



NEWSLETTER



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Test Run of Voter Registration Evaluated

Advanced New Voter Registration System Faces Challenges

The restructured National Election Committee is working on a new voter registration system for the elections in 2017 and 2018. While the development of this elaborated system makes progress and receives international support, some elementary challenges still remain to be overcome.

After the parliamentary elections 2013, not only the oppositional Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) but also many non-governmental and international organizations criticized irregularities, especially concerning missing and double names on voting lists. The governing Cambodian People's Party (CPP) as well as the CNRP both claimed to have won the elections. In the following year, the CNRP boycotted the sessions of the National Assembly. In July 2014, the parties agreed on a compromise, which among other things included a redraft of the list of those eligible to vote and shake-up of the National Election Committee (NEC), which is now made up of four members of CPP and CNRP each as well as a ninth person jointly nominated by both of the parties.¹

Appointed in April 2015, the NEC receives support also from Japan and the European Union. On the contrary, parties such as the recently established Khmer Power Party that are not represented in parliament criticize the line-up of the



Assembly Approves National Election Committee, VOA Khmer, April 9, 2015.

NEC as they are not part of it. Supervised are the NEC and its activities by the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL) and the Electoral Reform Alliance (ERA), amongst other. For instance, COMFREL demanded the application of the Bangkok Declaration on Free and Fair Elections of 2012 by the NEC in November

as well as the employment of at least 2.500 people for the voter registration. According to NEC spokesman Hang Puthea, the objectives of the Bangkok Decla-

¹ Cf. The Phnom Penh Post, November 11, 2015.

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ration are parallel to those of the NEC, though an official endorsement of the declaration required the approval of the National Assembly. For the voter registration, the NEC plans to employ 2.400 people.²

The redraft of the voting lists is based on a biometrical system. All citizens eligible to vote shall be identified unambiguously by their identity card, a photo and their thumb prints, their data to be saved electronically in a central database. This shall avoid fraud and mistakes. The development of the computer system, the overall cost estimated at \$17 million by the ERA, is being supported by Japan with \$1 million and the European Union with \$11.3 million. In addition, both also provide technical experts. The registration process in the villages is to eventually take less than five minutes per person.³

After a test run of two weeks from November 1 to 15 that took place at 43 registration points in selected areas, the results have now been evaluated. The goal is to achieve a 98% accurate voting list until the council elections 2017 and the parliamentary elections 2018. Though as of now, there are still a few obstacles to cope with: Of the approximately 32.500 people whose data was supposed to be recorded during the test run, only some 17.500 were successfully registered. Reasons were technical as well as logistical challenges, insufficient information of the population, vague instructions for and improvable trainings of the staff as well as missing identification cards, especially among the elderly who are not working any more. Missing printers, slow internet connections, power cuts and flat computer batteries, blotted thumb prints and non-appearances of citizens due to heavy storms and rain as well as lacking coordination with the working hours of many factory workers were other problems. Regarding Cambodian citizens living in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, the establishment of mobile registration units at the borders is being discussed; Cambodians overseas could turn to their respective embassy. However, the practical implementation of these plans might fail due to funding issues according to the government. This would especially harm the opposition, which enjoys a relatively large voter potential abroad. Nonetheless, COMFREL was rather satisfied with the overall results of the test run. Indeed, the organization drew attention to the above-mentioned challenges and requested a simplification and speed-up of the registration process, fewer documents to be filled out man-



Two-Week NEC Voter Registration Tests Begin Countrywide, The Cambodia Daily, November 2, 2015.

² Cf. VOA Khmer, April 9, as well as The Phnom Penh Post, July 14, November 20 and 21, 2015.

³ Cf. The Phnom Penh Post, May 14, October 9, and November 21, 2015.

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ually, ideally even a completely electronic registration, no possibilities to further editing of the once verified data by the NEC, and better support of, especially illiterate, citizens by the registration staff. But it also appeared confident that these challenges could be addressed and overcome in time. The official voter registration, which will have to record the data of some 11 million people and last for three months, will begin in spring 2016. A postponement from March to May is still subject to discussion. Until the elections, the Ministry of Interior will also have to issue another four million identity cards. In addition, some 600.000 cards which have already been issued are afflicted with peeling off top layers and might require replacement. However, according to an official of the Ministry, the responsible company already offered to repair the mistake, which occurred due to expired glue.⁴

For Further Information

Assembly Approves National Election Committee

By Kong Sothnarith | April 9, 2015

VOA Khmer

<http://www.voacambodia.com/content/assembly-approves-national-election-committee/2712681.html>

Donors to help set up poll rolls

By Taing Vida | May 14, 2015

The Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/donors-help-set-poll-rolls>

EU, Japan to provide election support

By Phak Seangly | June 23, 2015

The Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/eu-japan-provide-election-support>

NEC recruiting 2,400

By Vong Sokheng | July 14, 2015

The Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/nec-recruiting-2400>

NEC Unveils Details of Pilot Program for Voter Registration

By Kuch Naren | October 7, 2015

The Cambodia Daily

<https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/nec-unveils-details-of-pilot-program-for-voter-registration-96686/>

EU electoral experts to arrive on October 18

By Vong Sokheng | October 9, 2015

The Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/eu-electoral-experts-arrive-october-18>

⁴ Cf. The Cambodia Daily, November 2, 10, Khmer Times, November 20, as well as The Phnom Penh Post, November 17, 21, 24 and December 4, 2015.

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Two-Week NEC Voter Registration Tests Begin Countrywide

By Kang Sotheat | November 2, 2015

The Cambodia Daily

<https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/two-week-nec-voter-registration-tests-begin-countrywide-98942/>

Pilot for New Voter Registration System Identifies Key Problems

By Kuch Naren | November 10, 2015

The Cambodia Daily

<https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/pilot-for-new-voter-registration-system-identifies-key-problems-99786/>

Early issues crop up in voter registration test

By Taing Vida | November 17, 2015

The Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/early-issues-crop-voter-registration-test>

NEC Pressed on Election Reforms

By Chea Takihiro | November 19, 2015

Khmer Times

<http://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/17992/nec-pressed-on-election-reforms/>

Big job ahead for new NEC in bid to register 11 million voters

By Audrey Wilson | November 21, 2015

The Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/big-job-ahead-new-nec-bid-register-11-million-voters>

ID cards coming unglued

By Shaun Turton and Taing Vida | November 24, 2015

The Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/id-cards-coming-unglued>

Voter registration trial praised in spite of setbacks

By Vong Sokheng | December 4, 2015

The Phnom Penh Post

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/voter-registration-trial-praised-spite-setbacks>

Recommendations on NEC Procedure and Regulations of Voter Registration (Unofficial Translation)

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