



BACK FROM THE BRINK

Cambodian democracy gets a second chance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The international community collectively heaved a sigh of relief when Cambodia's rival factions moved back from the brink of disaster and agreed to form a fresh coalition government in November 1998 after weeks of violent protests and political deadlock.

But optimism is tempered by the knowledge that a previous shaky alliance between the two political parties forming the coalition – the powerful Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the royalist FUNCINPEC party – was torn apart by fighting in July 1997.

Moreover, the renewed power-sharing agreement follows weeks of bitter and at times violent protests by opposition supporters who claimed the CPP victory in elections on 26 July 1998 was the product of widespread electoral fraud.

ICG addressed the electoral process and post-polls stand-off in its recent report, *Cambodia's Elections Turn Sour*, published 10 September 1998. The present report follows the tortuous path that led to the formation of a coalition government in November. It also looks ahead at the prospects for the coalition -- between two parties who regard each other as rivals rather than partners -- lasting out its five-year mandate intact.

This will largely depend on the ability of the two sides to learn from past mistakes, to set aside their mutual mistrust and to show real commitment to working together to resolving the host of overwhelming problems that plague the small Southeast Asian nation. High on the list of issues to be addressed are a stagnant economy, unrelenting and spreading poverty, rampant and illegal deforestation, general lawlessness, drug trafficking, corruption, a cumbersome and ineffective administration, widespread impunity, lack of legislation and a weak judiciary.