



Special Representative of the Secretary-General
for Human Rights in Cambodia

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**STATEMENT BY THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN CAMBODIA
ON COMMUNE ELECTIONS**

2 August 2001

The United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia remains convinced that properly conducted, free and fair commune elections will contribute to the consolidation of pluralist democracy in Cambodia. He understands that the process to register voters is under way, and requests the election bodies as well as the Cambodian Governments to ensure that irregularities are appropriately dealt with.

The Special Representative is gravely concerned about instances of violence and intimidation against commune election candidates and members of political parties, which have occurred in recent weeks. He refers particularly to the killing of Uch Horn, a Sam Rainsy Party district council member, on 30 June in Kompong Speu Province, and the murder of Meas Soy, Funcinpec commune election candidate, on 17 July in Kompong Chhnang. Such events could have a serious and negative effect on public confidence in the processes leading to the commune elections planned for February 2002. Moreover, fear of violence may prevent many people from fully exercising their democratic rights in the election process.

To ensure a climate conducive to free and fair elections, it is essential that swift action be taken by the Royal Cambodian Government in response to these and other cases of violence and intimidation. The Special Representative welcomes the arrests of two suspects in Kompong Speu and urges that serious and independent investigations be conducted into these and all other instances of election related violence.

The Special Representative welcomes the statement made by Prime Minister Hun Sen last week during the Congress of the Cambodian People's Party urging all Cambodians to refrain from acts of violence and requesting local authorities to take immediate measures to ensure the security of all participants in the election process. The Special Representative himself, as early as December 2000, had urged the Government, and in particular the Prime Minister, to issue a clear and firm message condemning all acts of violence and intimidation related to political activity.

The Special Representative is also concerned about the conduct of "opinion surveys" by local authorities, and in some instances the local police, on behalf of a ruling political

party. During the month of June 2001, the Special Representative as well as the United Nations Cambodia Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on several occasions raised with the Royal Government of Cambodia their concerns about the involvement of local authorities in carrying out "opinion surveys". Despite assurances given that no government institutions would be involved in such activities, local authorities have continued to carry out opinion surveys in communes/sangkat in Phnom Penh and in the provinces in the month of July.

The local authorities' current involvement in conducting "opinion surveys" on behalf of a political party is not only contrary to the conduct of free and fair commune/sangkat elections, it also violates the Law on Elections of the Commune/Sangkat Councils. Article 129 of the Law stipulates that government institutions shall maintain neutrality and impartiality and not carry out any activities in support of a political party or its candidates.

The Special Representative emphasizes that impartiality of government institutions is a prerequisite for free and fair elections and therefore urges the Government to bring such practices to an immediate halt.