

Cambodia: Comfrel's Report on Irregularities in Voter List Revision and Voter Registration

During the process of voter list revision and voter registration for 2007, lasting from September 15 to October 20, 2007, COMFREL has deployed around 200 observers to observe in 400 communes/sangkats across 24 provinces/cities.¹

In general, COMFREL observes that both the political and security environment have been improved, although some voters used to or have felt concerns about insecurity, as in previous pre-national election periods. COMFREL highly appreciates the efforts of the National Election Committee (NEC) and officials at all levels, especially village and commune authorities, who have been carrying out voter list revision and voter registration. In some communes, clerks and councils have worked together to create mobile registration working groups to register voters in villages.

However, COMFREL observes that the speed of voter registration this year is slower than that of last year. According to NEC temporary results, dated September 28, 2007, by September 26, 2007, in 1,608 communes/sangkats across 24 provinces/cities, the number of newly registered voters was 233,776, which represents 34% of the NEC estimate of 682,459. For the same period in 2006, the rate of voter registration was 47% (273,477 of an estimated 577,205 new voters to be registered).

Meanwhile, COMFREL has doubts about the NEC's unclear estimation on the number of voters to be registered, as the NEC made a wrong estimation number of new voters to be registered in 2006 (estimating around 570,000 new voters while in reality the number had increased to 1.2 million). The NEC claimed that the overestimate owed to relocations: some people had registered at a new polling station without telling the authority to remove their name from their previous polling station. This caused around 1% of cases being 'double names' (around 78,000 names).

¹ One observer observes in two communes.

This year, the NEC conducted a big campaign to clean voter lists. Around 650,000 voter names could be removed from voter lists. According to NEC estimates, the number of new voters to be registered may be as high as 680,000. The NEC is yet to have a clear explanation on that number and the accuracy of these estimates.

According to COMFREL observers, pattern irregularities regarding voter list revision and voter registration include: not following procedure, not respecting working hours; and not posting publicly Form 1025 (the names of voters to be removed).

For instance, in Sre Nouy commune, Varin district, Siem Reap province, the official in charge did not post the 2006 final voter list until September 19, 2007. In sangkat Ou Chrov, khan Prey Nob, Sihanoukville, Kaoh Khchong village chief and vice-chief recorded some people's names for registration, charging each person 3,000 Riel.

In another case, COMFREL found that five armed soldiers of Battambang Sub-Division 2 had suggested to people, some of whom did not have enough documents, not to register their name on voter lists. This case happened in Boeung Pram (located in Bavel, Lvea and Prey Khpos communes).

COMFREL also found cases of irregularity in three communes of Memot district in Kampong Cham province (Dar, Memot and Tromoung) regarding data error of Form 1025. In Tromoung commune, the number of extracted voter names provided by the commune chief was 341 but when the names were sent back from the NEC, the number had increased to 844 names. In Dar commune, the number of extracted voter names changes had grown from 314 to 826 names. In Memot commune, the number had increased from 134 to 634 persons. The provincial election secretariat official for Kampong Cham said that this number had been estimated after low turnout of voters for the 2007 commune council elections.

Related to the 802 families (3,202 persons) evicted from Village 14 (Sambok Chab), sangkat Tonle Basac in Phnom Penh to Andoung Thmey village in sangkat Kouk Rokar,

khan Dangkao, by September 26, 2007, only around 350 people, equal to 20%, of those aged 18 and above (1,715 people) had registered on the voter list. COMFREL continues to observe and encourage voters to register, although the authorities claim that these groups do not have enough documents or cite other reasons for the discrepancy.

The NEC procedure is complicated. As such, COMFREL will continue to educate people to understand and pay attention to voter list revision and voter registration by means of the radio and other educational materials.

The NEC should find a way to speed up the voter registration process, and especially to ensure that commune clerks respect working hours before and after the Pchum Ben Festival and to create more mobile registration stations in the villages.

COMFREL continues to observe the National Election Committee (NEC) and commune/sangkat authority works towards achieving high results in registering voters and updating voter lists.

According to the NEC's update of the 2007 annual Voter List Revision and Voter Registration, as of October 15, 2007, 651,439 new voters, equal to 94% of the estimated number of new voters, have registered to vote.²

The above figure explains nothing if we analyze the number of new voters to be registered, which may exceed the NEC's estimation as in 2006, when the real number for registration of new voters was 200% of the NEC's estimation. Additionally, observation found that a high number of new voters had not been registered in some places, such as Boeung Pram in Battambang province. Observation found that local authorities had yet to issue residential documents to around 1,000 families sheltering on disputed land which they would then be able to use as evidence to register to vote.

² No 10.32/07 NEC.SG.PIB, Update of the 2007 Annual Voter list Revision and Registration dated October 16, 2007.

Meanwhile, COMFREL is very concerned over the extraction of voter names onto Form 1025 to be removed from the voter list as, in some cases, this has not been carried out in accordance with NEC Guideline No 658/07 dated October 5, 2007, which requires legal documents or clear evidence. COMFREL has found that some voter names have been extracted for removal based on those voters not being able to be found, or based on it being said that those voters had moved away from the commune/sangkat. This act has greatly negative impacts, leading to loss of the right to vote – contrary to the Constitution.

COMFREL is still finding some cases of irregularity arising from the voter list revision and voter registration process, such as lack of respect of working hours, failure to post Form 1025, fraudulent data correction on identity cards and registration of voter names without the voter being present.

COMFREL would like to suggest that the NEC instruct Tropang Phlang commune authorities of Chhouk district of Kampot province and those from Boeung Pram area of Borvel district of Battambang province to round up information and register people to vote, following the example of Kork Roka commune authorities, in Phnom Penh Municipality's Kork Roka district, who registered some voters evicted from Bird's Nest village, even though said authorities have not yet recognized them as legal residents of the district. The NEC must push officials in charge of voter registration to obey Guideline No 658/07 to ensure that the right to vote is not lost owing to any error or bad intention.