

is the only regular procedure which is in conformity with the principles of justice and equality.

"Of all the questions put forward at the Conference, the Political Delegation of the 'Pathet Lao' Forces feels that the one concerning free general elections with a view to bringing together all the Laotian citizens into the national body is a matter which must be studied in all priority. For it constitutes a fundamental political settlement which embraces within itself many other questions, and if this problem could be settled, it would enable the settlement of all the others."

B : MILITARY NEGOTIATIONS

38. Article 12 of the Geneva Agreement provided that there should be twelve Provisional Assembly Areas, one to each province, for the reception of the Fighting Units of 'Pathet Lao'. However, in the Agreement signed at Khang Khay by the two Parties in the Joint Commission on 29th - 30th August, 1954, no mention was made concerning the Provisional Assembly Areas for the Fighting Units of 'Pathet Lao' in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua (Reference paragraph 51(a) of the First Interim Report).

39. This fact, together with the 'Pathet Lao' interpretation of Article 14 that the 'Pathet Lao' had been given the two provinces in their entirety, went to support their claim that the Royal Government had no right to these provinces, that the Royal Government troops were interlopers and should withdraw. They asserted, in other words, that these two provinces belonged to them administratively and militarily and that this was agreed to as a compensation for their agreement to withdraw from all the other ten provinces.

40. On the other hand, the Royal Government claimed that the true significance of Article 14 was that the 'Pathet Lao' were to restrict themselves in the regroupment zones in the two provinces with a connecting corridor, and that this did not mean that the Royal Government had forfeited their right of free movement in these two provinces. In this interpretation the Royal Government claimed that the only significance of Article 14 was that the 'Pathet Lao' were given limited rights in the two provinces and in the corridor and had no right of movement in the other provinces. At the same time, the Royal Government, being a sovereign authority, had unrestricted right to move forces anywhere in the territory of Laos.

41. With such a situation, it was inevitable that opposing forces frequently found themselves against each other and clashes took place. It is true that Article 19 had prescribed that each force should respect the territory under the military control of the other, but since no demarcation had taken place, it was impossible to decide which territory belonged to whom. There was also the additional difficulty of defining the words "territories under the military control".