

II. PEACEBUILDING ACTIVITY IN CAMBODIA

The sections below represent the main fields of peacebuilding activity in Cambodia. Each describes the main issues at play, the role of the principal actors (including the Cambodian government, ngos, multilateral bodies and bilateral donors), and any Canadian support or involvement.

A. ELECTIONS

1. Issue

Elections, now scheduled for July 26, 1998, are the main political focus of Cambodians and the international community. A new legal framework consisting of the Law on Political Parties and the Law on the Election of the National Assembly was adopted late in 1997.

The most significant aspect of the framework is the creation of the National Election Committee (NEC) which, after much debate between the government, the National Assembly, and the international community, has been given the legal authority to act as a permanent, independent agency with a mandate to organize and supervise free and fair elections through provincial, commune, and polling station-level election commissions. In addition to its chair and vice-chair¹³, the NEC will have two representatives from the Ministry of Interior, one from each party in the National Assembly, two citizens and one representative of local ngos.

Although there remain some outstanding legal issues (eg, the Election Law will need amendments to its timeframes for voter and party/candidate registration in order for an election to be held in July; legislation to create a Constitutional Council to adjudicate electoral disputes is still needed although the Council's creation now seems likely), and technical questions (can voter registration be completed in time, what effect will the summer rains have on turnout, transport of officials and equipment), the key issue now is whether the government has the political will to let free and fair elections occur within this framework.

There are several tests of that political will ahead:

- whether the opposition leaders, and, in particular, FUNCINPEC leader Ranariddh, will be allowed to return, have their property restored, register as candidates and campaign in safety, including obtaining equal access at least to the public broadcast media.¹⁴ Most of

¹³Chheng Phon, a former minister of culture, is chair, and Kassie Neou, head of the Cambodian Institute of Human Rights (CIHR), is vice-chair.

¹⁴Ranariddh as the winner of the most votes in 1993 and as First Prime Minister until he left in July to be replaced by Ung Huot, is perhaps not the "opposition" but the "government" in a de jure sense, but for all practical purposes is seen as opposition leader now.