

**STATEMENT BY THE THIRD NDI PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT  
MISSION: PREPARATIONS FOR ELECTIONS IN CAMBODIA**

***June 11, 1998***

Although voter registration for elections in Cambodia scheduled for July 26, 1998 is proceeding moderately well, other requisite conditions for a competitive election do not yet exist.

Voter registration began on May 18, 1998 and is scheduled to continue until June 15, 1998. Several aspects of the voter registration process are encouraging:

Many of Cambodia's citizens have displayed considerable enthusiasm by enduring long waits, congested registration stations and confusing procedures in order to participate;

The National Election Commission (NEC) appears to have been receptive to complaints and willing to consider improvements to the registration process; the presence of independent Cambodian election monitoring groups and political party observers has enhanced the transparency of the process.

Although the registration process has been reasonably effective thus far, its ultimate success will depend on the number of eligible citizens contained in the final official voter list. Several problems have reduced the opportunity for citizens to register:

Decreasing registration from 28 continuous days to just 2 1/2 days per village can only have resulted in a reduced number of registrants; A late change in regulations as to where citizens could register has caused confusion and is also likely to have resulted in reduced registration; Administration of the registration process was disorganized during the initial days of the process; while administration has improved considerably, problems had not been entirely eliminated by the end of the third week; In places where NDI observed, persons rejected by the registration process were almost never provided with the required documentation or informed of the appeals procedure, leaving affected citizens with no possibility of favorable resolution; and In most cases registration officials were not well trained in the prescribed grievance process and other procedures.

To further enhance the quality of the electoral administration, NDI encourages the NEC to: improve transparency by identifying cases of potential duplicate registration by publishing a list of "near-match" registrants; continue to investigate and resolve all written complaints; prepare and publish the final voter list as soon as possible; and begin immediately to recruit and to train nonpartisan election day staff members. Other essential elements of a competitive election -- described in detail in a series of NDI reports issued over the last year -- are yet to be realized:

The CPP continues to dominate every major facet of the political environment, which has diminished expectations that the election will be conducted in a competitive manner; The CPP also continues to retain control of electoral administration, as evidenced by the

opposition parties, their supporters and nonpartisan domestic organizations continues; The CPP's exercise to enroll supporters by use of a thumbprint-verified party identification card has had a chilling effect on the political climate; and No one has been charged or otherwise held responsible for the murders of opposition supporters during and after the July 1997 coup, further contributing to a climate of intimidation.

An election that is technically well administered cannot be considered credible when a competitive environment is lacking.

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Representatives of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs assessed voter registration and preparations for the election throughout the registration period. The team included NDI Senior Advisor Glenn Cowan, Lawrence Lachmansingh, Project Director of the Electoral Assistance Bureau in Guyana, and NDI Program Officer Sophie Richardson. During its assessment, the NDI team met with members of the NEC, voter registration officials, political party representatives and domestic nongovernmental observers, representatives of the European Union, the United Nations and others. The team visited registration stations and observed the registration process in Phnom Penh, Kandal, Kompong Speu and Kompong Cham.

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