

Statement from the Press Secretary on Cambodia's Flawed Parliamentary Elections

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The United States regrets that Cambodia's July 29 parliamentary elections were neither free nor fair and failed to represent the will of the Cambodian people. The flawed elections, which excluded the country's principal opposition party, represent the most significant setback yet to the democratic system enshrined in Cambodia's constitution, and substantially erode Cambodia's achievements in promoting political reconciliation and economic growth since the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement.

We are profoundly disappointed in the government's choice to disenfranchise millions of voters, who are rightly proud of their country's development over the past 25 years. Genuine democracies tolerate opposing political views, foster competition through elections, and promote and protect the free exchange of ideas. In contrast, in the months leading up to the vote, the Cambodian government placed ever tighter restrictions on independent media and civil society, dissolved the main opposition party, jailed the opposition leader, and banned that party's senior leaders from participating in the political process. The campaign was marred by threats from national and local leaders to punish those choosing not to vote. These actions denied the Cambodian people a voice and choice in determining the future of the country.

The United States will consider additional steps to respond to the elections and other recent setbacks to democracy and human rights in Cambodia, including a significant expansion of the visa restrictions announced on December 6, 2017. In the meantime, we call on the Cambodian government to take tangible actions to promote national reconciliation by allowing independent media and civil society organizations to fulfill their vital roles unhindered, immediately releasing Kem Sokha and other political prisoners, and ending the ban on the political opposition.