A STUDY OF ELECTION RELATED POLITICAL VIOLENCE AS AN OBSTACLE TO DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN CAMBODIA

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ABSTRACT

Democratic transition in Cambodia started with the 1993 national elections arranged by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). The consolidation of democracy is an ongoing project of the Cambodian society that has met with numerous obstacles particularly election-related violence. After the national elections in 1993, two further national elections were held in 1998 and 2003 and one local election was held in 2002. Murders, intimidation and disappearances have accompanied each of these elections.

The purposes of this study are: first, to identify the extent and patterns of political violence directed at individuals who stood as election candidates or who were activists for political parties contesting the 2002 and 2003 elections; second, to explain the causes of political violence as a prelude to finding a solution; third, to assess the current efforts of the national and international community in solving the problem of political violence related to the elections in 2002 and 2003; and last, to identify the role for the national and international communities in removing this obstacle to democratic consolidation.

The study was conducted using a wide range of documentary materials. Particularly invaluable were United Nations Cambodia Officer for Human Rights' records of their investigations into political violence. These records were supplemented by in-depth interviews with the victims of political violence, witnesses, party officials, NGO members, and members of the National Election Committee.

Murder and intimidation were the main forms of political violence in the 2002 local elections and assassination was the main form of violence in the 2003 national elections. Most of these incidents appear to have been perpetrated by soldiers, police and civilians, respectively. Although the number of incidents has declined, this seems to have been because of a changed strategy of political violence that focused on higher profile targets rather than as the result of any measures to reduce political violence. Civil war lasted more than thirty years and there is a pervasive attitude that violence is the way to guarantee the achievement of one's political ends. Combined with the fact that UNTAC failed to achieve disarmament of former fighters in the civil war, and that foreign aid is provided to the government without conditions, continued political violence appears almost inevitable. It is recommended that NGOs play a more prominent role in documenting and publicizing political violence, that proper investigation into political violence be carried out, that the international community make foreign aid conditional on tackling the problem of political violence.

KEYWORDS: POLITICAL VIOLENCE/ DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION/ DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION/ ELECTION/ UNTAC

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