



**មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលដើម្បីសន្តិភាព និងអភិវឌ្ឍន៍
 វិទ្យាស្ថានបណ្តុះបណ្តាល និង គ្រូបាវគ្រូដើម្បីអភិវឌ្ឍន៍កម្ពុជា
 Centre for Peace and Development (CPD)
 Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)**

**Minutes of the COPCELPROM First Round
 (COPCEL Provincial Meeting)**

**Region I: Takeo, Kampot, Sihanoukville
 22–24 November 2005**

Conflict Prevention in Cambodian Elections Phase II

**ខ្សែស្រប ជំណាក់កាលទី ២
 COPCEL Phase II**

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United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Minutes of the COPCELPROM First Round
(COPCEL Provincial Meeting)
Conflict Prevention in Cambodian Elections Phase II

Takeo (Region I)
Tuesday, 22 November 2005

Agenda (valid for the three provinces)

1. Opening speech/welcoming remarks
2. General information relating to election preparations
3. Interventions by the participants on the election preparations in the province
4. Other issues
5. Closing remarks

1. Speech By H.E. Kang Sam Oeurn, the deputy governor of Takeo province, to launch officially the COPCELPROM mechanism in the whole kingdom of Cambodia

After short remarks by Mr. Ok Serei Sopheak, the CDRI consultant and facilitator of COPCEL Phase II, to welcome the participants and inform them about the agenda of the meeting, H.E. Kang Sam Oeurn, the deputy governor of Takeo province, thanked CDRI warmly for initiating and conducting a study of the root causes of conflict in Cambodian elections. He recalled that COPCEL I from 1999 to 2003 contributed a lot to improve elections and build a culture of dialogue. COPCEL II has many more structures to reach local places better. It is a very good opportunity for everybody here to think about what to do in the three coming elections. Even in a country where democracy is deeply rooted, there are always election conflicts. So we should feel proud to participate in efforts to reduce conflicts and build trust. So far Cambodia has a very good achievement already with its voting rate of around 90 percent, which is very high compared to other countries' 40–60 percent.

2. General Information Relating to Election Preparations

Mr. **Pen Long**, the president of the Takeo PEC, informed the meeting about the general situation since the 2002 and 2003 elections. He said that there were campaigns to inform the people about voting by secret ballot, the time and place of voter registration and voting and so on. Before starting the election campaign, each political party must sign the code of conduct for political campaigns. The PEC produced a campaign activity schedule to prevent possible conflicts and organised a weekly meeting with political parties, national and international observers, provincial authorities, the police and military police to mediate on any issue that might arise and to prevent conflicts and violence.

For the 2002 commune election, in Takeo there were 140 teams (850 persons) of officers to conduct voter registration within 15–27 days and update the voter list, which was based on the voter list from the national elections in 1998. For the 2003 national elections, the Takeo PEC did not have any registration officer because the NEC had delegated the work to commune councils. The PEC just helped to manage the paperwork, coordinate technical tasks and clarify procedures. In Takeo in 2005 there were 4,547 names deleted from the 2004 list and 19,760 newly registered voters, making a total of 486,737 registered voter or 98.88 percent of the 492,226 people aged 18 or older. His assessment is that up to now all elections were conducted in a free, fair and transparent way and acceptable for the competing political parties, national and international observers. All complaints

had been resolved in accordance with the applicable procedure, and there were only two cases where the complainant appealed to the NEC. On respect for election procedures, he had observed that certain representatives of political parties had used harsh words against others parties and/or did not comply well with the code of conduct. Some had refused to sign the report about the voting and the ballot counting even though they could not find any irregularity. Some observers from civil society gave instructions to election officials.

He proposed the following recommendations for future elections:

- 1- Continue public information work about the people's rights and obligations in an election.
- 2- Promote good compliance by political parties with the code of conduct and the election rules and procedures. Apply stringent penalties against offenders.
- 3- Promote participation by civil society organisations in the training of observers and political party activists about the election process.
- 4- Strengthen conflict resolution mechanisms at all phases of the election process, especially the ones used by local authorities.
- 5- All political parties must respect the people's vote and sign the official report about the election to fulfil their legal obligation.
- 6- The NEC should reconsider the time limit for the checking of voters' names and the annual voter registration in communes subjected to floods.

3. Interventions by Participants on Election Preparations in the Province

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** explained the three main goals of COPCELPROM, which are: (1) to campaign hard with the government, especially the MOI and provincial governors, to achieve a 100 percent delivery of identity cards to all eligible people, (2) to make voter registration become constant awareness in all villages and (3) to render elections completely free of fear and intimidation.

Mr. **Khim Vuthy**, the second deputy chief of Kdanh commune, told the meeting about the difficulty resulting from people coming to register to vote without an acceptable identity document like an ID card or family book, and the reason is that they are too poor to pay the unofficial fee charged by the police for these documents. This is very sad because, without these documents, these people and their families are completely outside Cambodian society. Another difficulty is that when the people come to register, the officials always say that this or that document is missing, and this is because these people support certain political parties. After the people go back home, they will not come again because they are very busy earning a living.

Mr. **Som Sokha**, the second deputy chief of Prey Lvea commune, said that past selection of CEC officials was done without any interview. He asked that next time this should be more transparent, with proper interviews so that the selection is really based on qualifications. When resolving disputes involving political parties, the CEC did not refer the case to a higher level even if it exceeded its competency, making the efforts to file the complaint completely wasted. He confirmed the information from Mr. Vuthy that, when delivering ID cards, the police always complain about insufficient documentation and ask for a cash payment.

Mr. **Pen Long**, the president of the Takeo PEC, said that the NEC has allowed the commune council to issue form 1018 to anyone who has lost all identity documents (through theft, fire and so on), to allow them to vote. ID cards are still a complicated issue because many people, including commune council members, do not yet have them and many more have problems with their ID cards, which contain spelling mistakes, wrong birth dates, birthplaces etc. Complaints must be filed

first with the CEC. If the complainant is not happy with the decision at this level, he/she must use form 1202 to appeal to a higher level. Without this form, the CEC cannot send the case upward. In the 2003 national elections, the Takeo PEC received only eight complaints, of which six did not make any appeal and two were appealed to the NEC. On the selection of CEC officials, please give evidence about the cases where there were no proper interviews so that improvement can be made in the future.

Mr. **Chin Pok**, the deputy provincial police commissioner, said that delivery of the family book (A4) and the residence book was made from 1995 to 1998 free of charge, and the local authorities helped to inform people widely about this. By 2003, 80–90 percent of all families had received these documents. The slow delivery of ID cards is due to the provincial governor being too busy and not able to sign them all very quickly. Right now there is no company to deliver ID cards, and some money is demanded from the people to pay for the travel expenses incurred by the police officer in charge.

Mr. **Khum Saroeurn**, the second deputy chief of Roka Krau commune, said that in his commune, payment must be made for the delivery of family books and ID cards, and this is so during the “delivery campaign period” and afterwards. For future elections, he made an appeal to all political parties to comply well with the agreed schedule, especially for campaigning.

Mr. **Ouk Vannara**, the second deputy chief of Angk Prasat commune, thanked the deputy provincial police commissioner for his measures to stop unofficial fee taking by police from the people and businesses. The police should take less money from the people for the delivery of family books and ID cards. Village chiefs went around to inform the people about the last voter registration. The problem was that they did not tell everybody but mostly those supporting their political parties. He asked for the COPCEL mechanism to bring this issue to the national level.

Mr. **Sao Min**, the second deputy chief of Trapeang Sab commune, was of the same opinion as Mr. Ouk Vannara and added that the commune clerks were discriminatory in the same way in their voter registration work.

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** cited the good experiences in the communes of Svay Chrum [in Kompong Chhnang] and Anlong Vil in Battambang, where they had similar problems with the same documents and the commune councils quickly convened a meeting with the people to review the situation and to take adequate measures.

H.E. **Kang Sam Oeurn**, the deputy governor of Takeo province, told the meeting that all suggestions in this COPCELPROM should be used to improve transparency. If there are unofficial payments for ID cards, family books and so on, please indicate the name of the officials involved so that the competent authority can take the necessary measures. The provincial authorities will apply administrative measures to stop these illegal activities, and the deputy governor himself promised to work directly with the police on this matter. In the same way, please report any irregularity observed in the work of commune clerks.

Mr. **Eum Oun**, from the SRP provincial committee, said that up to now most conflicts arose from discrimination against political parties. He suggested that the NEC’s composition at all levels should be multi-party. The existing rules require the selection of neutral persons to work at the national, provincial and commune levels. But this has never been the case, because most of the selected officials come from the CPP and very few from the SRP. An election dispute resolution committee should be created at the national, provincial and commune levels, because at present the NEC is a referee and a player at the same time and so a biased decision is unavoidable.

Ms. **Hak Sopheakry**, the president of the provincial NICFEC, suggested the government should allow observers to monitor ID card deliveries to avoid these problems. She suggested that a political representative at the polling station should not sign the election report if he/she observed any irregularity, to render that report (and the vote results) invalid.

Mr. **Teav Chamreun**, the second deputy chief of Tnaot commune, asked why a photo is needed for the voter card during voter registration. Local authorities should lower their unofficial fees to facilitate registration.

Mr. **Phan Soeurn**, the chief of the Takeo provincial bureau of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, expressed his strong support for the COPCELPROM because it promotes constructive discussions, trust building and a culture of dialogue. He had observed that certain officials do not apply correctly the voter registration procedure, making it too difficult for some people to register. But for the registration of “foreigners”, the NEC can only apply the procedure correctly, and the right to register depends on some other conditions. He appealed to all political parties not to distribute gifts in the campaign period.

Mr. **Him Vuthy**, the second deputy chief of Ba Srae commune, said that for voter registration the commune clerk in Ba Srae issued only one document, called form 1020, but no form 1018. The speaker asked the PEC to allow a person to vote also in the case where some information on his/her ID card is different from the information on the voter card from previous elections. Also, some people have lost the form 1018 delivered to them. Could the form be delivered to them a second time? Many people, even commune council members, do not yet have ID cards.

Mr. **Khorn Sokheng**, the chief of Ban Kam commune, said that names are missing from the voter list for two reasons: (1) the commune council in charge of registration is politically partisan and leaves out some names of people supporting a different political party and (2) some political parties asked people to come to get voting cards, but in reality the invitation was for registering them as party members, and this action confused the people.

Mr. **Un Vanna**, the chief of the provincial Office of Local Administration, said all conflicting issues (like taking money for family book delivery) can be raised in the commune council monthly meeting, which must be open to the public. To increase accountability for the commune/sangkat fund, right now in Takeo there are 130 boxes to receive people’s comments (in sealed envelopes), which will be forwarded to the office of the provincial governor who is president of the accountability working group. When monitoring voting, some political party representatives had monitored and signed the minutes of the vote counting, but back at their party offices they reported that they had filed a complaint against the results. So each political party should give adequate training to their representatives about the monitoring procedure and the signing of official papers.

Mr. **Pen Long**, the president of the Takeo PEC, explained that voter cards will no longer be used after the 2005 updating of the voter list. Before this COPCELPROM, the PEC did not know there were so many complaints at the local level. From now on, if there is something irregular, please file quickly form 1202 clearly saying who has done what wrong. Also, each party should know its activists very well before sending them for election monitoring.

4. Closing remarks

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** wrapped up the meeting by saying that there were 12 key issues discussed in this COPCELPROM.

H.E. **Kang Sam Oeurn**, the deputy governor of Takeo province, said that what had been raised and discussed in this meeting will be very useful in the efforts to avoid conflict and violence and to promote conflict resolution through legal means. All local officials, especially commune council members, must work hard to implement properly all the laws and regulations in force and to identify very clearly any problem that may arise. He deeply thanked CDRI for initiating this COPCELPROM to help to raise our understanding of election issues to another level and to facilitate our joint efforts to strengthen peace and stability for Cambodia.

Kampot (Region I)

Wednesday, 23 November 2005

1. Welcoming Remarks

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak**, the CDRI consultant and facilitator of COPCEL Phase II, welcomed the participants and informed them about the objective of the COPCEL mechanism in general and the COCELPROM structure in particular, and the rules of the meeting.

2. General Information Relating to Election Preparations

Mr. **Te Chinarith**, the president of the Kampot PEC, told the meeting that so far election conflicts have been of two main types. The first is technical like omissions, unclear understanding etc. This exists all the time but is easy to solve. The second one is political, may be planned in advance and is very difficult to resolve because there is no clear basis to rely on. The COPCEL mechanism can contribute a lot to building a culture of dialogue to resolve conflicts peacefully without violence. In rural areas there are cases of family members not talking to each other because of politics.

The technical aspects of the voter registration, the voting and so on, have improved remarkably. For the updating of the voter list in 2005, preparations were made for more than 20,000 registrations but the actual registrations reached only 11,000. Village chiefs' role is very important, from voter registration up to election day, and they must invite the people to vote without any political discrimination. The functioning of commune councils builds up a culture of good collaboration. The commune chief and the deputy commune chiefs are in close contact every day and should work together to stop political violence in all phases of elections. In the campaigns of the four previous elections, there was no violence in Kampot.

3. Interventions by Participants on Election Preparations in the Province

Mr. **Ung Chheng**, the vice-president of the SRP office in Kampot, expressed his strong support for COPCELPROM, which brings three groups with very divergent opinions together for discussions to seek mutual understanding, and he asked for more meetings in the future. There are two main election issues. The first is the legal framework. The NEC has made many improvements to that already, but there are many more to work on. For one, the existing election law serves the interest of the big political party, for example there is no representative of the opposition in the NEC. The public information by the NEC and political parties about voter registration and elections is not yet very good even though they used TV, radio, posters etc, because sometimes the message was difficult to understand. Therefore the NEC should increase information dissemination, especially at the village level, and should allow political parties to participate in the effort.

The law is very clear that the expression of political opinion is not a crime, but when this is done concretely, the person is accused of violating the code of conduct. So the law and the code of conduct should be more detailed than at present to avoid unfounded accusations against expressions of opinion. Because of the rules on defamation and incitement to unrest, it is now difficult for him to express his opinion to the people about various improvements that need to be made. The complaint against complaint filing should be abolished, and the time limit for normal complaints should be extended for a few more days.

Mr. **In Chiva**, the provincial deputy police commissioner in charge of criminal affairs, said that the police are presently working very actively in communes to deliver ID cards to the people. If the

commune councils see something irregular, they should quickly inform the provincial police commissioner so that appropriate measures can be taken. People can file a complaint about a criminal offence with any level they wish: the commune, district, province or ministry. He had observed that information dissemination about voter registration at the commune level was slow because the work was not divided among council members for carrying out in different villages. Also, in Kampot villages are far from each other and thus travel is time consuming.

Mr. **Hing Neang**, the second deputy chief of Svay Tong commune, Kompong Trach district, said that in Kompong Trach ID card delivery is complicated because the people are unclear about the procedure and the police do not explain clearly which documents are required. Some people have the A4 book but no A2 book and the police refuse to make ID cards for them. But if the people can pay 20,000–30,000 riels to the police, then the A4 book is acceptable.

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** told the meeting that the same problem exists in Takeo, and Deputy Governor Kang Sam Oeurn has promised to crack down on this illegal demand for payment.

Mr. **Phun Heang**, the second deputy chief of Srae Chaeng commune, asked the NEC to make arrangements for the officials in charge of voter registration to go to the villages because they are far from the commune and people have difficulty to come to the commune to register. On election day, the people who have already voted should leave the place and village chiefs should not stay there in front of the polling station. In past election campaigns, the opposition was not alone in making criticisms. Some other parties spoke very harsh words against our party leader, Sam Rainsy. The police chief in the commune does not distribute ID cards quickly. He keeps hundreds with him and says that he is waiting for the people to come to get their ID cards themselves, but he does not inform the people about this.

Mr. **Ke Savoeurn**, the second deputy chief of Sam Lanh commune, said he had observed the activity of police officers in charge of completing the formalities for ID card delivery. There are a lot of people, not much time and only a few police officers. Anyone who can pay gets served first. A garment factory worker must pay US\$10 to the police. Our commune chief had his ID card damaged and asked for a new one, but the police asked for \$40. For the family book and residential book, the police demand a 10,000–20,000 riel payment. There were a small number of voters registered because some people were not informed because they worked far from their home villages (like garment factory workers). The NEC should increase the length of the next voter registration to 30 days. Our party was keen to participate in the efforts to encourage people to register, but the commune clerk and the commune chief arranged most of the work without letting the other two political parties know. There was no security problem on election day, except the presence of the commune chief, village chief and other local officials at the polling station, which was in violation of the rules.

Mr. **Hun Teng**, the chief of Kanthaor Khang Cheung commune, said that the public information in his commune (with participation from political parties) was sufficient, and the small number of voters registered resulted from the people's own decisions. He confirmed that there really was payment to the police. For example, in 2003 one villager in his commune had his house completely destroyed by fire, and he tried to get a new residential book for the victim by offering to pay 10,000 riels, but the police officer demanded 20,000 riels and said that this was the instruction from higher authorities.

Mr. **Korng Ken**, the first deputy chief of Khcheay Khang Cheung commune, said the small results of voter registration were caused by the short time (20 days) and the commune clerk's busy schedule. Many people who came could not register, and it was not very easy for them to come again. On election day, the commune chief came only to help keep good order in front of the polling station, but his presence did not conform with election procedure.

Mr. **Te Chinarith**, the president of the Kampot PEC, explained that the election law went through many institutions: the Ministry of Interior (where they had foreign advisers from UNDP and so on),

the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly etc, so it should serve the interests of the people and not any one particular political party if it is adopted. It is the same for the code of conduct, where the main rule is for a political party to talk only about its own political platform and not attack other parties. In the voter registration, the result was 50 percent of the people reaching 18 years old this year, not 50 percent of all the people eligible to vote. In Kampot we have 280,000 names in the voter list and 40,000 more to be registered. He promised to raise with higher levels the request to increase the time limit for voter registration.

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** told the meeting that, with some amendments to the rules and regulations, we can have many students who are willing to work as volunteers to help the commune councils register voters if we can pay their food and transportation costs. The rule is that we must comply with the law. But the election is not a once-only event. If there is something not very smooth, civil society can make a recommendation to the government and the parliament to amend the law. In this spirit, there will probably be some amendments to the law for the election of commune councils in 2007.

Mrs. **Khieu Mean**, the second deputy chief of Stung Kaev commune, said that there are two parties in her council but this causes no problem for the work. She tries to disseminate information correctly without discriminating against any political party, but because she was alone in this work and with the people's low understanding of the matter, there might still be some insufficiency in her efforts. It would be very good if the time for voter registration could be increased to 30 days.

Mrs. **Chhim Sangvat**, the coordinator of Vigilance in Kampot, said the small number of new voters registering was caused by the identity documents brought in by many villagers that were badly damaged by rain, mishandling and so on, making it very difficult for the official in charge to accept them. Demands for payment of 40,000–50,000 riels for delivering identity documents really exist. If political parties give priority to having their networks of local activists encourage people to register, this may be more effective than the government institutions, but right now activists complain that all the incentives are gobbled up at the provincial or district level. In future elections, female candidates should be in the three top positions on the list. Female representatives understand very well women's problems and they are more effective in dealing with issues such as family violence.

Mr **Lau Keng**, the president of the SRP provincial committee, said that village chiefs who were busy producing and distributing tickets with voters' identification numbers to people in front of polling stations were not acting in conformity with their duty as a representative of the local authority, because they did that for one party only and not for all voters.

Mr. **Pok Soeurn**, the second deputy chief of Trapeang Bei commune, said that the situation is most difficult for the people who have moved away and come back. They have their family book issued somewhere else, and the police refuse to deliver ID cards to them if they do not pay 10,000 riels. The problem in voter registration lies mostly with the commune clerk, who told village chiefs to invite people reaching 18 years—those born in 1987. Therefore the village chiefs did not invite other unregistered people, for example those born in 1984–85, to register.

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** told the meeting that in many other provinces like Takeo and Kompong Speu, they could achieve a 90–95 percent registration rate. There they had the same problems of people's low interest, the commune clerk's slow work and so on, but about 10 days before the end of the registration period the provincial governor convened a meeting of all relevant institutions, including the PEC, to assess the situation. Seeing the low result, the governor gave instructions that all commune clerks must be freed from other duties to work totally on voter registration, and all commune chiefs and village chiefs must go to invite the people directly. This approach was very effective because the commune chiefs were also very active like in Svay Chrum commune in Kompong Chhnang and Anlong Vil commune in Battambang. Another issue that was pointed out very correctly by the president of the Takeo PEC was that political parties should not distort election mechanisms for political gain. In some places there were really six or seven complaints

filed at the commune level, but somehow they skipped the PEC level and filed hundreds of complaints at the national level. Also, political party representatives should not sign the vote counting report if they see something irregular. But when they have signed it, they should not create any more problems at the national level. There may be some points in the law and procedures that they are not very satisfied with. But they must comply with that and work hard to have them changed for the next election. COPCEL give them the space for that.

Mr. **Te Chinarith**, the president of the Kampot PEC, summarised that these two or three hours of discussions were very useful to eliminate doubts and accusations against each other. In Kampot, 99 percent of the commune council members have ID cards for the coming Senate elections. The security subcommittee for the elections must be completely neutral. If a village chief is an activist of a political party, he/she cannot be a member of that committee and must resign from the public function before working in the election campaign. Above all, everybody must build up the culture of dialogue. This is very important to reduce conflicts and misunderstandings.

4. Closing remarks

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** wrapped up the meeting by saying that there were eight key issues discussed in this COPCELPROM.

Sihanoukville (Region I)

Thursday, 24 November 2005

1. Welcoming Remarks

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak**, the CDRI consultant and facilitator of COPCEL Phase II, welcomed the participants and informed them about the objective of the COPCEL mechanism in general and the COCELPROM structure in particular, and the rules of the meeting.

2. General Information Relating to Election Preparations

Mr. **Huot Phon**, the president of the Sihanoukville PEC, informed the meeting about the four previous elections in Cambodia and explained that each election has five phases. Phase 1 includes the selection of election officials for the provinces and their training about the law and regulations, the administrative and technical procedures and the materials and equipment for the elections. Phase 2 is voter registration. The difficulties here come from the many people who do not have all the required documents. Also, there may be too many people coming on the same day, and if they cannot register, they are reluctant to come again. Phase 3 is the election campaign. If all political parties could comply correctly with the code of conduct, there would be no conflicts. Up to now, this has not been the case but we can see a continuing improvement. Phase 4 is the voting and vote counting. Here there are always problems. The NEC issued an instruction that if there is something irregular, the PEC must convene all political parties and all relevant government institutions to discuss the problem. So far the PEC has always carried out this instruction so that a timely solution can be found. Now there is a new instruction from the NEC requiring this kind of meeting in all election phases. In the voting, there are some difficulties early in the morning because too many people arrive and need to queue up for quite a long time. Thus some people cannot wait and go back home without voting. Another problem is with the people who have difficulty reading. They cannot find their names and they claim that they are not on the voter list.

3. Interventions by Participants on Election Preparations in the Province

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** thanked the PEC president for his frank words, which help to bring up all issues for discussion by the meeting. This attitude is very beneficial for the development of our nation.

Mr. **Om Sophal**, a commune council member from the SRP, said that while we can see important improvements in the election process, there are also some insufficiencies. For one, information dissemination is not very adequate. Many people do not understand properly the importance of the elections. For example, the information dissemination by loudspeaker mounted on a car: the car goes too fast and the people cannot hear the message. It is better if the car can stop for a while. And a TV broadcast is even more effective. The place for voter registration and for voting should not be changed too often or moved too far from the old place. Also, the voting time should be extended from 15:00 at present to 16:00 to help the people who work far from home, especially fishers.

Mr. **Sam Sam Ath**, the chief of cabinet of the municipal governor, suggested that COPCEL should also invite a representative of the municipal authorities. He agreed that more work should be done on information dissemination and voter education to make them see voting as one of the most important duties of a Cambodian citizen.

Mr. **Heng Sey**, the representative of the SRP office in Sihanoukville, praised the PEC president for his good work in keeping the elections in Sihanoukville free of any major problem. It is true that people do not like to queue for a long time for voter registration, and it would be very helpful if we could inform the village authorities of the date that the mobile registration team will arrive so that they can invite the people accordingly. During the election campaign, each of us should not consider another political party as an enemy, and this will help a lot to avoid conflict.

Mr. **An Samon**, the first deputy chief of sangkat No. 2 from the SRP, made an appeal: (1) for the government to take measures to ensure that all Cambodian citizens of 18 years and over have their ID cards, (2) for the NEC to make available instant cameras to facilitate people with no ID cards who need form 1018 for voting and (3) because the results of the Senate elections were very easy to predict, to have universal suffrage for the next Senate elections.

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** explained that this is advocacy work that we can do. But there is already an improvement in this Senate election, because for the last term direct appointment was used.

Mr. **Touch Sorn**, the first deputy chief of Ream sangkat from Funcinpec, agreed that there were many problems with voter registration, especially with required documentation, and the NEC should expand voter registration work to the village level. The military should not be allowed to vote because in the present situation they are under the direct control of their commander and go to vote in unit or company and not freely like civilians. In the ballot counting, the contents of some ballot boxes, such as the ones from the military compound, were not combined with other boxes. They were counted box by box as if to learn about the influences on the vote.

Mr. **Huot Phon**, the president of the Sihanoukville PEC, explained that past insufficiencies in information dissemination were mostly with people in isolated areas. In the future, the PEC will cooperate with local authorities and political parties because they always have a presence there. The PEC has already informed all political parties about the weekly consultations and discussions. The PEC will broadcast the spots on the elections via radio and TV. When changing polling station locations, the PEC will ensure that the new address is not far from the old one and will cooperate with sangkat chiefs to inform the people. He promised also to take to a higher level for consideration the suggestions from the SRP representative about a smaller number of voters per polling station (700 at present) and a longer time for voting.

Mr. **Huot Phon** agreed that to achieve good information dissemination, the car with the loudspeaker should stop for a while at each place so that the people can hear the complete story. The PEC will rectify that next time. Another difficulty is with the many people who come to register without an identity document. We need to issue them form 1018 so that they can vote. But this form requires a photo, which costs 1,000–2,000 riels per person, and this is a lot of money for people in rural areas. Vote counting without first mixing the ballots from various boxes is completely illegal, and the PEC did not instruct the CEC to do this and did not know about this until now. This is a serious failure for the PEC.

Mr. **Sok Savath**, the acting president of the SRP office in Sihanoukville, said that until now there has been no transparency in selecting the CEC. Everybody agrees that identity documents are a big problem in voter registration. The law should be amended to say that if a person has black hair and speaks Khmer well, that person can register to vote without the need to have all these identity documents. On the other hand, there were people who could not speak Khmer clearly and did not have a Khmer name but they have the right to vote because they have Khmer ID cards. In the present situation, tens of thousands of people cannot vote because of insufficient documentation, especially our students. The present formula for seat allocation gives an unfair advantage to a party that get a higher percentage of the vote. Is it possible to amend the election law to return to the UNTAC formula? He agreed with the representative from Funcinpec that in Ream the armed forces should not vote because they receive orders from one person. Of course the constitution states clearly that all Khmer citizen of 18 years and over have the right to vote. But the armed forces must

remain neutral in politics and the constitution does not state expressly whether a neutral person can vote or not. Another point is that persons registering to vote receive a certificate, but many people lose it or damage it, so the NEC should provide instead a voter card like for the elections during the UNTAC time or 1998. The law states that a person without an identity card must find two witnesses to get the identity document for voting. This rule creates a lot of difficulties and a big expense (US\$20–30) for the people, especially those working far from their home villages, and therefore should be amended. In Sihanoukville, security is good. There were many cases of intimidation reported, but they were not very serious.

Mr. **Chey Visun**, the second deputy chief of khan Stung Hav, had observed a lot of improvements in the dissemination of election information. This resulted from better compliance with the law and the code of conduct by all parties. But the election of the Senate by non-universal suffrage is not good because the results are almost known in advance. Ballot counting should be done at the polling station so that the people can observe the process directly and do not have unfounded suspicions.

Mr. **Samreth Phum**, the CPP representative in Sihanoukville, said that there were conflicts in all elections so far, but they are small, can be solved one after another and do not affect the election's credibility. Voter registration and voter list checking are not the responsibility of the sangkat chief or the PEC president alone. The offices of all political parties must use their networks to encourage their supporters to register voters and check voter lists. The PEC president has never allowed a conflict to escalate. He always invites representatives from all political parties to discuss the issues and agree on the measures to apply. Voter registration could reach only 80 percent in 2005 because of the people's own wills and their understanding of their election duty. In spite of all our information and education efforts, we must recognise that our people grow weary of elections. So all political parties should strengthen their activities to encourage registration and voter list checking, and the law does not forbid this.

The legal period for the election campaign is 20-30 days for political parties plus the work done by the PEC and NGOs. So far all parties involved are very active, and it is very unlikely that the information will not reach the people.

All political parties posted their representatives at all polling stations for voting and ballot counting, and these people were very careful to ensure that there was no cheating. For him, the ballot counting procedure used by the NEC is very good. In Cambodia, about 85 percent of the people are farmers and they are very busy during the rainy season. In Sihanoukville, there are many fishers, but it rains a lot in July–August, when we normally hold the elections. The National Assembly and the Senate should consider amending the law to move the elections to a more favourable month.

Mr. **An Sok**, the first deputy chief of sangkat Veal Rinh from the SRP, said that the leaflets dropped for the people from the information campaign car are not very useful for those who cannot read. Also, when these people go to vote, the guard at the polling station tells them that their names are not on the list and sends them to another place. After three or four unsuccessful attempts, they give up and go home. Some people are not Khmer by their look but they have complete documentation and can vote while some others are very much Khmer but they cannot vote.

Mr. **Huot Phon**, the president of the Sihanoukville PEC, explained that raising non-transparent selection of election committee members is a useful reminder for the PEC. He always remains neutral because he has received detailed instructions from his superiors and would be subject to a 50 million riel fine and other penalties if he deviated from this position. Complaints that are filed may be well or not well founded. He always appoints a staff member from the legal service section to inquire with NGOs, the complainant and so on, to see if the complaint is well founded (if not, it will be rejected). The PEC supports the suggestion to increase information dissemination. It will cooperate with government institutions, political parties etc to find better ways to inform and educate the people. The people are rather keen to vote because voter numbers increase

continuously. Illiterate people can get information about the elections from the spots broadcast on radio and TV, posters and so on. The guards at polling stations have no competency to advise voters about the voter list content.

4. Closing remarks

Mr. **Ok Serei Sopheak** wrapped up the meeting by saying that there were 15 key issues discussed in the Sihanoukville COPCELPROM.