

**STATEMENT BY THE FOURTH JOINT NDI/IRI
PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION TO CAMBODIA**

July 14, 1998

Following a fourth assessment of Cambodia's political environment since the coup of July 1997, a delegation from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) has concluded that:

- The process leading up to the elections scheduled for July 26 is fundamentally flawed, and, under the prevailing circumstances, the delegation would not normally recommend sending international observers to monitor the elections. However, political parties and prospective voters, despite serious obstacles, are actively participating in this election. The outcome of the election is not a foregone conclusion and it merits international attention.
- Any objective evaluation of the upcoming elections must not be confined to the official campaign period and the technical aspects of the poll. Such a limited perspective gives a distorted view of the elections as a whole. Any accurate assessment must take into account the larger political environment within which the elections are taking place and the effects of that environment on the electoral process. Acquiescence to seriously flawed elections will only contribute to a deterioration of the political environment and undermine genuine efforts to advance Cambodia's democracy.
- The delegation encourages Cambodians and the international community to deploy as many observers as possible.

The delegation's chief observations and findings are:

- Political violence and intimidation continue, especially in the countryside.
- No arrests have been made despite pervasive political violence; a culture of impunity impedes the ability of candidates and domestic monitoring groups to recruit workers and supporters.
- Citizens continue to express their interest in the election and the desire to cast their votes for the candidates of their choice if given the opportunity in an environment free from intimidation.
- The international community, which encouraged the exiled political opposition to return and participate in the campaign, should closely monitor the entire election process. This should include monitoring the post-election period.

The Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which overthrew its coalition partner and reversed the results of the UN-sponsored elections of 1993, continues to enjoy exclusive control over the military, security forces, civil service, electronic media and electoral administration. There is no independent judiciary to provide a check on governmental power. United Nations reports document approximately 100 executions and disappearances, as well as other apparently politically motivated killings, since July 1997. Cambodian political parties, election monitoring groups, human rights organizations and the UN

In its assessment of the pre-election environment, the delegation found that systematic and widespread political intimidation and violence have affected the ability of opposition parties to fairly compete in the campaign. Opposition parties have not been given sufficient time nor the resources to rebuild their party membership networks since their organizations were dismantled last summer. The resources of the CPP dwarf those of the opposition parties. Some candidates state that voters are hesitant to openly show their support for them, fearing harassment. This atmosphere of repression affects the voters' confidence in the secrecy of the ballot.

Although opposition candidates have been able to open offices and have sometimes drawn large crowds at rallies, there are reliable reports that local officials and police have often unlawfully restricted campaign activities. Limited access to broadcast media impedes the ability of opposition parties to reach voters and potential supporters and gives the CPP a substantial advantage. Each of the 39 political parties is allowed one five-minute slot per day, but news coverage of rallies, speeches or other campaign events is heavily biased toward the CPP. A recent UN study showed that during the month of May, Hun Sen was mentioned 170 times on state-run TV while Prince Ranariddh was only featured five times.

The delegation heard several persons express the concern that the government might not accept the results of the election. Given the events following the 1993 elections, it is critically important that the international community carefully monitor the post-election period, including the seating of the National Assembly.

IRI and NDI intend to assemble a joint multi-national delegation to observe the elections. We believe that international and domestic election observing in the coming elections is important because the outcome of elections in some provinces may be affected if voters are permitted to cast their ballots freely and fairly. We also believe that international observation is important for the following reasons:

- It may deter further violence and intimidation of those who want to freely cast ballots.
- It provides international support to candidates who courageously decided to contest despite enormous obstacles and threats of violence.
- It helps to strengthen civil society organizations (e.g., monitoring and human rights groups) which in spite of intimidation have decided to proceed with their efforts.
- It strengthens the hands of democratic forces in each political party that want to move the country in a more democratic direction.
- It may lead to improved electoral administration, which would have long-term benefits for the nation.

Cambodia remains badly divided. The delegation stresses that elections alone will not bring reconciliation and stability to the country. Building democracy is a long-term process and will require a sustained commitment by Cambodians and the international community.

The NDI-IRI delegation assessed the pre-election environment from July 6 to 13. The delegation consisted of former US Ambassador to Thailand and former President of the Carnegie Endowment for

Program Director Elizabeth Dugan and NDI Senior Consultant and former NDI/Cambodia Field Director Peter M. Manikas. NDI/Cambodia Field Representatives Sarah Malm, Lawrence Lachmansingh and Sophie Richardson also participated in this assessment.

The IRI-NDI delegation met with political party leaders, candidates, members of the National Election Commission, representatives of domestic election monitoring and human rights groups, members of the domestic and international press, diplomats, and officials from the United Nations and the European Union. The delegation observed campaign activities in Phnom Penh and Takeo, and staff members have also observed activities in the provinces of Kandal, Kompong Thom and Prey Veng. The delegation also reviewed documents and reports by Cambodian and international organizations.

NDI and IRI have worked since 1992 with Cambodian political parties, members of the National Assembly and nongovernmental organizations to promote the development of democratic institutions. Based in Washington, DC, IRI and NDI are nonprofit organizations working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide.

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