



ខុមហ្វ្រែល COMFREL

គណៈកម្មាធិការដើម្បីការបោះឆ្នោតដោយសេរី និងយុត្តិធម៌នៅកម្ពុជា (គ.ប.ស.យ)

COMMITTEE FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS IN CAMBODIA (COMFREL)

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Press Release

On

Findings of Media Monitoring from May to September 2007

Phnom Penh, October 03, 2007

Since May 2007, COMFREL has been undertaking a thorough analysis of programs on one state-run television channel (TVK) as well as some popular media, in order to analyze coverage of political party activities and of progress towards the upcoming 2008 National Elections. Results are as follows:

COMFREL, in general, observes that the **Cambodian People's Party (CPP)** was **ahead in terms of access to the media** or, in other words, information on or activities of the CPP were covered by all TV channels and some radio channels and newspapers. Coverage was of, among other things, field visits to strengthen the party network, gift giving, acceptance of new members defecting from other political parties and criticism against other political parties, the main opposition parties in particular.

Observation of TVK<sup>1</sup> within the monitoring period shows that, in terms of coverage of political parties, TVK came out heavily in favor of the CPP, which was allocated (or heard about in) 85% (34 times) of cases of political party coverage (three political parties were heard about 40 times in total). For example, TVK broadcast a program on the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CPP on June 28, 2007, in which the CPP President mentioned party efforts and achievements in developing and building the country. TVK also showed the logo of the CPP and banners praising the CPP, using the words **“the CPP protects social equity and justice”**. Government officials, including the Prime Minister when on duty, also took the time to mention the CPP; this was also broadcasted by TVK.

FUNCINPEC was heard about in 10% of cases (four times) and the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP) in 5% of cases (two times). Examples included coverage of the relative position of the parties against the request to remove immunity from the retired king. No other political parties were heard about on TVK.

Observation also found that TVK covered activities of FUNCINPEC members of the **RGC in 4% of all cases of coverage of government activities (2.325 of 93 times)** (this entailed activities of the two ruling parties of the RGC). TVK did not mention the activities of non-ruling parties.

It should be noticed that some media, such as radio stations FM 90 MHz and FM 90.5 MHz, which are affiliated with FUNCINPEC, broadcast information on the activities of FUNCINPEC.

However, observation revealed that non-ruling parties could still access some electronic and print media. For example, the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), the Human Rights

<sup>1</sup> The monitoring times are from 12:00 to 14:00 and 18:00 to 20:00, excluding Equity Weekly Program.

Party, and the NRP all accessed radio airtime from Radio FM 105 MHz from 11:00 to 14:00 respectively. These political parties used the media to disseminate information on their own political platforms and party activities and to express their views against the ruling parties as well as criticizing each other.

Programs on Radio FM 90.5 MHz and FM 105 and articles in Khmer Youth Voice and Khmer Amatak newspapers, affiliated either with FUNCINPEC or the NRP, traded harsh words with each other. Similar cases occurred between the SRP and Mr. Khem Sokha's newly established Human Rights Party.

**TVK's Equity Weekly Program:**<sup>2</sup> COMFREL observed that this program focused mainly on social, economic and environmental issues and on matters surrounding the livelihoods of ordinary people; **political issues or views were given less coverage.** Most information dealt with the positive aspects of government development activities, such as the building of infrastructure; **victims of development were not mentioned.** For example, the episode on June 3, 2007 on land disputes interviewed a guest speaker and a government official, who stated that land problems were caused by ordinary people who grabbed or took land belonging to the state or to other people. **The episode focusing on land conflicts did not mention, interview or show any of the thousands of families who have been victims** of land disputes in Phnom Penh.

**The above program dedicated only a small amount of time (about 5% of the program)** to covering political views or parties. Members of parliament from the three elected parties were shown in the program: **CPP parliamentarians were allocated around 2%** (or 11 appearances), **SRP parliamentarians about 2%** (nine appearances) and **FUNCINPEC parliamentarians 1%** (four appearances).

Meanwhile, with voter list revision and voter registration in progress, COMFREL hopes that the Equity Weekly Program will focus on the political parties and related topics, in order to raise awareness and disseminate information to the voters, at the same time as providing election-based education.

**In conclusion, all TV channels are still providing the most coverage in favor of the ruling party. However, there has been a notable improvement on some radio stations and in some newspapers, which have provided time or space for other political parties.**

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*COMFREL's mission is to help to create an informed and favorable democratic climate (1) for free and fair elections through lobbying and advocacy to establish a permanent and suitable legal framework; education to inform citizens of their rights; and monitoring activities that both discourage irregularities and provide comprehensive data to enable an objective, non-partisan assessment to be made of the election process, and (2) for the general public to fully understand democratic processes not just before elections but after and between them. It arranges, towards this end, educational sessions and public forums to encourage citizens to participate in politics and decision making. It encourages constructive advocacy and lobbying for electoral reforms that increase the accountability of elected officials. Finally, by providing comprehensive observation and monitoring, it enables objective, non-partisan assessments to be made on the progress of commitment made in political platforms and on the performance of elected officials.*

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<sup>2</sup> This program is supported by UNDP in conjunction with the Ministry of Information. The program aims to promote civic understanding and participation in political issues. The UNDP consultant in charge of the program has claimed that the program is different from the Equity News Program which was broadcast during the 2007 commune council election campaign period.