Secretary-General Waldheim and Labouisse launched the public appeal for Kampuchean relief on 19 October, the target was \$110 million for a programme lasting six months. As events unfolded at breakneck speed during October and November, the amount was re-estimated at \$250 million for a year.

At the special pledging conference called in early November, governments eventually came up with promises of \$210 million altogether. But instead of setting up a special fund as he had done for Indo-China in 1975, the Secretary-General had invited governments to pledge separately to the main UN bodies involved: Unicef, UNHCR, WFP, FAO. The distribution of responsibility—particularly for what was going on in Thailand—was imperfectly understood by the donors. As a result, Unicef was continually forced to spend money it had not yet received, temporarily diverting other resources. During late 1979, Charles Egger spent much of his time chasing pledges and extra resources. When, in December 1979, the world's press began to report food piling up in Kompong Som while Kampuchea starved, donors who had pledged funds began to show a marked reluctance to part with them. The problems of the situation were compounded by the confusion over whether the famine had been stayed or not; nothing was easy to explain to a world whose understanding of the intricacies of relief in obscure countries is not sophisticated, and whose goodwill is fickle at best.

Difficulties were further compounded by the uncertainty surrounding the various responsibilities of Unicef, WFP, UNHCR and ICRC in the area around the Thai border where the Khmer resistance groups were encamped, and by the presence in Bangkok of people from nearly 100 different voluntary agencies, each with its own agenda, constituency and view of how and whom to help. After visiting the region in November, Mrs Rosalyn Carter, wife of the US President, appealed to the UN Secretary-General to appoint someone with the authority to bring order out of chaos. The Secretary-General appointed the veteran Sir Robert Jackson as special relief co-ordinator. Jackson had relationships stretching back over many years with Egger, Saunders and many of the senior diplomats and statesmen involved in the Kampuchean imbroglio. He also understood where UN feathers were likely to be ruffled and how to smooth them. Jackson thereupon made Bangkok his base and endlessly travelled the diplomatic circuit, throwing into the operation all his contacts and experience, not to mention his legendary panache.

With the new year came other changes. Harry Labouisse retired. His

fifteen years at the head of Unicef had culminated with the triumph of the International Year of the Child, and, simultaneously, with the Kampuchean crisis and its extraordinarily taxing demands. Almost his last act as Executive Director was to write to President Heng Samrin asking him to place the highest priority on improving the distribution of relief food. On 1 January, his successor, James P. Grant, previously head of the Overseas Development Council in Washington, took over the leadership of Unicef, and inherited the thorniest international relief crisis since the Nigerian civil war.

As President of the ODC, Grant had been active since Waldheim's and Labouisse's appeal in October in exerting pressure on the US Administration to make a major contribution to Kampuchean relief. On 25 October, President Carter committed \$39 million altogether, of which \$30 million was for relief inside Kampuchea and \$9 million for refugees on the Thai border. Grant saw this as the turning point in mobilizing generous contributions from European donors and the Japanese. However, in spite of his determination that Unicef continue to acquit itself effectively in its Kampuchean relief role, Grant was essentially a man with long-term development problems on his mind—what he called the 'silent emergency'. Like the rest of Unicef's senior staff and many Board members, he was dismayed by the extent to which Unicef had been plunged up to its operational neck in a 'loud emergency'. He believed that responsibility for the large and intricate operation Ulf Kristofferson had built up along the border with Thailand more properly belonged with the UNHCR.

The most serious problem was the cross-border operation to feed mothers and children under the protection of the armed Khmer opposition groups. These were not truly refugees since they had not fled their country; but while Unicef continued to provide for them, relationships between John Saunders, the representative in Phnom Penh, and the Heng Samrin authorities remained distinctly awkward. At a time when there were great problems with getting food moving around the country before the results of the November harvest were exhausted, Saunders felt that the cross-border programme jeopardized the more complex and even larger programme inside Kampuchea itself. All efforts to divest Unicef of the role of 'feeding the Khmer Rouge' proved in vain, however. The UNHCR pleaded that it already had its hands full with refugee camps and holding centres within Thailand, and with other refugee problems elsewhere in the world; and the Thai Government was adamant that Unicef should continue.

In late January, Grant visited both Phnom Penh and the base of the Thai and cross-border programme in Aranyaprathet, and what he saw of the programmes and the efforts of the staff serving under him overcame any previous lack of enthusiasm. From this point onwards he became wholeheartedly committed to fulfilling Unicef's mission to the maximum in both operational theatres, went actively after funds all over the world, and

was an energetic spokesman on Kampuchea's behalf, using the limelight cast on Unicef to enhance its prestige.

On 7 January at the anniversary celebration of his installation in power, Heng Samrin responded to Labouisse's valedictory effort to get food moving out of Kompong Som. He announced that he had instructed his officials to attach the highest priority to mobilizing transport and food distribution. Indeed, over the coming weeks things did begin to improve. Still under the greatest pressure from all external quarters to expedite their programme, the relief teams in Phnom Penh were beginning to piece together fragmentary information from districts and provinces, and began to present a convincing account of supplies finally getting through. In Thailand, the numbers of people receiving food rations at the border hovered around the 600,000 mark at the beginning of 1980. During January, 5000 tons of food were funnelled across the land bridge into the north-west. Gradually, as food once more became available inside Kampuchea, many of the famine refugees began to return home.

On 14 February a special session of the Unicef Executive Board was summoned in New York. Grant presented a full and up-beat account of the situation he had explored both within Kampuchea and on the Thai border, and announced the outcome of discussions held in Bangkok under Jackson's auspices between all the senior UN agency representatives involved. It was now clear that the entire relief operation, and Unicef's lead agency role in Kampuchea, would have to continue at least through 1980, and probably well into 1981. The UN organizations and the ICRC began to make plans for the next twelve months. They had almost no breathing space. Current stocks of food in Kampuchea, together with the dry-season harvest of the late spring, would start to run out at the end of May, and then there would be nothing until the next main harvest in November 1980. Unless enough paddies were planted before the monsoon, then that harvest too would be seriously short.

The two critical requirements were food—240,000 tons of rice, according to FAO/WFP calculations—to tide the country over, and 40,000 tons of rice seed to plant during the coming months. In these two areas, Hans Page of FAO and his small staff played the essential role, working closely with the Phnom Penh authorities to draw up elaborate plans to purchase and ship in these huge volumes of food and seed.

The critical question once again was the handling and distribution capacity. *Without opening up new port facilities and river routes, without more trucks, barges and better use of them, it was hard to see how the pipeline would not become hopelessly blocked.* Once the monsoon began in the summer, many roads already in poor condition would become impassable. Unless the whole road, rail and river distribution network was somehow dramatically geared up, the spectre of famine would raise its head again and there would be another flight towards the Thai border.

Over the coming months, much of the effort both by the joint UN/ICRC effort in Phnom Penh and by the voluntary-agency consortium headed by Oxfam was invested in transport and logistics. The country's truck fleet was steadily increased, eventually to 1500 imported and donated vehicles. Tugs, barges and other rivercraft, as well as marine engineer services were also provided, and rail transport between Kompong Som and Phnom Penh was restored. While the full repairs required by the railroad were beyond the capacity of the international relief operation, they set up vehicle repair workshops for trucks, trains and boats. Unicef's most experienced transport officer, Horst Ruttinger from the Federal Republic of Germany, was despatched to Phnom Penh in April 1980. Unicef recruited a group of East German mechanics to help him, and Oxfam assigned another mechanic. Under Ruttinger's leadership, this team played a vital role in building up an efficient national trucking system over the spring and summer. Port bottlenecks were much alleviated by teams of dockers sent from the USSR who substantially improved the speed at which goods were offloaded; cranes, forklifts and conveyors were delivered; floating wharves were built; and port repairs were undertaken at both Phnom Penh and Kompong Som.

In spite of these improvements, the situation both in Kampuchea and on the Thai border, where military action continued, remained balanced on a knife-edge, sustaining the world's sense of urgency. The image of a country pounded to pieces had left a powerful imprint on the conscience of Mankind. Even though the worst prognostications of the autumn had turned out to be wrong, though the political knots remained tied, and though the picture from Phnom Penh remained ill-defined, the world wanted to do its best for the Khmer people. With the various means at its disposal, it tried.

The flood of generosity from the general public had reached over \$60 million from western Europe, the US, Japan and Australasia by February 1980. Funds continued to flow into scores of voluntary agencies, those in the Oxfam-led consortium as well as others, and to Unicef national committees. But the really large sums had to come from governments. So far, \$205 million had been swallowed up by the joint relief operation. Unicef was still overspent on its current relief efforts, and far from buoyant for the next stage and others beyond it. To finance the necessary operations to the end of the year, another \$263 million was needed.

The confidence of the main donor governments in the programme was growing, but some were still unhappy that Unicef as lead agency had been obliged to go way out of its normal line. They were, however, persuaded that no better arrangement could be made. Unicef had demonstrated its efficacy in supplies procurement and delivery. It was true that distribution beyond a certain level—in the border camps, beyond camp overlords; and in Kampuchea, beyond the national authorities—was rarely under the control of the relief operation. During the spring months, before the

monsoon began in earnest, every effort was made to influence both by negotiation and by practical measures the movement of supplies to their final destination. In March, a new logistical problem arose when part of the wharf at Phnom Penh collapsed: it was a symptom of how overstrained the severely-deteriorated port and transport system still were.

In May, with Jean-Pierre Hocke, the ICRC's Director of Operations, Grant again flew to Phnom Penh. The two men tried to reinforce Jackson's continuing efforts to put across to the authorities the fragility of the operation, its dependence on their ability to give answers to their donors, and the possibility that it would suddenly cease if distribution bottlenecks could not be unblocked. In spite of all the problems, the donor governments were reassured by the reports of Grant and Hocke. A thorough re-assessment of needs based on the much more precise information about food and seed availability in different parts of the country, and the promised opening-up of new ports and delivery routes from Vietnam gave an appearance for the first time of some margin of safety. In spite of all the diplomatic overtures of Grant, Hocke and Jackson, however, there were still extreme political difficulties in facilitating supply lines through areas of combat. The prospects of another famine scare were still very real. At a special conference called in Geneva in late May, the donors came up with another \$116 million. Jackson's and Grant's relentless arm-twisting in capitals around the world had managed to keep the programme financially afloat: there was now at least enough money in hand to carry on until the post-monsoon harvest.

Within Kampuchea, the ports and transport systems improved markedly as the summer months progressed. Food delivery around the country remained sluggish. But the authorities attached a very high priority to the need to put much larger areas of land under rice cultivation, and with the help of Hans Page and his small FAO/WFP team, this countrywide exercise was planned and carried out with comparative efficiency. Due to delays in receiving funds and in purchasing and delivery delays the target of bringing in enough rice seed before the end of the planting season nearly fell by the wayside. At the last minute, 3000 tons of floating seed was brought in by airlift. With a superhuman effort of despatch and logistical precision, it was quickly moved out to the farmers in the countryside. By what seemed a miracle, two-thirds of the regular crop was planted, putting twice the 1979 area under cultivation. And in the meantime, for the second time in twelve months, the threat of widescale death from hunger in the pre-harvest months had been held at bay.

Once again, the resilience of the Kampuchean people, as well as the food-distribution programme, helped to deflect disaster. They supplemented their diet with other foods: fish, wild game, maize, manioc, sweet potatoes, beans. Nutritional surveys in a few parts of the country between August and December revealed some severe malnutrition, but nothing

widescale, and the prospects of an adequate rice harvest were good. It finally seemed as though the country's agricultural and rural life was returning to normal, and that stop-gap emergency measures to import food could be scaled down. Towards the end of the year, the organizations involved in Kampuchean relief could begin to think in terms of the end of the emergency, and turn their attention instead to more conventional programmes of long-term rehabilitation and development.

John Saunders, who had seen the mission through its most gruelling and frustrating period of operation, left Phnom Penh in June, and was replaced by Kurt Jansson, a Finnish administrator similarly brought out of retirement after a long and distinguished UN career. From the summer months onwards, Jansson concentrated most of the efforts of his small handful of staff on the task of constant monitoring. They covered as much of the country as possible, visiting warehouses, ports and distribution points, and doing their best to work out with the authorities whatever means they could to improve the rate at which food moved about the countryside by truck, barge and rail. Jansson's reports to the donor governments were vital to allay the fears, constantly expressed in the media, that the food provided by the UN operation was going to feed the Vietnamese Army. He was able to satisfy them on this point.

For the ICRC, the time had come to bow out. In the normal course of events, their role was confined to emergencies. During the past fifteen months, as well as helping to run the entire programme on both sides of the border, they had provided vital emergency health services in Kampuchea's shattered hospitals as well as in the refugee camps. Their medical teams and other personnel were gradually withdrawn. But Unicef, which had hoped finally to be released from the role of lead agency, carried on. In the UN General Assembly of 1980, the representative of Democratic Kampuchea once again took the Kampuchean seat. Waldheim, confronted with the same political puzzle which had prompted his original designation of Unicef to shoulder the burden, wrote to Grant asking Unicef to continue as lead agency for Kampuchean relief throughout 1981. In spite of the misgivings of senior staff and Board delegates, there was no alternative but to accept. A more modest programme was envisaged for 1981, with a somewhat different emphasis. A budget of \$200 million had been set. Now the plans for this programme became a source of contention.

Back in May 1980 Unicef's Executive Board had approved a quite separate, relatively modest programme of Unicef co-operation for the People's Republic of Kampuchea, to be carried out alongside the major emergency programme but concerned with the long-term health and education needs of the kind usually assisted by Unicef. One of the earliest Unicef team members to arrive in Phnom Penh was the young Welshman, Ian Hopwood, who had previously worked in Hanoi. When Grant made his first visit to Kampuchea in January 1980, he had been impressed by the

tremendous enthusiasm shown both by the people and by the authorities to rebuild the schools destroyed under Khmer Rouge rule. Everywhere in the countryside he and Egger had seen classes being conducted in the most primitive of conditions, with pupils of twelve and thirteen years struggling to master the first rudiments of learning, without books, pencils, slates, benches or desks. Already, close to a million children were enrolled, although because of the recent past, less than a quarter of those instructing them had qualifications of any kind. Inspired by this evidence of the thirst to learn, and convinced that education would help salve psychological wounds and knit communities together again, Unicef had shipped in some basic primary-school supplies, and Hopwood pursued educational rehabilitation with vigour. At the May 1980 Executive Board session, most of the \$2 million programme was for school supplies, the rest for health. To this programme, the Board had agreed without demur.

Now, however, in early 1981, when aid to education was proposed as a part of the main emergency relief programme, some of the donors objected. They were determined that Kampuchea should receive humanitarian relief and nothing else. They did not want their contributions to be spent on anything that would help rebuild the country's infrastructure. They did not recognize the People's Republic of Kampuchea; they did not want the Heng Samrin regime to stand on its own, or its allies', feet. To Robert Jackson, the debate was an echo from the days when UNRRA was helping postwar rehabilitation in the countries of eastern Europe and was accused in the West of ideological bias. At the regular meetings of donors for Kampuchean relief, which continued throughout 1981, he expressed exasperation. Time and again, he pointed out that to draw a line between 'relief' and 'rehabilitation' is impossible for all practical purposes. The delivery of relief—food, for example—could not be divorced from the state of the road along which it had to be driven. If the road network, and other parts of the social and economic infrastructure, was left to collapse, the task of delivering relief would become much more expensive and complicated.

Unicef's assistance to primary education provoked considerable complaint at these meetings, in spite of the fact that schools had become venues for supplementary feeding programmes for young children, and were playing an important part in the people's recovery from their long ordeal. Here was a classic example of how ambivalent can be the international community even in the late twentieth century towards an issue where humanitarian considerations clash with political and strategic interests. Undeterred, Unicef sought approval from its 1981 Executive Board for a larger programme of co-operation for health care, schools, orphanages, drinking water and nutrition. In this public forum at least, no dissenting voice was raised.

At the end of 1981, Unicef at last relinquished its lead agency role for

Kampuchean relief. Altogether, the joint UN and ICRC programme, in which Unicef had shouldered a lion's share of the administrative burden inside Kampuchea and much of it outside the stricken country, had provided some \$634 million in assistance between October 1979 and December 1981. Unicef's own expenditures on Kampuchean relief within the overall programme were \$49 million in 1980 and \$22.7 million in 1981. Altogether, 300,000 tons of food aid had been distributed, as well as thousands of tons of rice seed, fertilizers, pesticides, agricultural equipment, vehicles, handling equipment, fuel and medical supplies. More than 6000 schools and 1000 clinics and hospitals had been re-opened. It was not perhaps quite the largest relief and rehabilitation programme ever undertaken, but it was the most complex, and the most all-encompassing for a single country.

On the border with Thailand, the relief operation for refugees and famine victims had cost the international community \$132 million. By the end of 1981, many of those who had fled the west and north-west with their families and sought refuge under Khmer resistance protection, had returned home to their villages. Over 250,000 refugees still remained in the camps, and the task of providing for them was handed over to a special UN body—the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO)—created for the purpose.

The two-and-a-quarter years of the programme had imposed a heavy strain on Unicef, one from which both Grant, and Labouisse before him, had feared Unicef could not emerge without serious damage to its reputation for impartiality. Somehow it did so; and, largely due to the quality of leadership provided by the two Directors, it also emerged with heightened prestige in international circles.

During the course of 1980 and 1981, the world's attention began to shift to other humanitarian crises: the Pakistani side of the border with Afghanistan, and the Somalian side of the border with Ethiopia—in both of which huge refugee populations had congregated. Worse was to come, in the shape of famine across the African continent. If the Executive Board and James Grant could possibly avoid it, Unicef would not be designated lead agency again. Operationally, diplomatically and financially, the Kampuchean crisis was one of the stormiest and most difficult passages of Unicef's history. It was also one of which it could be justifiably proud.

Although the main chapters of the Kampuchean story were concluded at the end of 1981, and in spite of the country's remarkable recovery at the end of the emergency period, the real process of reconstruction had yet to begin. The 1981–82 monsoon was uneven and food aid and rice seed were still needed on a very considerable scale throughout 1982. The trauma suffered by the Kampuchean people was still a living memory from which it would take at least a generation to recover.

But the world's memory is short. Unicef and other organizations in the

international community continue to support the process of Kampuchean recovery and rehabilitation. But the passions aroused throughout the world by the horrors endured by the Khmer people as an outcome of the years of turmoil in Indo-China have died away. It may, tragically, take another cataclysm to re-arouse them.

Main sources

'Kampuchea: Back from the Brink', a report by the International Committee of the Red Cross on its 15-month joint action with Unicef in Kampuchea and Thailand, ICRC, October 1981.

Unicef: 'Lessons to be Learned from the Kampuchea Emergency Operation', a confidential report (never formally issued) by Ron Ockwell, December 1982.

The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience, by William Shawcross, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1984.

Rice, Rivalry, and Politics: Managing Cambodian Relief, by Linda Mason and Roger Brown, University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

Unicef Executive Board: documentation concerning emergency relief and rehabilitation assistance to services for mothers and children in the Indo-China peninsula throughout the period 1965 to 1981; Executive Director's progress reports; summary records; statements by Unicef representatives; and other specially-prepared papers.

40,000 enfants par jour: Vivre la cause de l'Unicef, by Dr François Rémy, published by Robert Laffont and Michel Archimbaud, Paris, 1983.

Interviews with many of the principals, undertaken by the Unicef History Project, 1983-85.

The Economist: articles concerning Indo-Chinese refugees, Kampuchea, and emergency relief to victims of the Kampuchean crisis 1979-1980 in Kampuchea and in Thailand; 7 July 1979 through September 1980.

Unicef: Kampuchea Emergency progress reports; a series of reports prepared during the period November 1979-end 1981 to keep donor governments informed of the relief situation inside Kampuchea and on the Thai-Kampuchean border.