



**INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN CAMBODIA**

Unit 410, 4/F La Fuerza Plaza 2, 2241 Don Chino Roces Ave., 1231 Makati City, Philippines

Tel: +63 2 8196071 Fax: +63 2 8101431 Email: [mico\\_espina@cald.org](mailto:mico_espina@cald.org)

## **International Parliamentary Committee For Democratic Elections in Cambodia**

### ***Background***

Free, fair and credible elections are essential to democracy. A democratic system of government presupposes that the people's sovereign will shapes and directs the affairs of the state, usually through the election of political representatives that act on behalf of the people. That these representatives only serve for as long as the people indicate their support for them in elections guarantees that the system operates in accordance with the principles of popular sovereignty and political accountability.

The holding of periodic elections, however, is not an assurance that the government is *of the people, by the people and for the people*. Given the nearly universal acceptance of democracy as the most legitimate form of government, many authoritarian regimes conduct elections to provide a semblance of democracy. In these countries, regular elections are used in the regimes' bid to quell domestic opposition and gain international legitimacy. A cursory look at these elections, however, would reveal that they are nothing but a democratic façade to perpetuate one's hold to power.

Elections, therefore, should not only be held regularly – they should also be **free and fair**. In order to be credible, candidates and their parties must have an equal chance of competing in the process, particularly in getting their messages heard and in enlisting support. Furthermore, the candidates and/or their supporters must be allowed to participate freely without fear of bodily harm or intimidation. Independent institutions overseeing the conduct of the elections and the hearing of electoral cases must also be created to ensure that the process is fair to all concerned.

These, to name a few, are the major requisites for the conduct of free and fair elections. In the mainland Southeast Asian country of Cambodia, however, elections are held with wanton disregard for democratic electoral standards. Opposition parties and their candidates are not given equal access to the media. Their candidates and supporters are routinely harassed, intimidated and killed. The election commission is packed with members from the ruling party and its allies, who do not adjudicate cases with impartiality and fairness.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an international organization of parliamentarians working for the firm establishment of democracy, has repeatedly called attention to the unremitting harassment and persecution of Cambodian opposition parliamentarians, including the opposition leader, in its many resolutions and statements. In a recent resolution unanimously adopted by IPU Governing Council at its 189th session in Bern, Switzerland on 19 October 2011, it called again on the authorities to take action to enable the opposition leader “to resume his rightful place as a member of the National Assembly and to stand as a candidate in the next parliamentary elections.”

Similarly, the European Parliament, in its resolution on Cambodia adopted on 21 October 2010, condemned "all politically motivated sentences against representatives of the opposition and NGOs." The resolution also noted that "the strategy of Cambodia's ruling party is to use a politically subservient judiciary to crack down on all government critics."

The dismal state of Cambodian elections and the incessant persecution of the political opposition serve as the impetus for the creation of the **International Parliamentary Committee for Democratic Elections in Cambodia (IPCDEC)**. The committee hopes to enlist the support of past and present parliamentarians all over the world to support the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in Cambodia. In particular, it aims to impress on the Cambodian government the necessity of promoting a democratic environment where opposition parties and their leaders are given a fair and equal chance to participate actively and meaningfully in the political process. The committee believes that the essence of democracy hinges on the presence of strong opposition parties which can realistically challenge those controlling the mantle of government – without such opposition democracy is meaningless.

The Cambodian people have been suffering for too long under an authoritarian government hiding behind a democratic façade to perpetuate its hold to power. With crucial legislative elections coming on **28 July 2013**, the time to ensure that their voices are heard through a genuinely fair and democratic electoral process is now.

The free world must seize the opportunity presented by these elections. Forcing the Cambodian government to play by democratic rules would not only empower the Cambodian people to determine their own future. It would also give an impetus to democracy and human rights in countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Burma, China and North Korea. Drawing from the recent experience of Arab countries, a democratic spring in Cambodia could lead to the democratization of the rest of the Asian region.

The International Parliamentary Committee for Democratic Elections in Cambodia serves as an important instrument in seizing this opportunity. Through its many connections with parliaments, governments and international institutions, it is meant to be a powerful and unique lobbying tool to help achieve democratic change in Cambodia and beyond.

### ***Vision Statement***

To assist in the restoration and consolidation of democracy in Cambodia by pushing for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections that meet international standards and genuinely empower the Cambodian people to make free and informed choices.

### ***Mission Statement***

To encourage past and present parliamentarians all over the world, in the spirit of international solidarity, to support the holding of free, fair and credible Cambodian elections by being part of IPCDEC roster of members and by raising the awareness of their respective parliaments and/or governments on the plight of political opposition and on the state of elections in Cambodia.

## *Objectives*

The International Parliamentary Committee for Democratic Elections in Cambodia aims to raise awareness of parliamentarians all over the world on the importance of addressing critical electoral issues and problems in the run up to the July 2013 national elections.

Even though the current political system in Cambodia is nothing more than a façade of democracy with a rubber-stamp parliament, the upcoming elections, if held according to international democratic standards, would definitely bring about a long-awaited democratic change in this mainland Southeast Asian country.

Elections meeting international standards would also go some way toward fulfilling the 1991 Paris peace accords on Cambodia. The agreements guarantee "a system of liberal democracy, on the basis of pluralism" for Cambodia.

The Committee, therefore, will work with all relevant stakeholders within and outside Cambodia to raise awareness and/or help in bringing a resolution to the following demands:

- To secure and guarantee as a matter of urgency the safe return of the leader of the opposition to Cambodia, to drop all politically motivated charges against him, to restore fully all his civil and political rights, including the right to participate in the political process and to contest elections;
- To ensure that the July 2013 elections take place with free and full participation of the political opposition, civil society groups and international observers;
- To change the composition of the National Election Committee in order to guarantee its full independence and neutrality in administering elections and adjudicating electoral cases;
- To overhaul the complicated election procedures, particularly those relating to voter registration and election administration, to ensure that they are not used for partisan purposes;
- To guarantee equal access to the media for all political parties and their candidates;
- To prevent the use of state resources and state personnel for partisan ends;
- To halt the use of judiciary in concocting politically motivated charges against the opposition; and
- To stop the intimidation and killings of political activists and opposition politicians.

Failure to address these demands would mean that the often-deceived Cambodian people would lose all faith in the show of democracy. The invalid democratic process would lose its capacity to serve as a channel for their grievances, leading to an increased risk of instability and violence.

### ***Preliminary Line-up of Activities***

The International Parliamentary Committee will engage in activities to raise awareness in the international democratic community about the importance of ensuring democratic elections in Cambodia. At the same time, the committee will work with relevant actors to raise awareness of the Cambodian people on the value and sanctity of their votes, and the power of political participation to bring about genuine social and political change.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Event</b>
From July 2012	*****	Membership recruitment
Second week of September 2012	Manila, Philippines	Launch of the committee
October 2012	Yangon, Burma	Participation in CALD Burma Conference
17-21 October 2012	Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire	Participation in 58th Liberal International (LI) Congress
21-26 October 2012	Quebec City, Canada	Participation in 127th International Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly

***For further information or inquiries, please contact:***

**Mr. Mico Espina**

Project Officer

International Parliamentary Committee for Democratic Elections in Cambodia

CALD Secretariat, Unit 410, 4/F La Fuerza Plaza 2,

2241 Don Chino Roces Avenue, 1231 Makati City, Philippines

Tel: +63 2 8196071

Fax: +63 2 8101431

Email: [mico\\_espina@cald.org](mailto:mico_espina@cald.org)