

**Norodom Sihanouk Oral History Statement– JFK#1, 3/24/1964**  
**Administrative Information**

**Creator:** Norodom Sihanouk

**Date of Statement:** April 24, 1964

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**Biographical Note**

Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012) was the Head of State of Cambodia from 1960 to 1970. This statement focuses on the Cambodian people's opinions of John F. Kennedy and the hopes that he would improve United States foreign policy concerning Asian countries, among other topics.

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**Suggested Citation**

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## Oral History Statement

Of

Norodom Sihanouk

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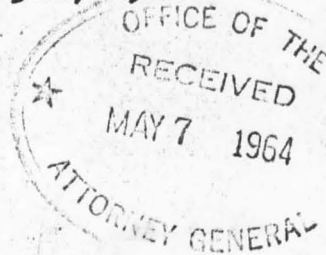


SAMDECH PREAH  
NORODOM BIHANOUK UPAYUVAREACH  
CHEF DE L'ÉTAT DU CAMBODGE

PHNOMPENH,

April 25th, 1964

No. I95 /SPU



Mr Robert.F. Kennedy,  
Office of the Attorney General,  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr Kennedy,

I thank you for your letter of March 23rd, asking me to tape-record a candid assessment of the achievements, and influence on the history of our times of your brother, the late President John F. Kennedy, for inclusion in the oral history section of the Library, which is to be built at Boston, Massachusetts, to perpetuate the memory of a youthful statesman, whose untimely death shattered in tragic fashion the high hopes placed throughout the world in his capacity for leadership and noble intentions.

I need hardly say how flattered I am by this request that I should make my modest contribution to such a project. But, as I only had the good fortune to meet President Kennedy on one occasion, and possess no inside knowledge of the personal rôle he played in the major events which marked his tenure of the Presidency, I do not feel myself to be in a position to contribute anything on this subject likely to be value, or interest to scholars and future historians. I have decided, therefore, that the assistance you ask of me would best assume the form of the following very general and brief appreciation of the President and his achievements as seen through Cambodian eyes, and from the Cambodian standpoint :

"The news of Mr John.F. Kennedy's election to the Presidency of the United States of America was welcomed in Cambodia, where nerves had become somewhat frayed by the obvious determination of the outgoing Government to ignore the powerful forces making for change unleashed throughout the world, and to maintain the "status quo" cost what it might: a tendency sometimes to be found among older men, who have failed to keep abreast of the times. The election of a President of the United States, still young in years, with an intellectual's approach to the business of Government, completed by practical experience of the

P.T.O.

limitations of power, who was alive to the need for the American People to adopt a "pioneer's" approach to challenging present-day problems, gave us good grounds to hope that the American Government under his aegis would modify its rigid attitude towards Asian aspirations: aspirations which could not be indefinitely contained by the defences built up against them, nor silenced by the weight of armament brought into line for that purpose.

These hopes were to be increased by the President's statesmanlike handling of the crisis, which occurred shortly after he had assumed Office, when an invasion of Cuba by an armed force, allegedly trained and equipped with the clandestine assistance of certain American organizations, faced him with the unwelcome choice of either committing the American Air Force to the battle, or abandoning to their fate those who believed that such support would be forthcoming in their hour of need. His refusal to involve American Armed Forces directly in an attack on a neighbouring Country, despite a great public outcry by reactionary elements urging this course of action, showed him to be a man of rectitude and courage.

Our confidence in President Kennedy's ability to lead was to be confirmed by the resolute fashion in which he championed the claims of the negro minority to be treated on an equal footing with, and to enjoy the same rights and privileges as, those American citizens who were not of African descent. The speeches he made in support of this claim to equal "civic rights" had the authentic ring of greatness. In similar fashion, we followed with sympathy and attention his efforts to lessen world tensions and, in particular, to come to an understanding with the Soviet Union in regard to the suspension of nuclear explosions; and, although my Government found itself unable to subscribe to the agreement finally come to, this should not be ascribed to any failure on our part to recognize the importance of such an achievement."

Indeed, you may rest assured, Mr Attorney General, that your brother's death was sincerely mourned by the People of Cambodia, moved that a life so rich in promise should have been terminated in such brutal fashion, and dismayed to see their hopes dispelled that President Kennedy would lead the American People to recognize the self-evident right of all Peoples to forge their national destiny, free from outside pressures, or foreign interference in their internal affairs, and to adopt the state-form, and the social, and economic system best suited to their native genius, their historic antecedents and the conditions in which they lived.

For my part, I share fully in my People's sorrow, the more so perhaps as I had occasion to meet the President in New York in September 1961, and was immediately impressed by the ease with which he carried his heavy responsibilities, by his natural distinction and youthful vitality and by his readiness to listen with patience and respect to opinions, which conflicted with his own appreciation of the situation in South-East Asia.

I am of the opinion that historians, who study this vital period in the world's history at the John.F. Kennedy Library in your native Boston, will confirm my personal fear that, when President Kennedy died, a light was put out which may not be re-lit for many years to come.

I am, Yours sincerely

*N. Sihanouk*

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NORODOM SIHANOUK.