

## **SPEECH**

### **Remarks by USAID/Cambodia Mission Director Erin Soto, Political Party Agent Training of Trainers**

Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh  
January 29, 2007

Good morning. It is a delight to be invited to speak to you this morning. Thank you all for coming. In addition to NDI Country Director, Director of Programs, I would like to give a special welcome and pay my respect to:

H.E. Im Sousdey, Chairman of the National Election Committee (NEC)

H.E. Say Chhum, Secretary General of the Cambodia People's Party (CPP)

H.E. Yum Sary, Deputy Secretary General of the FUNCINPEC (FCP)

H.E. Mu Sochua, Secretary General of the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP)

I am glad to see Chairman Im Sousdey of the National Election Committee (NEC) here. Your presence is an important support to the political parties so that they are encouraged to play a role of poll watching during the Commune elections.

It's also wonderful to have the leaders from the main political parties here today providing their support for this Poll Watches training. This week's political party agent training of trainers workshop supported by USAID and implemented by National Democratic Institute is designed to help trainers from political parties to acquire the knowledge and skills of systematic poll observation; and reporting based on the party agents manual and observation checklists developed on the basis of the Commune Council election laws, regulations, procedures and code of conduct; and to impart training tips to prepare trainers to disseminate training to their party poll agents throughout the country before of the Commune Council elections.

I know that organizing a nation-wide poll watching effort is not a simple thing. It involves training, organizing and mobilizing tens of thousands of people. In fact some parties may mobilize two poll watches per poll station! That means mobilizing somewhere in the range of 28,000 people nationwide a most ambitious target.

Most people are familiar with the role of neutral election monitoring organizations such as the Carter Center from USA or COMFREL and NICFEC from Cambodia. So why should political parties bother spending time and resources on poll watching? Political Party poll watchers play such an important role because they are not neutral. First and foremost political parties and candidates have their own interests at heart. The motivation of "self-interest" can provide a greater guarantee of electoral fairness than any number of neutral election observers. The parties' self-interest will ensure that every vote in their favor is counted and that their opponents play by the rules and follow procedures.

That's why NEC's participation in this training is particularly important. Since each party will be watching the others and the election officials, it is vital that the rules of the election are accurately and clearly understood by everyone. The political party trainers assembled there today will have any opportunity to learn the rules from the official source NEC. They in turn

will disseminate this knowledge to tens of thousands of poll watchers or poll agents at the Commune Level.

Democracy works because people participate – owned by the people. Adding hundreds of thousands of pairs of eyes to watch Election Day increases the participation of citizens in democracy's most fundamental act, voting. This has the effect of increasing the public's overall understanding of the election and increasing the legitimacy and credibility of the election process.

Poll watching is also important in assisting political parties to collect information that can be used during the complaints process. Without a poll watching activity, party complaints often lack of strong evidence. Parties are often frustrated when their complaints are dismissed because they lack of the proper means of proving their claims. Information gathered during Poll watching also helps parties defend themselves against complaints from their opponents.

I realize you have a tremendous job in the weeks ahead. Each party now has to begin the enormous task of recruiting, training, equipping and mobilizing tens of thousands of poll agents. The benefits to your party of this hard work are well worth it; the benefits to democracy and Election Day as a whole are equally as valuable.

USAID and NDI are proud and delighted to support this training. Not only will this training provide the required understanding of Commune Council Election Law, regulations and procedures, but also make your election observation easy and meaningful. I encourage you all to take a full advantage of the training, to learn all you can, and to help strengthen each other.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak today. Thank you NDI for their sustained commitment. I wish you all well, good luck in the elections.