



MEDIA STATEMENT

6 June 2013

CITIZENS ASK: PARTIES OR PEOPLE? WHO WILL BE THE MASTER?

Phnom Penh 6 June: Over 350 representatives of communities, civil society, and political parties gathered to hear representatives of major political parties outline their policies in the run up to the Cambodian National Election on 28 July 2013.

“It is a fundamental principal of a democratic society that citizens have the right to hear where the political parties stand. Today Cambodian citizens showed they are keen and eager to challenge the parties’ policies”, said Mr. Chhith Sam Ath, Executive Director of the NGO Forum.

Today, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) and Funcinpec attended the political forum and answered questions on a wide range of issues. The candidates were asked to outline their policies under four key headings: **Economic and Land Reform; the Environment, Forestry and Climate Change; Social and Human Development; and Rule of Law, Good Governance and Access to Information.** Missing was the CPP.

Participants and Organizers expressed their disappointment that CPP did not participate, despite repeated invitations to do so. According to democratic principles, all political parties should be accountable to their citizens on their policies before the National Election.

The audience included Community representatives from across Cambodia. Prominent among their concerns were parties’ positions on sustainable and transparent natural resources management and land evictions. Several were concerned about transparency in the handling of revenues expected from extractive industries.

A repeated emphasis from questioners was on the need to implement and enforce the existing land law and other regulations

Both parties agreed on the need for a greater judicial independence and endorsed passage for the drafted law on access to information.

The forum is the biggest event so far the NGO community has organized in the run up to the current election.

Thida Khus, member of the organizing committee and Executive Director of Silaka said it is also different from events previously conducted in the history of the NGO community.

“NGOs are taking more ownership of the process of briefing citizens about the election options”, she said.

The Forum drew participation from many community representatives, CSOs, political representatives, and the donor and diplomatic communities.

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Organizing Committee



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CAMBODIANS FOR RESOURCE REVENUE TRANSPARENCY



Members of the audience were happy to have this opportunity to question party representatives.

“The forum is very good because it gives us a chance to raise our concerns about the development of Cambodia”, said Ms. Tim Sakmony from the Borei Keila community.

But she also expressed that the time is very tight and that she could not ask all the questions she had.

A student from Kampong Cham, Mr. Hour Chai Ngoun, said “It is very important for me as a student to have a chance to ask all the questions to the political parties and bring the answers to be shared with my friends.”

“I request all political parties to participate in this event, because on this occasion they will hear the issues and concerns from their citizens and we want them to give us their solutions to the problems”.

Mrs. Mom Sakin, who comes from a forest community in Kratie said: “The issues of forest management are of great concern for us. Today is an opportunity to hear answers about forest management which never find their way into political discussions on local TV.”

A popular theme that ran through the questioning to the parties and was expressed in so many words by more than one person was; “If elected, will you be the master or will the people be the master?”

ENDS

Forthcoming events are the election forum focusing on women issues on 12th of June in Phnom Penh, for youths on the 15th of June as well as in Monduliri on the 19th of June, which is focusing on land and environment, and the Anti-Corruption and Integrity Pledge Signing Ceremony on 12th June.

Organizing committee members were the NGO Forum on Cambodia, the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC), Comfrel, Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRA), Gender and Development in Cambodia (GADC), Committee to Promote Women in Politic (CPWP), Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), Silaka, Development Partnership in Action (DPA), Cambodians for Resource Revenue Transparency (CRRT), Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), Transparency International Cambodia, Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCiM), and World Vision Cambodia. The Political Forum was designed to provide an opportunity for citizens to hear the policies of the key parties contesting the Election.

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