



Joint Statement On Atmosphere Prior to the 2008 Elections of Members of the National Assembly

COMFREL Central Office, July 25, 2008

The league of civil society organizations has appraised the atmosphere prior to the elections as **tense and insecure, as a result of threats, the gunning down** of political party activists—the assassination of a journalist affiliated with the opposition party (the Sam Rainsy Party – SRP) in particular—and the deployment of Cambodian and Thai military troops around Preah Vihear Temple, as well as the lack of neutrality of most government officials, authorities, armed force personnel and national police, who carry out activities supporting the ruling party and against other political parties.

“The Preah Vihear military standoff has attracted much of the attention of voters. Hence, bringing voters’ attention back to the elections is absolutely crucial.” says Mr. THUN Saray, President of COMFREL’s Board of Directors and also President of ADHOC.

Mr. Saray is also concerned about electoral obstacles and difficulties faced by some voters in the forthcoming July 27 elections, such as those involved with finding their name on the voter list and working out the relevant polling station code.

Observations of National Assembly elections since 1998 have shown that, one or two days before polling day (often called **Dog Barking Night**), voters are often given money and/or promised materials by political parties. Regarding these elections, civil society organizations are concerned that **political parties will give money and/or materials to voters** not only to attract them to **vote for their party** but also to **prevent certain voters from going to cast their ballot**.

There has been an **increase in the number of cases of violence** during the electoral campaign period, such as murder, intimidation and physical persecution of political party activists. From June 26, 2008 to the end of the election campaign period¹, **six (6)** cases of murder occurred, with a total of seven (7) victims, including political party activists and supporters and a journalist, notably the murder of journalist Mr. Khim Sambo and his son.² Of the six (6) cases, **four (4)** cases involved the murder of Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) members, although the victim of one of the four cases, in Kampong Speu province, was also claimed by the Human Rights Party (HRP) as a member. The two (2) other cases of murder were of SRP members. In most cases, the perpetrator(s) have yet to be brought to justice and the authorities claim that the cases were not politically motivated.

Counting from July 2007 up to the pre-electoral campaign period, **fifteen (15)** cases of assassination of political party members, activists and supporters occurred; **seven (7)** involved the murder of members of the SRP, **three (3)** involved members of the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP), **four (4)** the CPP and the **last one** the HRP.³

The above-mentioned murder cases (before election campaign to an end of campaign) took place in Kampong Cham (4 cases); Banteay Meanchey, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom and Siem Reap

¹ According to a report of COMFREL-ADHOC’s networks

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

provinces (2 cases in each province); and Phnom Penh, Kampong Chhnang, Kampot, Kandal, Preah Vihear, Ratanakiri, Svay Rieng, Takeo and Pailin (1 case in each province/municipality).

Besides cases of murder, the observation has also noted fifty six (56) of **physical persecution and intimidation** towards political party members, activists and supporters in **almost all provinces/municipalities**. There have been around 151 cases of **civil servants, armed forces personnel and local authorities** participating in electoral activities to support the CPP and to oppose other political parties. In addition, there have been cases of violation of electoral law, regulations and procedures; the destruction of property belonging to political parties; the tearing and pulling down of party signs, posters and leaflets; the prevention of and disturbance to campaign activities of other political parties; and gift giving with the aim of buying votes.

COMFREL has observed overall that the atmosphere surrounding the pre-election period brings about concerns over the level of voter participation, particularly in Preah Vihear province. The number of cases of murder, intimidation, threats and irregularities in these elections is lower than in previous elections. However, such cases have still affected the feelings and thoughts of voters. Additionally, we are concerned that these cases will continue to take place in the future. To avoid these negative cases, the league of civil society organizations would like to offer some recommendations, as follows:

- *The competent authorities and institutions should prevent any cases of murder, threat or intimidation toward political party activists and voters during cooling, polling and counting day;*
- *The competent authorities and institutions should take action to investigate the cases of murder, physical persecution and threats, bringing perpetrators to justice effectively;*
- *The competent authorities and institutions should prevent all vote-buying cases (both those telling voters to vote for a specific party and those telling voters not to go to vote), particularly during cooling day;*
- *All armed forces personnel, civil servants and local authorities should not take part in any activity supporting any specific party in or near polling station compounds;*
- *Polling station officers (2nd assistants) should try their best to help voters who have no voter information notice to find their polling station code;*
- *Voters must go to vote even though they might face some minor difficulties.*

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