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Cambodian Institute of Human Rights

(Education, Research, Training and Documentation)

CAMBODIAN INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

PRESS RELEASE

On Tuesday September 8th, representatives from eight local NGOs came together to hold a one-day workshop evaluating the local NGO community's contribution to Election '98. The workshop was hosted by the Cambodian Institute of Human Rights with special guests the Asia Foundation and Forum Syd.

Participants were drawn from Women's Media Center, COFFEL, COMFREL, Women for Prosperity, OUTREACH, Khmer Women's Voice Center, Khmer Youth Association, and the Center for Social Development. Representatives from the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute attended along with a representative from UNDP.

Participants discussed the successes and achievements of local NGOs in preparing the Cambodian people for the elections and in monitoring the election process. Problems and obstacles encountered were also highlighted as well as lessons learned for the future. Some early steps were taken towards planning for the commune leader election scheduled for next year. Those attending called on local NGOs to work closely together in the planning and implementation of future voter education and local election monitoring efforts.

For further information, contact Jeffrey C. Gallup or Aine Doody at 015 912 607.

WORKSHOP CONCLUSIONS

The following are some of the views expressed by workshop participants. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the attendees as a whole.

- Voter education material must be appropriate to people's needs and education level. Participants felt that in the run up to the next elections efforts must be made to distribute greater numbers of voter education material in order to reach as wide a portion of the population as possible.
- Well trained, neutral observers are crucial to the success of any election monitoring effort.
- The National Election Committee, local authorities, and the NGO community should cooperate closely. However, the NEC role should not be to censor voter education material, but to advise on technical corrections. Participants suggested that a special unit should be set up at the NEC with the purpose of fostering cooperation. Local authorities should be encouraged to participate in NGO activities.
- NGOs' spending on administration should be reduced to a minimum, while spending on activities should be maximized. Every effort must be made to be accountable and transparent in their financial transactions.
- An NGO radio should be established for civic education.
- More effort should be made to include a substantial number of women as staff, trainers and observers.
- NGOs should better coordinate their efforts. An overall coordinator might be named to arrange frequent meetings and assist cooperation.
- Common election material should be prepared and used by the different NGOs. Common guidelines for observers should be prepared.
- Voter education must be extended to the most remote areas, where otherwise voters may be misled by partisan information.