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Credibility of the Election Process - "Are they free and fair?"

A recent French poll indicates that 16.6% of the population would vote for Hun Sen, 17.4% for Ranariddh and 17% for Sam Rainsy. - 60% would not express an opinion in the upcoming election. The Cambodian Internet News Service reported that if international assistance doesn't come forward an Israeli-Argentinian map-making company would be contracted to organize the election process (census, voter registration, balloting etc.) Any violence during the election will be between political parties not the ordinary people of Cambodia and violence is likely in the run-up to the elections. The CPP is trying to position itself to secure 70% of the vote through alliances. The question will be whether people will want to participate because of fear and cynicism. The credibility of a census and voter registration is a concern and impunity has still not been addressed.

Free and fair elections There was some discussion about who's definition of free and fair elections we are using; "If the participants are happy with the outcomes then we have to accept that. We have to accept Cambodia as it is - not what we want." Discussion concentrated on the series of conditions outlined in Chris Cooter's background document. Do these conditions currently exist for free and fair elections? One participant suggested that it is unlikely that the Cambodian elections meet any of the conditions outlined in Cooter's report.

Voter education It was emphasized that voter education will help to decrease violence prior to the election but it was not clear on what is meant by voter education at this time. "The objective shouldn't be perfection, but some steps forward in pluralism where the majority of people vote". There should be support to those in the provinces, not just the urban areas.

Broadcast Media The possibility of using the broadcast media for voter education as a means of countering factionalism was discussed. NGOs could have a role as they have access to the people and could assist with reducing voter intimidation. However, third party access has not been granted and in the absence of access to a neutral broadcast facility, the impact of NGO voter education efforts may be limited.

Election monitors and observers Canada has four advisors in the Elections Commission now and some Canadian NGOs are assisting with voter education. The election process needs to be monitored and closely observed by a large and credible representation of foreign observers.