

18. From 7 November onwards the two Princes discussed the various aspects of the problem several times, but, because of certain unforeseen factors, their efforts did not reach any conclusion until 28 December when a Joint Declaration was issued (Annexure 13). This Declaration expressed satisfaction of both the Parties at the deepening cordiality and complete mutual understanding established between them. It underlined that on the remaining problems of democratic liberties, supplementary general elections, administration of the two northern provinces and military integration, agreement in principle had been reached and detailed discussion on their implementation had taken place between the two Parties, who expected to reach agreement on the modalities of such implementation in the near future. The Declaration provided that a Government of National Unity with adequate representation of the Pathet Lao would be formed before the supplementary general elections which were to be held by "equal, direct, free and secret ballot, with equal rights to both sexes, and in circumstances guaranteeing justice and precluding fraud - this in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution of the Kingdom." Both the Parties agreed that such a Government would also build up Laos on the basis of a suitable political programme as a peaceful, democratic, united, independent and prosperous country. The Joint Declaration stated that immediately after the formation of the Government of National Unity, the administration of the two provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua, as well as the Fighting Units of the Pathet Lao, would be placed under the authority of this Government and would be reorganized in accordance with the national pattern; also the Pathet Lao Movement would be transformed under the name of "Neo Lao Haksat" as a political party working within the framework of the existing laws of the country.

19. On 29 December, the Commission received a letter signed jointly by the Prime Minister and Prince Souphanouvong forwarding the Joint Declaration of 28 December. The Joint letter stated that the "signing of this joint communique constitutes an important step in the working in sincere co-operation between the Royal Government and the Pathet Lao Forces, with a view to reaching quickly the final settlement of the Laotian problem in conformity with the Geneva Agreements." The letter concluded by requesting the Commission "to inform the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference and assure them that once the general supplementary elections will have been held in the conditions and circumstances mentioned in the Joint Declaration, the political settlement as foreseen in Article 14 of the Geneva Agreement will be realised. Suitable notification will be addressed to the International Commission and the Co-Presidents of the Geneva Conference as soon as the arrangements foreseen in the Joint Declaration are fully implemented." This joint letter is reproduced as Annexure 14. The Commission transmitted all these documents to the Co-Chairmen in a letter of 11 January 1957, indicating that the Parties were optimistic of reaching a final settlement and of holding supplementary elections without much delay.

20. On 31 December, 1956 Prince Souphanouvong left Vientiane, agreeing to return to the capital in two or three weeks' time in order to continue and complete the negotiations. He arrived in Vientiane on 4 February 1957, and the negotiations, on the basis of 28 December agreement, were immediately undertaken between the two Parties. No substantial progress was reported to the Commission except