

# **IRI Calls for Peaceful and Lawful Resolution of Cambodia's Political Crisis**

## ***Final Report Says July Election Did Not Meet International Standards***

September 26, 2003

The International Republican Institute today issued a final report on the July 27 National Assembly elections and urged Cambodia's political parties to negotiate a peaceful and mutually acceptable resolution to the ongoing electoral dispute.

The report cites pre-election intimidation and an inequitable political playing field in Cambodia's failure to meet international standards for democratic elections.

"The next government of Cambodia should reflect the will of the Cambodian people. The leadership of Cambodia's political parties should take every step necessary to negotiate a peaceful resolution," said Christine Todd Whitman, the former governor of New Jersey and IRI's election observation delegation leader.

Whitman headed a delegation of 60 credentialed election observers who monitored voting proceedings in 14 Cambodian provinces. IRI has conducted programs in Cambodia since 1993, when IRI's chairman, U.S. Senator John McCain, led an observation of the country's first multi-party elections. IRI has worked with all major political parties and with civil society to help build democratic processes in Cambodia.

### **Cambodia's Political Future in Question**

IRI issues its report just as the National Assembly is scheduled to convene to form a new government. Cambodia's constitution requires a two-third majority of the seats in the National Assembly to form a government, but no political party met this threshold in the July elections. Last month the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) and Funcinpec formed The Alliance of Democrats. The Alliance has called for a government made up of the Cambodian People's Party, Funcinpec and SRP, without Hun Sen as Prime Minister.

At this time the CPP has refused to negotiate with the Alliance. As a result the National Assembly meeting scheduled for this weekend will convene without representatives of the SRP and Funcinpec, or the symbolic presence of the King, who has refused to participate in the swearing in ceremony unless all three parties are in attendance.

IRI calls on Cambodia's political parties to peacefully negotiate an acceptable settlement to the current electoral dispute. The Alliance of Democrats has attempted to use existing legal means to dispute the election results only to be shut out by a process controlled by the ruling party. The demands of the Alliance are part of the legitimate negotiating process exercised in parliamentary democracies around the world and should not be ignored or intimidated by the threat of using extra-constitutional power.

### **Climate of Fear**

IRI found that the election process failed to genuinely express the will of the Cambodia's voters by providing a truly competitive political environment. In a series of pre-election assessments conducted over the first six months of 2003, IRI reported that a climate of fear

and intimidation pervaded much of the Cambodian countryside. Though the number political murders declined from earlier elections, IRI found that:

- Violence continued to be directed primarily against opposition political activists, leading to 11 cases of political murder documented by human rights groups;
- CPP officials and village chiefs in rural areas coerced voters using both threats and inducements; and
- The SRP and Funcinpec parties targeted ethnic Vietnamese with irresponsible rhetoric.

### **Level Playing Field**

The report concluded that during the campaign period opposition political parties had very little chance to reach voters because of the domination by the CPP of government-owned broadcast media. In one case the Ministry of Information denied repeated requests for a radio license from the SRP while granting a license to the government in the same time frame.

This imbalance was exacerbated by the fact that many Cambodian civil servants openly campaigned for CPP candidates. Furthermore, CPP appointees dominated the ostensibly independent National Election Commission. As a result, very few village chiefs were sanctioned for coercive political acts on behalf of the CPP.

### **Recommendations**

IRI concluded that the biggest problem in Cambodia is a failure to equitably and effectively enforce existing laws that govern political activity. In the report IRI recommended that:

- NEC should be representative of all political parties;
- Access to broadcast media should be expanded for opposition parties;
- Political parties should have the right to purchase a radio license;
- Political gift-giving should be banned outright; and
- Civil servants should not be given leaves of absence to work for political parties during the 30 day campaign period.

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[Election Observation Report: 2003 National Assembly Elections](#)