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Khemararangsi Buddhist Temple of ACT Inc.

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23 October 2008
Mr Jon Stanhope
Chief Minister, Australian Capital Territory

Dear Mr Stanhope,

Re: Sponsoring a Buddhist Monk to minister to Canberra's Cambodian Buddhist community

Recently our religious Association, the Khemamarangsi Buddhist Temple of ACT Inc, which serves the spiritual needs of Canberra's Cambodian Buddhist community which comprises some 380 people in 85 Canberra families, has been engaged in difficult negotiations with the Immigration Department in seeking their approval for entry of a Buddhist monk to provide religious services to our community in Canberra.

We are currently using a house which we own in 3 Arkell Place, Charnwood, ACT, as a temporary temple and monk's residence, while we seek to negotiate for a permanent Cambodian Buddhist temple premises.

We have now been advised by the Commonwealth Immigration Department that our Association does not satisfy ACT law for legally conducting religious activities within a residential zone.

We therefore request your special permission as ACT Chief Minister to enable us to continue to use the house we own at 3 Arkell Place as a temporary religious centre, while our negotiations with the ACT Government for a permanent Cambodian Buddhist temple in Canberra proceed.

In order to satisfy the Commonwealth Department of Immigration's requirement to allow us to sponsor a Buddhist monk to work in Canberra under a religious worker visa, we wish to ask for your special approval of a temporary permission for a Cambodian Buddhist monk to live and perform religious duties at our house at 3 Arkell Place, Charnwood, to serve the spiritual needs of our Canberra Cambodian Buddhist community.

As background, our community temple was first established in 2001 with support of the Cambodian Buddhist Monks Council of Australia and New Zealand, based in Melbourne.

In 2007, the association committee of the temple was officially registered in the ACT.

As well as providing Buddhist religious functions, our centre in the house at 3 Arkell Place Charnwood also provides traditional cultural events, community meeting facilities and conducts Cambodian language classes for children of the Cambodian community in Canberra and for staff from the Australian Foreign Affairs Department in preparation for their postings to Cambodia. It is a genuine religious premises.

In recent years we have lodged a series of applications to purchase a block of land in Canberra to build a permanent temple to legally serve our community, in compliance with ACT law. Since the first establishment of our temporary temple in 2001, there has been a long series of delays regarding approval of our application for a site, as our community has not enough banked funds to satisfy the requirements of the ACT Land Development Agency (LDA) for release of a block of land. Our problem as a small local community has been to obtain sufficient funds prior to the allocation of a building block.

We are however confident that once we have a block, larger and wealthier Cambodian communities in major Australian cities will give generously for the construction of our Cambodian Buddhist temple in the national capital. We have had promises of such financial backing from major community sponsors in Sydney and Melbourne once a site is secured.

Meanwhile, at our temporary temple in our house at 3 Arkell Place, Charnwood, as Buddhist followers we have kept everything within the residential laws and regulations. We have had no problems or complaints whatsoever from our local neighbours regarding any noise or parking issues over the last seven years. We are a very quiet community. We appeal to you to express support to the Immigration Department for our request for continued temporary use of our house at 3 Arkell Place, Charnwood as a Cambodian Buddhist community temple. We need your authority urgently, as the Immigration Department will only give us time to work through this case until the end of this month, and we may lose our approval for a resident Cambodian monk unless we have your intervention in time to influence Immigration's decision.

If Canberra's Cambodian Buddhist community is left without a resident Cambodian monk or functioning religious centre, it will be extremely disruptive especially for our older members, in particular our widows, who depend on the temple for their daily spiritual and social welfare.

We anxiously await your reply.

Yours sincerely

Darin Men

(Special Project Officer)

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