

A
Proposal to Support
Democracy, Human Rights
&
the Freeist-and-Fairest-Possible Elections
in
the Kingdom of Cambodia

Submitted
by
the
Phnom Penh Post

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Proposal Outline

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I. Project Goals

The *Phnom Penh Post*, Cambodia's oldest, existing, independent newspaper in any language, seeks outside funding for four, inter-related purposes:

1) to enable the *Post* to maintain and expand its ability to cover issues related to democratic development, human rights, the conduct of free and fair elections scheduled in Cambodia on July 26, 1998, and the installation of a new, democratically-elected government;

2) to enable the *Post* to train, on-the-job, a team of Cambodian reporters with the immediate goal of having them undertake news reporting assignments on the issues described above;

3) to enable the *Post* to serve most effectively as a vehicle for the dissemination of information to a wide variety of policy makers, human rights officials, governments, donor organizations, media outlets, Cambodian scholars and other interested individuals, both inside Cambodia and abroad, on the issues described above; and,

4) in a broader sense, to enable Khmer-language publications to have free access to *Post* articles so that appropriate information can be made available to a wider audience in Cambodia.

II. Problem Statement

The Kingdom of Cambodia has embarked on the road to national elections scheduled for July 26, 1998.

These polls, the first since the UNTAC-sponsored elections held in 1993, are widely seen as an important benchmark for Cambodia's "transition to a democratic society". The key issue at hand is at what level elections can take place without widespread intimidation, violence and in an environment where individuals and political parties can exercise their rights to participate in the broader political processes.

Towards this end, international donors — including the European Union, the Government of Japan, and others — have agreed to contribute to the costs of paying for the elections.

As is well known, the key question for any concerned parties with the lead-up to and conduct of elections is whether the Cambodian people will be able to participate fully and freely in the entire electoral process. In this regard, it is paramount that accurate information on what happens throughout the country from now until the elections be available both as a means of assessing the utility of funds disbursed and, much more importantly, as a vehicle for bringing to light inconsistencies which may be possible to correct as the electoral process unfolds.

Cambodia is primarily rural in nature with more than 80 percent of the population living in villages relatively cut off from the outside world. The populace has little access to print media or television. At the same time, the outside world's understanding of what happens in rural Cambodia is severely limited.

The *Phnom Penh Post*, for its part, is interested and ready to play a broader, more comprehensive role in providing electoral-related news coverage from all parts of Cambodia. The *Post* is, however, severely limited in the resources required to undertake this task. Since the events of July 1997, the *Post's* ad revenues have dropped significantly. While the *Post* has maintained its high editorial standards, cost-cutting has been necessary in light of monthly deficits since last July and there is no guarantee that revenues will be sufficient to continue publishing in the next seven months.

III. Project Description

The *Phnom Penh Post* seeks funds to expand its ability to cover relevant issues in the lead up to elections scheduled for July 26, 1998.

Specifically, the *Post* seeks funds to develop an expanded reporting and editorial team that would enable it to provide more regular and in-depth reporting on events around the country as they relate to the scheduled polls. *Post* teams of two reporters — one Cambodian and one expatriate — would be able to travel more extensively for periods of up to one week in provincial areas to investigate issues related to political campaigning, the free flow of information, the climate (or lack) of intimidation, the ability of political parties to organize offices and related activities, and the general pulse of the populace towards the elections.

The *Post* would secure the services of a journalism trainer to train Cambodian reporters in the varied aspects of an electoral process including: the electoral law; the rights of political parties; party campaigning; the rights of individuals; the functions and duties of the National Election Commission and the Ministry of Interior; the role of electoral watchdog organizations such as COMFREL and COFFEL; the relationship between the various electoral entities and the outside donors who will fund the election; the role of electoral monitors; and, the overall technical mechanisms of the electoral process such as balloting, vote counting, registering complaints, and how a new government will be formed after the election.

The *Post* envisions that the journalism trainer will be based at the *Post* full-time and will work directly with reporters to provide them with the necessary background information on the above-mentioned electoral aspects via appropriately designed seminars, lectures, site visits and reading assignments, and to work closely with reporters to help them define story assignments, conduct interviews and necessary research, and help with editing final copy for eventual publication in the *Post*.

The *Post* would establish a dedicated section within each issue specifically focused on election-related issues. Articles would comprise reports from *Post* staff as a result of the respective reporting assignments.

Ideally, should sufficient funds be available, the *Post* would publish weekly so as to provide the most comprehensive coverage available of events as they transpire between now and the elections and the installation of a new government.

The *Post* is also seeking funds so that copies of the paper could be made available to Cambodian NGOs involved in electoral watch issues for wider distribution throughout the country via the offices of the respective NGOs. At the same time the *Post* will give permission to Cambodian human-rights related NGOs (such as the Khmer Institute for Democracy, LICADHO, ADHOC, and the Cambodian Institute for Human Rights) to re-print *Post* articles in Khmer in these NGOs' respective publications.

IV. Means of Evaluation

The *Post's* Publisher & Editor-in-Chief, Michael Hayes, will serve as overall Project Director for the envisioned project and will maintain primary responsibility for reporting to donors of the progress of the program.

The Journalism Trainer will have day-to-day responsibility for overseeing the program designed to train Cambodian reporters and will undertake to submit to donors monthly reports on progress achieved.

The Journalism Trainer will determine key criteria for program success and will monitor related progress towards these goals.

As expatriate reporters will be paired with Cambodian reporters, they too will monitor progress and keep the Journalism Trainer informed of program results.

Finally, any donor will be more than welcome to participate to whatever extent required in the program, either by basing an individual at the *Post* or by regular consultation with both the Publisher or the Journalism Trainer.

The *Post* will submit monthly financial reports to the donor on the use of the funds with signed receipts as appropriate.

All funds disbursed to the *Post* will be maintained at the *Post's* bank account at Bank Indosuez in Phnom Penh.

V. Background on the Phnom Penh Post

The *Phnom Penh Post* is the Kingdom of Cambodia's oldest existing independent newspaper in any language. First published on July 10, 1992, the fortnightly, English-language newspaper celebrated its fifth anniversary in 1997.

The *Post* was founded and is 100% co-owned by Michael Hayes, Publisher & Editor-in-Chief, and Kathleen Hayes, Managing Director. Both are American citizens. The paper was started with an initial capitalization of approximately US\$50,000. Since Volume I, Issue #6 the company has been operating just barely in the black.

The *Post*, beginning with a staff of 5 individuals, was initially published as an 8-page, black & white, tabloid size publication. Based on expanding ad revenues the *Post* increased to 20 pages. Full-time staff has grown to 18 expatriates and Cambodians.

Since the events of July 1997, the *Post's* ad revenues have dropped severely. Accordingly, the *Post* has had to cut back to 16 pages when necessary and take other cost cutting measures. Circulation also had to be cut back to 4,500 in order to save expenditures. While ads have come back somewhat, there is no guarantee that sufficient funding can be maintained in the long run. Most problematic, to cover deficits the *Post* has had to use funds from subscriptions paid-in-advance to continue publishing.

EDITORIAL POLICY: The *Post* is an independent, non-partisan publication. It does not support any political party or point of view. The paper's news coverage is entirely devoted to events in Cambodia, with the bulk of reporting focused on political, economic, social and cultural events in the Kingdom.

The *Post* does not carry its own editorials, preferring instead to encourage responsible opinion and comment pieces from its readers, be they government officials, NGO workers, academics, Cambodia-watchers from abroad, or the man-in-the-street. The *Post* does carry Letters to the Editor, which often serve as a lively forum on timely issues.

CIRCULATION: Since Vol. I, Issue 1, the *Post* has been printing 5,000 copies per edition. Currently, 800 copies are mailed from Bangkok to overseas subscribers in 42 countries around the world. Of the remaining copies, between 3,800 and 4,000 are sold inside Cambodia - at news stands, hotels, restaurants, by paperboys, or to subscribers in Phnom Penh. Some papers are distributed free to airlines, advertisers and English schools.

While the bulk of the papers are sold in Phnom Penh, copies are sold to local distributors which supply the paper to outlets in various provincial capitals including Kompong Chhang, Pursat, Battambang, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

The *Post* retains remainder issues, around 200-300 per issue, which are sold as back issues.

READERSHIP: There are no official newspaper readership auditing organizations operating in Cambodia. However, from our own informal estimates and one survey undertaken by the International Marketing and Investment Company (IMIC), a market research firm in Phnom Penh, the *Post* is read by almost the entire Western expatriate community in Cambodia (around 5,000). As well, the paper is considered a must-read by senior Cambodian government officials and others in policy-making circles.

The *Post* was told by one informed source that Co-Prime Minister Hun Sen has translated copies of key articles on his desk the same day the paper comes out. Moreover, literally scores of senior and mid-level government officials have told the *Post* that the paper is one of the most valuable and reliable sources of information on political and economic current events in the Kingdom and that they depend on the *Post* as a vehicle for understanding what's happening within their own government.

IMIC, as a result of a newspaper survey conducted in 1994, estimated that around 20,000 Cambodians see each copy of the *Post*.

Overseas, the *Post* is considered by Cambodia-watchers — including government aid agencies and policy-makers, international lenders such as the World Bank and the IMF, members of the press, human rights groups, non-profit aid organizations, and overseas Cambodians — as the most important publication available for keeping abreast of on-going events in Cambodia.

LEGAL STATUS: The *Post* is registered as an American, wholly-owned, off-shore holding company in Thailand.

The paper received its initial permission to publish from King Norodom Sihanouk, in his capacity as President of the Supreme National Council of Cambodia on January 14, 1992. Permission from the (then) State of Cambodia Council of Ministers was granted to operate a newspaper in May, 1992.

With the advent of a new, democratically-elected government in September 1993, the *Post* has subsequently registered, as must all newspapers, with the Kingdom of Cambodia's Ministry of Information.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT: Since the departure of the United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia and the promulgation of a new Constitution and formation of a new government in September 1993, the environment for an independent press in Cambodia has been a difficult one.

The situation has been most problematic for the Khmer-language press, especially for those papers which have run articles critical of government officials and policies.

In the last four years, four editors and one reporter — all working for papers critical of the government — have been murdered, with few arrests and no convictions resulting from the subsequent government investigations. Khmer journalists working for Khmer-language newspapers have received death threats regularly, editorial offices have suffered grenade attacks, and one newspaper office was sacked by a mob with the tacit approval of senior government officials.

To date, the *Post* has not been systematically harassed, although its staff have been threatened. In 1995 the government filed an official complaint against the *Post* for an article, alleging that we were disseminating "disinformation" and "creating political instability."

After the complaint was filed with the Municipal Court, the court had six months to either prosecute the case or drop the charges. Combined with an international outcry against the charges, complaints made by international media watchdog organizations, and a statement by King Norodom Sihanouk that, if convicted, the *Post's* publisher would be pardoned, the government did not pursue the case and the six-month time frame for any action on the initial complaint expired on January 4, 1996.

Overall, there is no pre-publication censorship for newspapers operating in Cambodia. The *Post's* publisher and editor-in-chief uses a well-honed sense of discretion in editing the paper based on an on-going determination of the political climate, the sensitivity of any article in question or other related issues.

VI. Staffing

The *Post* currently maintains an editorial and reporting staff of 8 expatriates and 3 Cambodians configured as follows (with nationalities identified):

Michael Hayes (USA)	Publisher & Editor-in-chief
Kathleen Hayes (USA)	Managing Director
Matthew Grainger (New Zealand)	Managing Editor
Chris Fontaine (USA)	Deputy Managing Editor
Jason Barber (New Zealand)	Editor-at-Large
Chea Sotheacheath (Cambodia)	Reporter
Elizabeth Moorthy (Canada)	Reporter
Samreth Sopha (Cambodia)	Reporter
Eric Pape (USA)	Reporter
Bou Saroeun (Cambodia)	Reporter
Peter Sainsbury (New Zealand)	Reporter

VII. Budget

MENTOR PROGRAM

*Cambodian reporters: \$400/mo x 8 mos x 8 pers	\$25,600
*Expatriate reporters: \$1,200/mo x 8 mos x 8 pers	\$72,000
*Journalism trainer: \$1,500/mo x 8 mos	\$12,000
*Training materials:	\$ 1,500
*Translator: \$350/mo x 8 mos	\$ 2,800
*Program director: \$1,000/mo x 8 mos	\$ 8,000
*Sub-editor: \$1,500/mo x 8 mos	\$12,000
*Resource lecturers: \$200/session x 16	\$ 3,200

PROVINCIAL REPORTING PROGRAM

*Travel to provinces: (40 travel days/mo x \$50/day x 6 mos)	\$12,000
*Mobile phones: \$500 x 12	\$ 6,000
*4wd Vehicle	\$ 7,000
*Satellite phone	\$ 4,000

ADMINISTRATION

*Dedicated pages for elections: (includes postage for mailing, printing, layout, editorial) 4 pgs/issue x 16 issues	\$16,320
*Equipment: 6 computers x \$2,000	\$12,000
*Admin officer: \$450/mo x 8 mos	\$ 3,600
*Dedicated free copies to NGOs: (1,000/issue x \$1/issue x 16 issues)	\$16,000
*Internet access: \$6/hr x 30hr/mo x 8 mos	\$ 1,440
*Phone use charges: 12 x \$50/mo x 8 mos	\$ 4,800
*Office rent: \$600/mo x 8 mos	\$ 4,800

TOTAL \$225,060

VIII. Endorsements

Attached are letters of support for the *Phnom Penh Post* from readers in Cambodia and around the world.

One of the main reasons the *Post* sought these letters is because many donors are reluctant to provide funds to a "private sector" entity. In this regard, any prospective donor should keep in mind that while the *Post* is run as a business, it has barely broken even since its inception in 1992. The *Post's* co-owners have not repatriated any funds since start-up, nor have they received salaries over the last five-plus years. Any expenses incurred by the owners have been charged to the operating budget of the *Post*.

In essence, the *Post* has been operating like an NGO, with staff salaries generally pegged at rates lower than those offered to either Cambodians or expatriates in all other professional sectors in Cambodia.