

# **CAMBODIA'S COMMUNE COUNCIL ELECTIONS**

## **A Human Rights Watch Backgrounder**

**January 2002**

As Cambodians head to the polls on February 3, for the first time ever they will be democratically electing their own local level representatives. For the last twenty years the leaders of Cambodia's 1,621 communes (administrative units consisting of four to seven villages) have been appointees of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP). They are now to be replaced with popularly elected commune councils and commune chiefs. As well as marking an important step in the development of democratic institutions in Cambodia, the commune elections will play a crucial role in setting the tone for national elections slated for July 2003. They will also be the first polls conducted during a time of relative peace, and thus could have important ramifications for Cambodian democracy, rule of law and human rights.

The pre-campaign period has seen an increase in threats, killings, and other violence directed against opposition party candidates and supporters. Between January 1, 2001, and January 5, 2002, fifteen members of political parties running against the ruling CPP, most of whom were prospective or confirmed commune council candidates, have already been killed. 2001 has also seen allegations of widespread voter intimidation and vote buying conducted primarily by the ruling party. This backgrounder includes an overview of the Cambodian electoral process, provides details on human rights abuses in the run-up to the campaign, and assesses the government's lack of effective response to date to reported incidents of political violence and intimidation. The backgrounder ends with concrete recommendations for the Cambodian government and the donor community.

### **POLITICAL CONTEXT**

Cambodia has not held local elections of any kind since the late 1960s, when only candidates from Prince Sihanouk's ruling Sangkum Reastr Niyum party could run for office. Commune elections, originally slated to be held after 1993 national parliamentary elections overseen by the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), have been repeatedly delayed. The 1993 elections and post-election political maneuvering resulted

in a fragile coalition government between the CPP and the royalist Funcinpec Party that collapsed in a coup four years later. In 1998, a second parliamentary election was narrowly won by the CPP over Funcinpec, which was given a junior role in a new coalition. Cambodia's national political opposition is currently provided by the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), which holds fifteen out of 122 seats in the National Assembly. However, the leaders of Cambodia's communes, who are very important players at the local level, remain appointees of the CPP, and many have been in position since the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979.

Given the CPP's nationwide control of local leadership, it is hard to see why its leaders agreed to hold the commune elections at all. The most benign interpretation is that they recognize that the party's national strength has been weakened by the unpopularity of many of its long-standing appointees at the commune level. A less charitable interpretation is that they may think they can control the outcome. In support of the former, the CPP conducted controversial surveys prior to candidate registration to confirm which local leaders might hinder the party's election chances. The latter theory is supported by the growing reports of violence and intimidation directed against opposition parties. The period from January 1, 2001 to January 5, 2002 has seen the following human rights violations:

- Killings of fifteen activists and commune council candidates for the Funcinpec and SRP parties.
- 176 reported cases of intimidation, threats and harassment against activists and candidates running against the CPP, including twenty-one death threats. In addition, there has been one reported case of threats made against a CPP supporter, by a Funcinpec village chief.
- Twenty-two cases of arbitrary arrest or detention of Funcinpec and SRP party supporters.
- Forty-eight cases of property violation against Funcinpec and SRP parties, including forty-one cases where party signboards were damaged, destroyed or removed for fear of reprisal. One case of property destruction – the burning down of a party office - has been reported against a CPP office.
- Intimidation of voters, primarily through confiscation of voter registration cards and pressure to take oaths of loyalty to the CPP, in at least nine Cambodian provinces.
- Inaction by the National Election Committee, the Central Security Office for the Defense of the Elections, and other governmental mechanisms to address and penalize violations of the electoral law such as bribery, intimidation and violence.

### **The Commune Election Process**

Under the commune election system, which follows a proportional representation model, citizens will vote from political party lists for a council of between five and eleven members, depending on the population of their commune. The first-placed candidate of the party with most votes assumes the position of commune chief and presiding councilor, and the first-placed candidate of the next most successful party assumes the position of deputy chief. A powerful yet unelected position is held by the commune

secretary, an Interior Ministry appointee charged with assisting the commune councils in the administration of their duties.

When the Commune Election law was in its draft stages, a wide range of Cambodian civil society groups – including the three nongovernmental election monitoring organizations, Comfrel, Coffel and Nicfec – advocated strongly for a commune electoral system based on individual candidacy, as opposed to party lists and proportional representation. They contended that such a system would increase decision-making based on local issues, while reducing traditional problems of political party patronage, inter-party conflict and political violence. These suggestions were rejected by the Cambodian government.

With many of the smaller political parties that contested the 1998 national elections either folded or absorbed into their larger rivals, a total of eight parties are fielding candidates in the commune elections.

Party	Number of Candidates	Number of Communes	Coverage (Percentage)
Cambodian People's Party	24,948	1,621	100 %
Funcinpec	23,537	1,603	99 %
Sam Rainsy Party	22,717	1,501	93 %
Khmer Democratic Party	1,042	61	3.76 %
Chamroeun Niyum Khmer Party	100	6	0.37 %
Vongkort Khemarak Party	63	5	0.30 %
Khmer Angkor Party	38	3	0.18 %
Khmer Women's Party	18	1	0.06 %

## **HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN THE COMMUNE ELECTION PROCESS**

Human rights abuses against Funcinpec and SRP candidates and supporters were widespread throughout 2001, and have been increasing as the election date nears. Opposition parties, Cambodian human rights groups and international observers have all expressed grave concern at the climate of fear and intimidation experienced by both voters and candidates at the local level.

### **Political Violence and Intimidation**

During the November 2001 visit to Cambodia of the U.N. Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia, Prime Minister Hun Sen made a call for non-violence in the election period, and pledged to do so fifteen more times before polling day. The latest such statement came on January 17, when Hun Sen said violence would not be tolerated and ordered authorities to arrest any perpetrators of political violence “no matter what political parties they are from or how high their ranks are.” However, Human Rights Watch is not aware of any steps taken by the government to turn the Prime Minister’s words into official policy to ensure the security of both candidates and voters.

Human rights organizations working in Cambodia have documented more than 267 cases of alleged violence and intimidation from January 1, 2001, through January 5, 2002. These include harassment, threats, arbitrary arrest and detention, restriction of assembly, property violations, destruction of party signboards, and numerous violent acts - including fourteen confirmed murders.

Evidence in some of these cases points to incumbent commune chiefs, who wield immense power at the local level because they often command the local militia and police. It's not difficult to send a message to villagers that if they vote the "wrong way," their security cannot be guaranteed or their village may be cut off from national level development assistance, such as new roads or schools.

The Sam Rainsy Party has been the primary target of rights abuses, with some two-thirds of all reported victims SRP members. Nearly a quarter of reported abuses have been against Funcinpec, and a further 7 percent have been directed at the general populace. Three reported cases have been of abuses against CPP members.

Violations have been reported in twenty-two of Cambodia's twenty-four provinces and municipalities. As in the 1998 national elections, there is a significant concentration of cases in southern and northwestern provinces, regions that had a large Khmer Rouge presence in the 1990s. The U.N. Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (COHCHR) estimates that some 40 percent of all reported abuses have occurred in these remote, military-controlled areas. Other locations of particular concern include the southern provinces of Prey Veng and Kandal, with numerous reported incidents of threats and intimidation, and Kompong Cham province, where more than a third of all suspected political killings have taken place. Alleged perpetrators of abuses are predominantly commune and village officials - many of whom are themselves commune election candidates - as well as local members of the police and military.

Opposition party representatives claim security concerns as the main factor in their failure to field candidates in fourteen communes throughout the country, rendering the elections there as one-party events. In a further 120 communes, only candidates from the ruling CPP party and national coalition partner Funcinpec are standing. Two communes feature only candidates from CPP and the Sam Rainsy Party. Both Funcinpec and SRP representatives have stated that the pressures on opposition supporters have led to many candidate withdrawals. Some potential candidates have shied away from running, party leaders say, because there is too much risk in running for office.

This issue has been particularly acute when it comes to encouraging women to run for office. Despite each party pledging to promote women candidates, and the SRP even imposing a 30 percent quota for women, the proportion of female candidates from the eight political parties stands at just 16 percent (CPP 13 percent, Funcinpec 14 percent and SRP 20 percent). Of these, only a few are placed first on the party candidate lists, and therefore stand a chance of being elected commune chief or deputy chief. The killing of two women over two successive days in early January - a Funcinpec candidate in

Kampot and an SRP candidate in Svay Rieng – is likely to raise the element of fear among women candidates.

### **Political Killings**

Between February 10, 2000, and January 5, 2002, nineteen Funcinpec and SRP party members, most of whom were prospective or confirmed commune council candidates, were killed. Fifteen of these cases occurred since the start of 2001 – three of them within the first week of January 2002 alone.

The killings included the following:

- On February 10, 2000, SRP member Chim Chhuon was shot dead in Kompong Cham province. A commune militiaman was tried for the murder and acquitted on August 8, 2000 – a verdict upheld at two subsequent appeals.
- On June 3, 2000, prospective Funcinpec candidate Pak Chhoeun and his wife Doung Mean were shot and killed in Kampot. The incumbent commune chief and a local villager were convicted of the murders on March 15, 2001, with two others convicted in absentia. However, the court rejected a political motive for the killing, attributing it to revenge for perceived acts of “black magic.”
- On August 17, 2000, Khhim Nhak, a SRP member in Kompong Cham, was killed. The deputy commune police chief was convicted of the murder on January 19, 2001 and a local villager convicted in absentia.
- On January 3, 2001, SRP activist Phoung Phann was shot dead at his home in Kompong Cham. Court attempts to question the suspected perpetrator, a local member of the military, have so far proved unsuccessful.
- On January 14, 2001, prospective Funcinpec candidate Chhay Than was killed in Kompong Cham. Court attempts to question the suspected perpetrator, a local soldier, have so far proved unsuccessful.
- On June 30, 2001, prospective SRP candidate Uch Horn was killed in Kompong Speu. He had previously complained to two local human rights groups and the U.N. that he had received death threats. Two local residents, one a police officer, were convicted of the murder on October 12, 2001. However, investigations by human rights NGOs also point to the possible involvement of Uch Horn's village chief in the killing.
- On July 17, 2001, prospective Funcinpec candidate Meas Soy was shot and killed by two unidentified persons in Kompong Chhnang. A member of the military was subsequently tried for the murder, but acquitted for lack of evidence.
- On August 23, 2001, prospective SRP candidate Touch Voern was shot and killed at his home in Siem Reap. Five suspects remain in custody for the killing, three of whom claim they were tortured during police interrogation. All deny the accusations.
- On September 21, 2001, Chhim Leang Sri, a prospective SRP candidate in Kompong Cham, was shot dead by three armed men. No suspects have been arrested.
- On November 5, 2001, confirmed SRP candidate Sam Sophear was beaten to death by five assailants in Battambang. Four suspects have admitted the killing,

which they claim took place at the instruction of a government agent who remains at large.

- On November 14, 2001, SRP member Phoung Sophath was shot dead in Kompong Cham. Two hours later, Funcinpec candidate Thon Phally was shot dead in the same commune. Two members of the military and a former militia member are suspected in the killing of Thon Phally, but to date none have been arrested. The proximity and similar methods used in these two killings suggest that they are related.
- On December 8, 2001, SRP activist Ouk Sao was shot dead at his home in Kompong Thom. To date no suspects have been arrested for the killing.
- On December 9, 2001, Funcinpec candidate Orn Chileng was fatally wounded at his home in Takeo province after being attacked with a knife and a wrench. A CPP election observer has been arrested in connection with the killing.
- On December 14, 2001, the body of Ros Don, first-placed candidate on the Funcinpec party list for his commune, was found near a roadside in Siem Reap. Don had sustained a number of blows to the head. Investigations into his death are continuing.
- On January 4, 2002, third-placed Funcinpec candidate Long Kim Thon and her husband Soun Kroeun, a Funcinpec election observer, were shot dead in fields near their village in, Kampot province. On January 15 four people, including two commune policemen, were arrested in connection with the killing.
- On January 5, 2002, Touch Sean, as SRP candidate, was shot dead at her home in Svay Rieng province. Local authorities claim robbery as the motive for the killing. Three people have been arrested as suspects in the killing, one a district-level deputy police chief.

While there is no evidence that any of the killings have been directed from high levels of government, opposition party members say that the government's lack of serious and effective action to stop the killing, results in a climate of fear and intimidation for voters and candidates alike.

### **Voter Coercion and Intimidation**

2001 has seen widespread reports of voter intimidation and vote buying, primarily conducted by the ruling party. The great majority of cases go unreported, with voters either unaware of their rights or too afraid to accuse the perpetrators – typically local officials such as their own village or commune chiefs, and often backed by members of the police and military.

Beginning in May 2001, CPP party agents, local authorities and in some cases uniformed police officers carried out voter opinion surveys on behalf of the CPP, distributing forms with lists of names and photographs of possible candidates. These surveys are in violation of the Commune Election Law, which calls for government institutions and officials to be politically neutral.

Another prevalent form of voter intimidation is for government or party officials to confiscate voter registration cards from voters, record the numbers, and then return them.

Since the start of voter registration on July 21, 2001, CPP officials have confiscated voter registration cards in at least nine provinces, with cards confiscated in entire districts and voters told to support the CPP. There has been one reported case of card collection directed at CPP members by one village chief. This is a tactic that was also employed in the 1993 and 1998 national elections; the intent appears to give voters the impression that their voting-day activity can be monitored and detected, and is explicitly prohibited by the Commune Election Law. Although cards are usually returned to voters after a few days, a report from Kien Svay district, Kandal province, indicates that cards collected in September 2001 were still being held by local authorities as of December 29.

Registration card collection is frequently accompanied by ceremonies at which voters are urged to swear allegiance to the CPP, sometimes by thumbprinting documents or drinking "oath water" to cement their pledge. These gatherings are often accorded additional legitimacy by being conducted in the local Buddhist temple. And as early as August 2001, electoral monitoring organizations received reports of vote buying that have continued through to January 2002. Each of the three main parties has been reported as involved in vote buying, although the CPP has been cited in the great majority of cases, reflecting their control of resource allocation to the local level. For example, the election monitoring organizations report that in many areas commune chiefs who had received emergency flood donations of food, clothing and other materials distributed these goods to sworn CPP voters.

Examples of voter bribery and coercion reported by the Cambodian election monitoring organizations include:

- On August 11, commune authorities collected thumbprints from voters in nineteen villages of Samrong district, Takeo province, and asked them to drink oath water as a pledge to vote for the CPP.
- On August 29, the chief of Tropang Thom North commune in Takeo province summoned 404 voters to the local temple, where they were asked to vote for the CPP, again drinking oath water to seal their pledge.
- On September 5, village chiefs and group leaders in Koh Thom district, Kandal province, collected voter cards and made villagers pledge allegiance to the CPP with oath water.
- On September 26, the village chief of Chroy Somreung in Takeo province collected voter cards from villagers to record the code numbers.
- On September 28, military officials in Somreung Tung district, Kompong Speu province, told voters to vote for the CPP if they wanted to receive gifts.

Throughout September, in twelve districts of Siem Reap province, commune authorities including commune chiefs and village chiefs conducted a widespread campaign of voter card collection and forcing voters to thumbprint documents pledging allegiance to the CPP. Voters were informed that those voting for the CPP could expect to receive gifts, and others could expect to face problems. All of the above cases were submitted to the National Election Committee in November 2001, but at the time of this writing, no investigations had been conducted.

## **Lack of Government Action to Stop Political Violence and Intimidation**

Cambodia's National Election Committee (NEC) is mandated by the Commune Election law to organize, oversee and monitor all aspects of the elections from registration of voters, parties and candidates to ultimately verifying the accuracy of the final tally.

The Commune Election law prohibits a number of acts such as confiscation of voter registration cards, threats and intimidation against candidates or potential candidates, use of force or intimidation to undermine confidence in the secrecy of the ballot, and pressure on citizens to sign oaths of loyalty to a particular political party. The law includes provisions for penalties to be imposed on election officials and ordinary citizens who violate the law. These include fines, revocation of voter registration cards, and if the violator is a candidate, prohibition from standing for election. If an election administration official violates the law, they can be dismissed or reprimanded. To date, however, not a single case has been seen where the penalty provisions set out in the Commune Election law have been exercised against offenders.

During the national elections of 1998, the NEC was widely criticized for its perceived partiality to the CPP and failure to act on cases of electoral irregularity. In particular, observers of the post-election period were highly critical of the fact that the NEC accepted a revision of the formula used to calculate seat allocations from voting figures, and in the post-election period it rejected every one of more than 300 complaints it received of electoral irregularity that favored the ruling party.

Some changes have been made in advance of the 2002 commune elections, with three representatives of Funcinpec and one from the SRP accepted onto the NEC. Composition of the Provincial Election Commissions and Commune Election Commissions has also seen some minor changes, although insufficient to counter the CPP domination. Yet the NEC remains, in the words of one NGO leader, "a toothless tiger", and its inaction strongly suggests political bias towards the ruling party. At a minimum, it has shown itself unwilling or incapable of carrying out its role.

While the composition of the NEC is marginally more balanced in this election, it is still passive in terms of dealing with political problems, primarily referring any complaints of political violence to the Ministry of Interior. The Provincial Election Commissions, whose members are largely recruited from high-ranking officials of the government who tend to be CPP members, have proven in practice to be very partisan. While this partisanship may not be shown overtly, it is evident in the fact that when Provincial Election Commissions are asked to address a violation of the election law they rarely take concrete action.

The NEC has defended its failure to act on reported election violations by noting the financial constraints it faces, and maintains that very few reports by the election monitoring organizations or the U.N. are actually sent directly to the NEC. In addition, NEC officials state that many perpetrators of offences such as voter card collection and pledging ceremonies are unaware that their actions are illegal. According to NEC officials, many problems are resolved locally by provincial and commune election



commissions, who convene community meetings to talk over problems and explain the proper electoral process.

The NEC has now placed a priority on completing a Code of Conduct for village and commune chiefs outlining their responsibilities under the law – a task that should have been undertaken long before voter registration. As of January 17 the Code of Conduct remained unfinished and undistributed, with just a few weeks to go before polling day. The NEC had previously pledged that it would be finalized before the official election campaign starts on January 18, and that future violations will be punished.

In August 2001, after heavy criticism about a rash of political killings from donor countries, human rights groups and the U.N., the government established a Central Security Office for the Defense of the Commune Elections. Presided over by Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng, it includes representatives from the interior and defense ministries, national police, military and the NEC.

On October 11 the Central Security Office issued a directive to local authorities, province, municipal and commune security offices to strengthen security especially for political parties and agents. It calls for government officials to understand and abide by the law, to be neutral, and to collaborate closely with the NEC. The directive specifically states: “If any incident happens, there should be an immediate investigation and collection of evidence to prove the case and prepare a report in order for the Court to impose the relevant sanction.” Despite this proclamation, to date the body has been ineffective and has not conducted a single investigation.

### **Unequal Access to the Media**

Access to the media, and in particular broadcast media, remains a severe problem for opposition parties in Cambodia. This could be a decisive factor in the commune elections because people will be voting for parties, which will rely on radio and television to get their message out, rather than individual local candidates. Only six of around thirty Cambodian newspapers that are published on a regular basis are not affiliated to the ruling CPP, and the CPP dominates ownership of television and radio stations.

A nation-wide survey published by the Center for Advanced Study and The Asia Foundation in 2001 found that television is the most powerful medium for reaching Cambodian voters, with 72 percent of those polled stating that television is the most widely accepted source for information about elections. However all of Cambodia's six national television stations are either state-owned, or privately owned by CPP affiliates.

Of the thirteen Cambodian national radio stations, only FM102 (a nonpolitical channel operated by the NGO Women's Media Center) and Beehive Radio (operated by the Beehive Social Democratic Party, which is not standing in the commune elections) are wholly free from CPP affiliation. Funicpec managed to re-establish a radio station in 2001, but it remains closely linked to the government and its national coalition partner. The Ministry of Information has consistently rejected the Sam Rainsy Party's applications for a radio broadcast license.

Television and radio programming is consistently biased towards the ruling party, with extensive news coverage of CPP achievements while the other parties are largely ignored. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections (Comfrel), a Cambodian electoral monitoring NGO, is monitoring television and radio broadcasts in Phnom Penh and three key provinces. It found that during the week of January 4-10 the airwaves were dominated by coverage of government activities (82 percent). The only political party granted airtime in the broadcast media that week was the CPP, which had forty-nine minutes on air.

For those not interested in news, a ninety-part radio drama series "Sun Under Moonlight" paints the life story of Prime Minister Hun Sen in glowing terms. Already broadcast once on Bayon Radio (a private station owned by Hun Sen), it is currently being re-transmitted on the CPP's Apsara Radio and regional stations, with episodes scheduled to continue until days before the start of the election campaign.

The few non-CPP media outlets that are able to function do so with a relative degree of freedom. No newspapers were closed by the government during 2001 and little or no action has been taken recently against coverage that is critical of the government or the CPP. However, the lack of opposition access to media, especially during the pre-election period, deprives the Cambodian electorate of vital information concerning the political alternatives open to them.

A further test of the freedom of expression for opposition party members relating to the commune elections should be evident in commune council candidate debates and "roundtables" planned for the campaign period. A joint initiative between the Khmer Institute for Democracy and the U.S. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, will feature debates involving six of the eight parties participating in the elections, including the CPP, Funcinpec and Sam Rainsy parties. Although limited to just six communes, the existence of such debates represents an important step forward for the Cambodia democratic process.

Although each of the parties has agreed to participate in the debates, the NEC has refused to grant free air time for them on state television. Airtime for the debates may be bought from private national TV stations; however, these private stations are under substantial pressure to refuse any election-related programming that has not first undergone NEC censorship. However the NEC has decided that it will allow pre-screened, national-level election "roundtables," organized by the election monitoring organizations and other non-governmental organizations, to be broadcast starting on January 18.

The NEC's media monitoring subcommittee has primarily focused on the political content of voter education materials produced by election NGOs, rather than lack of access to the airwaves by opposition parties during the election campaign. NGO leaders are occasionally featured on radio and television programs to discuss electoral issues. For example on January 9 the national television station TVK broadcast a seventy-minute roundtable discussion on electoral security organized by Comfrel together with the NEC. A daily voter education program produced by Comfrel, which started on January 8 and

will continue for one month, is being broadcast on two different radio stations each day. Aired live, it will feature call-in questions from listeners.

### **Problems in Voter Registration**

Cambodian election monitoring organizations charged that the voter registration period, which lasted from July 21 to August 19, 2001, was both chaotic and partisan. Characterized by a lack of resources, lack of effective information dissemination, lack of flexibility on the part of the NEC to meet the problems that arose, and a reported tendency to favor supporters of the ruling party, it left an estimated one million potential electors (from an eligible population of just over six million) unregistered. The election monitoring organizations reported instances of registration stations closing early, threats made or money demanded of voters coming to register, and citizens turned away from stations unregistered after lengthy waits because of confusion, lack of trained registration workers and sufficient supplies. After requests from political parties and the election monitoring organizations, the NEC re-opened registration stations in some areas for an additional three days. However, this fell far short of the two-week re-opening demanded by the election monitoring organizations, and proved insufficient action to guarantee the right to vote of many Cambodian citizens.

The Cambodian election monitoring organization Comfrel, which monitored voter registration at 10,647 of the 12,378 registration stations, found "unacceptable" problems at twenty-nine stations, and reported a total of 7,477 technical irregularities at 3,711 different stations. These included:

- 819 cases of threats or intimidation of voters.
- 2,754 cases of non-neutral behavior by provincial and commune election commissions and registration officials.
- 1,011 cases where observers' presence was refused or accreditation cards confiscated.
- 206 cases of unidentified or ineligible persons being allowed to register.
- 275 stations where refusal and complaint forms were not been provided to voters.
- 27 cases of voters who had registered more than once.
- 87 cases of voter card confiscation by local authorities.

### **CONCLUSION**

Cambodia's first local elections, which should be a unique opportunity for citizens to have an impact on decisions affecting their everyday lives, are taking place in a climate of fear and intimidation. Opposition candidates are afraid to stand; opposition supporters are afraid to vote with their conscience. The mechanisms put in place by the Cambodian government to ensure free, fair and secure elections have so far proved ineffectual and partisan. Yet there remains the chance to take decisive action if the election campaign is not to see further threats and violence. The international community must act now, taking advantage of its influential status supporting the development of Cambodia, if it wishes to see commune elections that live up to the name.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Cambodian Government should issue clear written instructions to government officials at all levels (national, provincial, district, commune and village), calling for an end to political violence, intimidation, coercion and other human rights violations, and setting out the penalties for transgressions. These instructions should be delivered at a national election security meeting, broadcast on national television and radio, and closely followed-up by government, civil society and the international community.
- The Cambodian government should support statements such as that made by King Sihanouk on January 17, when he urged voters not to be intimidated by threats or coercion when they cast their ballots. Government officials should make strong public statements to underscore the secrecy of the ballot, explicitly stating that voters should vote with their consciences and are in no way beholden to any pre-poll pledges.
- The National Election Committee should demonstrate independence and integrity by investigating all reported violations and electoral irregularities, exercising its powers of sanction where appropriate. Donors should consider contributing towards the costs of the NEC's investigations. The Central Security Office for the Defense of the Elections should take concrete action to ensure the security of commune election candidates and other party members before, during and after the polling.
- The Cambodian government, Central Security Office and local authorities should ensure the security and freedom of expression for all participants in candidate debates proposed for the campaign period.
- The Cambodian government should extend full and unfettered access to broadcast media to all political parties during the campaign period, and candidate discussions should be aired on national television and radio without government censorship.
- The international community should increase its support to Cambodian civil society organizations, in particular election monitoring and human rights groups, as well as international observers, to effectively observe and report on the election period and any post-election violence and reprisals, and press for follow-up of alleged violations.