

SF Examiner

FEB 6 1972

Ted Charges Conspiracy on Cambodia Toll

WASHINGTON — (AP) — priorities are more important than people.”
Sen. Edward Kennedy said yesterday the United States and Cambodia have joined in a conspiracy of silence about an increasing toll of civilian war casualties and refugees in Cambodia.

Kennedy based his charge on a report prepared by the General Accounting Office at his request for his subcommittee on refugees.

The State Department challenged the allegation and said Kennedy's statements concerning the GAO report are seriously misleading.

'Massive Bombing'

"Cambodia is following in the tragic path of Vietnam and Laos," Kennedy said.

"Massive bombing and ground military operations are producing a rising tide of refugees, who now swell the cities and towns, or cram makeshift refugee camps, neglected by a government which says the war will be short, and that military

"Worse still, our government supports this," he said. Kennedy said the GAO, a congressional investigating agency, reported that two million refugees had been dislocated in 18 months of war.

"The GAO estimates that at least 20 percent of the refugees' homes that were destroyed were caused by U.S. and allied bombing," Kennedy said.

Cambodian Figures

The GAO report said the estimate of 2 million refugees came from the Cambodian Ministry of Public Health, and that its investigators had no basis for assessing the reliability "of this figure or any other over-all figures."

The report said also the Cambodian government estimated in March 1971 "that a maximum of 20 percent of property damages was a result of Cambodian and allied air operations."

In response to requests for comment on the Kennedy statements, State Department spokesman Charles Bray said Kennedy's remarks don't reflect the conclusions of the report.

'Essential Facts'

According to the State Department, the "essential facts" set forth by the GAO study are:

- "The North Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia in March of 1970."
- "The largest single source of refugees within Cambodia are those who are fleeing from Communist-controlled territory" and probably fewer than 20 percent of the refugees left their homes because of combat activity and air strikes.

The GAO said the Cambodian government has estimated that about 140,000 refugees were living in Phnom Penh as of September and about 70,000 were living in provincial capitals.