

## I. OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CAMBODIA

Six years after the Paris Peace Accords, and four years after internationally-organized elections, Cambodia's wounds are by no means fully healed. There remain serious political divisions, and the country is still socially and economically fragile. Nevertheless, there are signs that the country could consolidate its democratization, particularly if the 1998 elections are reasonably free and fair, and if the right combination of local political will and sufficient, well-directed international support can be found.

Unlike many of the war-torn countries that have been the focus of international attention in the 1990s, Cambodia's divisions have not been based primarily on ethnic, language, clan, or religious differences: Cambodia is overwhelmingly Buddhist and Khmer-speaking; minority groups comprise only 370,000 people (although there has been persecution of the minorities, especially the Vietnamese). The main cleavage now is essentially political, based on the rivalry between the royalists of FUNCINPEC<sup>2</sup>, with their ties to Thailand, and the supporters of the CPP<sup>3</sup>, the successor to the former Vietnamese-backed regime. This division, although intense and pervasive, also offers some hope, many observers seem to think, simply because it is not rooted in non-negotiable ethnic or religious identity: potentially at least, it should be capable of resolution through a negotiated arrangement.

The 1993 Cambodian elections, under the authority of UNTAC (the UN Transitional Authority for Cambodia), were the high water point of international involvement in helping this country of 11 million overcome the effects of civil and inter-state conflict, as well as international isolation. By 1993, the international community had spent over \$2 billion<sup>4</sup> in the largest UN operation of its kind, conducting elections and providing security for them (deploying from 46 countries 22,000 peacekeepers, 3,500 police and 1,700 civilian employees and electoral volunteers), repatriating and resettling 360,000 refugees, and administering the country generally. Canada's contribution totalled \$70 mn (Cdn); it provided 220 soldiers and 100 civilians for the exercise.

The result of the Cambodian and international efforts, despite threats from the Khmer Rouge which called for a boycott, was an almost 90% turnout of the 97% of eligible voters who had been registered. FUNCINPEC, led by (then) Prince Sihanouk's son Prince Ranariddh, emerged with the largest number of votes. As such, under the proportional representation system that had been adopted, FUNCINPEC was allocated 58 seats in the National Assembly. However, the runner-up, CPP, led by Hun Sen, the former prime minister under the Vietnam-sponsored regime that followed Vietnam's invasion in 1978, gained 51 seats. Because of CPP's political and

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<sup>2</sup>Front uni pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre, Pacifique et Cooperatif

<sup>3</sup>Cambodian People's Party

<sup>4</sup>dollar figures in the this report are in US currency.