Mini Report following National Political Platform Debate on “Special Measures to solve Women’s and Children’s issues in Cambodia” held in Phnom Penh on 3 July 2013

Executive Summary
This mini report summarizes the issues raised during the National Political Platform Debate entitled “Special Measures to Solve Women’s and Children’s Issues in Cambodia” (the “Debate”) held on 3 July in Phnom Penh. The event was jointly organized with the collaboration of a number of non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) and civil society organizations (“CSOs”), details of which are provided in the Annex to this report.

The purpose of this Debate was to provide representatives of political parties with the opportunity to present and discuss their party’s political platform in relation to solving women’s and children’s issues and specifically to address the implementation of a quota system to increase the representation of women in politics. Approximately 270 participants attended the event including seven representatives of different political parties, Cambodian citizens, NGOs and CSOs. Participants were given the opportunity to access information about women’s and children’s rights and the Debate demonstrated the need to vote in the National Assembly Elections 2013, to ensure action and policy change in regards to these rights.

The Debate comprised of introductory and concluding remarks and a presentation on “The issues of women and children that occur in Cambodia”. This was followed by two panel discussions and question and answer sessions with the representatives of seven political parties split into two groups. The political party representatives were given seven minutes each to set out their political platforms before the session was opened up to questions from participants for the representatives to answer.

Introduction
Although women theoretically have access to the same rights as men, in practice women are often discriminated against in ways that men are not. Women are often seen to be of a lower value than men as demonstrated in a well known Khmer proverb “men are gold, which never loses value or beauty, whereas women are white cloth, which can become spoiled and useless”.

Mr. Koul Panha, Executive Director of the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (“COMFREL”), welcomed attendees to the event. He said that holding this political platform when the political parties had already started their election campaigns was not too late and provided a valuable opportunity to draw attention to the issues of women and children. Holding this debate didn’t mean men weren’t doing anything to further the cause of women but that women need to be more empowered.

Ms. Wenny Kusuma, Country Director of United Nations for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (“UN Women”), spoke next to provide some opening remarks to the morning’s event. She

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1 The two panel discussion were 1) special measures to solve women’s and children’s issues in Cambodia and 2) setting a quota system to increase the number of women’s political representatives at all levels including three options; set the quota system in election law, or set the quota system in internal regulations of political parties or set the quota system in the action plan of political parties.
said that crucial to the process of voting is the keeping of promises and the importance of events like this was that promises were made in public. The morning was about making clear what leaders say is their vision for the future of Cambodia and then looking beyond the elections to the future of keeping promises. The Country Director of UN Women identified three key areas that the global community as a whole had to work on, which were: **voice, choice and safety.** **Voice** relates to representation in decision making-positions in leadership, **choice** to women’s economic empowerment and **safety** to violence against women and girls. In particular reference to quota systems Ms. Kusuma identified approximately 80 countries worldwide that had adopted special temporary measures to improve women’s representation.

Mrs. Pok Panha Vichethr, Executive Director of Cambodian Women’s Crisis Centre (“CWCC”), presented the issues facing women and children before the panel discussions began. She explained that whilst Cambodia works towards greater economic development women are not well prepared for this because they do not have the time to participate in economic discussions; they are too busy looking after their families. Lack of time also prevents women from being able to benefit from many social and cultural activities. The Executive Director of CWCC said that it is important to consider the issues of women and children together; helping women to be better mother’s benefits their children and the nation as a whole. Women and children suffer from a lack of education and awareness of what is happening beyond their domestic circle. Many women and children suffer from domestic violence and the disloyalty of husbands and fathers. There are issues surrounding women’s migration where women are deceived by private companies and return to Cambodia as victims and where young girls are being deceived, trafficked and sexually abused.

The underrepresentation of women in Cambodian politics stems from a common perception of women not being qualified enough for political leadership, as well as the economic restraints and discrimination faced by women when participating in the political decision-making process. The Royal Government of Cambodia (the “RGC”) has committed itself to increase female political representation to at least 30% of women elected at national level by 2015, this would meet specific targets through the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals (the “CMDGs”), to be achieved by 2015. These goals, however, can only be achieved within the set timeframe if more effective mechanisms are implemented than those currently utilized.

Women achieve many things and the situation is not wholly negative but there are many negative aspects that need to be addressed. The promotion of women’s and children’s rights cannot be done alone but must be achieved together.

**The policies of the political parties**

**Cambodian Nationality’s Party (“CNP”): Mr. Seng Sokheng, President**

The representative of the CNP did not focus on women’s and children’s issues but spoke in general terms of the need to address issues of poverty, healthcare and education for everyone. He focused on the Buddhist principles and leadership of the party and saw following Buddhist principles as a means of eradicating the evils of sexual violence and addiction. Specifically related to women the party representative said the CNP wanted to see more women in both learning and teaching, greater
opportunities for women to work in Cambodia or abroad, and with access to more roles that are intellectual rather than manual.

CNP’s representative wanted free education from Grades 1-12 to be available to all children and spoke of the need to address the root cause of high levels of school drop-outs, which they identified as poverty. The solution given was to promote access to free education and to involve the private sector in this endeavor by making more scholarships available.

The representative of CNP expressed clear support for a minimum quota system 30% for women’s representation in politics although they said the reason this quota hadn’t yet been met was because women lacked interest in politics and needed to take greater responsibility for helping themselves.

**FUNCINPEC:** Lokchomteav Prak Chantha, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, Chief of Women Movement Council of FUNCINPEC

FUNCINPEC’s representative said that the party was committed to the women’s movements and had undergone an internal reform which created a separate Women’s Wing and appointed young women in senior positions within this Wing; the party has been keen to give women more roles and responsibilities. The party representative also highlighted the appointment of Princess Norodom Arunreaksmey as the head of the party and Prime Minister candidate. As a result of this, the party’s representative explained, FUNCINPEC is now better able to respond to women’s and children’s issues. They also said that they have a promotion strategy to increase women’s representation in politics and think a target of just under 30% is fine. The party representative was not in favor of a quota system as they said this would not solve issues of underrepresentation as the country moved from a developing to developed nation.

The representative of FUNCINPEC identified the need for effective education and awareness so that people can be better informed of the issues that affect them but acknowledged the financial barriers to education and called for people to understand that “daughters have the same values as sons”. The party’s representative also said that whilst women and men have equal rights in law there is a need to reform the judicial system so that the vulnerable can gain access to justice and that those who do not follow the law can be punished.

**Republican Democracy Party (“RDP”): Mrs. Sok Rothsovann Panhchakseila, President**

The representative of RDP set out the problems women face including: physical and mental abuse, poverty, lack of education, poor access to healthcare and higher mortality rates than men; however, didn’t expand upon how the RDP would address these until questions later on. The party representative spoke of the need to promote the status of law so that women have something to depend on and the need to disseminate awareness of the laws that protect women and children to the people.

The RDP’s representative would not commit to a quota system but highlighted the 89 women candidates (37 (35.58%) titular candidates and 52 (43.33%) reserved candidates for RDP and spoke of a need to improve education for women to increase their political participation.
Cambodian People’s Party (“CPP”): Lokchomteav Chou Bun Eng, Secretary of State for the Ministry of Interior, the Chair of the National Secretariat on Anti-Human Trafficking

The CPP’s representative acknowledged the many issues relating to women and children and drew attention to the CPP’s promotion of equality and participation. They said the CPP continues to work to improve women’s and children’s conditions by increasing access to education, welfare and healthcare, by eliminating discrimination, increasing gender equality, expanding job opportunities and strengthening the implementation of laws against domestic violence and trafficking. They said that the CPP provides opportunities to women to learn technical skills and supports girls studying to Grade 12 and in higher education by providing dormitories and scholarships. The party representative said CPP views children’s well-being as a priority. They would like to see more care for women and children in community-based, state-run and NGO operated orphanages. The CPP would bring more opportunities for children locally and abroad. When asked about underage marriages the CPP representative explained that there was a law against this but there was little the CPP could do without the proper motivation of parents and new families.

The party representative highlighted the fact that the number of female members of the National Assembly had increased from 5.83% in 1993, to 21% today. The numbers show female participation has increased from one legislature to another. CPP has improved women’s participation at all level in the government. When asked directly about the quota system CPP’s representative said that, whilst there was no quota system within the party itself, targets have been set for the government to increase the proportion of women in leadership. In response to a question from the participant about the CPP putting more women at the top of party candidate lists the representative replied that the ranking of candidates was decided by holding a referendum with party members of each constituency and that they cannot arbitrarily put women at the top, this must be the will of the people.

CPP’s representative said migrants have the same rights as other citizens but that there should be guidelines to better facilitate migrants within the rules of law. They also said that the CPP had a policy of labor contracts and paid attention to those wanting to seek available jobs elsewhere and that they would continue to implement this policy. On media advertising the CPP representative said that there were currently no laws against advertising products deemed to have a negative impact on society as this was not just a matter for government but an issue that relied on the participation of the people.

In response to a question about those in positions of authority misusing their rights, CPP’s representative said that, like other parties, they were committed to punishing all lawbreakers including civil servants; they added that victims who cooperate will always be supported but called on people not to further victimize victims and increase levels of fear.

Khmer Anti-Poverty Party (“KAPP”): Mr. Krovann Daron, President

KAPP’s representative did not address women’s and children’s issues separately but grouped them with issues facing all Cambodians, particularly focusing on issues of poverty. The party representative did speak of developing a women’s program and making anger management available to help people manage their lives better, which would decrease incidents of domestic abuse. They also committed to the creation of maternity homes, highlighting the fact that many
women die owing to a lack of maternity care, and stated “lives are very expensive and can’t be bought with money”.

When asked, KAPP’s representative said KAPP would not discriminate against same-sex lovers, would openly support the concept and punish those who do discriminate. Responding to a question about money needed to fight an election campaign KAPP’s representative accepted the importance of money but said that KAPP would knock the concept of money being the most important thing.

On media issues the representative of KAPP acknowledged problems of advertisements of alcohol and commented that in the United State of America if you drink alcohol you cannot drive. In relation to increasing media access across the nation they said that technicians committed to KAPP would address this and hoped that a rise in media access would see a rise in freedom of information and expression.

The party representative spoke of the need for the executive, legislative and judiciary to work together to hold people to account who break their promises and called for the establishment of a media body to assist with this. They also spoke of the possibility of being able to petition those in senior positions in government to oust their leader if they do not fulfill promises made, as is the case in some other countries.

**Cambodian National Rescue Party ("CNRP"): Ms. Yang Phannet, Reserved Candidate for National Assembly Elections 2013 in Prey Veng Province**

The CNRP’s representative focused on the need to improve access to education to combat domestic abuse, increase opportunities to participate in all-levels of government and to encourage women entrepreneurs. CNRP would like more community-based free schools with qualified teachers and was committed to an increase of teachers’ salaries, to a minimum of $250, to eliminate corruption and bribery and make people take their roles more seriously. CNRP’s representative believes better education would help women to become more capable of leadership and increase the numbers of women participating in politics however, they also said women need to work to fight discrimination themselves to demonstrate that they are as capable as men.

To support women entrepreneurs CNRP’s representative said the party would provide loans at very low interest rates of less than 1%. CNRP would provide $100 for pregnant women to help support them through pregnancy. Moreover CNRP would not support adverts for alcohol and would want to put a higher tax on this to discourage people from drinking.

CNRP’s representative called for greater access nationwide to independent television and radio stations and commented on the ineffectiveness of ruling party controlled media stations in encouraging women’s political participation. They said that “women shouldn’t be afraid of politics” and called for enforcement of existing laws to prevent violence against women candidates. Law enforcement was poor and that Cambodians should not just have respect for leaders but for the law as well.

In response to a question about the importance of money the CNRP representative explained that whilst it was not the first priority it was important for an electoral campaign, which relied on support
of those committed to the party. The party’s representative encouraged women to get involved in politics and said that more women’s representatives would see more women’s issues addressed.

League for Democracy Party (“LDP”): Mrs. Pang Vanthown, Deputy Secretary-General

LDP’s representative called for greater empowerment of all people but said that whilst men and women are equal on paper in reality there is gender inequality and there is a need to educate people on gender issues.

On increasing women’s participation in politics, LDP’s representative commented on the violence and pressure that women face and saw this as a violation of voter’s rights. They also said that women representatives feel they have to be more active than their male counterparts in order to prove themselves. On the issue of a quota system LDP’s representative said that women must gain representatives legally and that the quota system is a secondary principle to that of increasing participation through better education.

LDP’s representative said those with roles and responsibilities who do not do their duty towards the people and fulfill their promises should be punished.

Recommendations
Following the Debate, the CSOs suggest that all political parties set up separate strategies and policies to specifically address women’s and children’s issues during the fifth mandate of the National Assembly. The CSOs recommend that the following be included in party policies:

- The implementation of voluntary gender quotas within their internal party regulations as an immediate mechanism to increase the number of female candidates and the number of women on parties internal governing boards and in other decision-making structures within the parties;
- Support for reform of electoral laws to include mandatory candidate quotas to ensure female representation at all levels of governance and politics. Electoral laws can be improved by adding criteria to political party’s candidate registration procedures that achieve the required 30% quota.
- Additional state funding should be approved to finance political parties providing capacity-development for political roles to female candidates.
- Effective use of media networks to promote the rights of women and children, to ensure access to justice and to promote freedom of expression and information;
- The provision of greater access for Cambodian people, especially women, to media sources across the country for the purposes of encouraging women’s participation in politics, promoting gender equality and non-discrimination, preventing violence against women and increasing information about health care;
- The strengthening of legislation and law enforcement to better protect women affected by problems such as migration, trafficking, rape and gender-based violence; to abolish the culture of immunity that exists around these crimes and to punish those who abuse their duties and responsibilities.
Improving women’s access to education as a means to improve opportunities for and capabilities of women to be represented in politics and decision-making positions at all levels as well as in other sectors; and

Implementing specific strategies to prevent high numbers of girls from dropping out of school.

For more information, please contact

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Annex

The following jointly organized the Debate:

- Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (“CCHR”)
- Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (“COMFREL”)
- Committee to Promote Women in Politics (“CPWP”)
- Paz Y Desarrollo (“PYD”)
- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (“UN Women”)
- Women for All Network
- Women for Prosperity (“WfP”)

The following political parties attended the Debate:

- Cambodian Nationality’s Party (“CNP”)
- Cambodian National Rescue Party (“CNRP”)
- Cambodian People’s Party (“CPP”)
- FUNCINPEC Party
- Khmer Anti-Poverty Party (“KAPP”)
- League for Democracy Party (“LDP”)
- Republican Democracy Party (“RDP”)

The following organizations participated as key note speaker in the Debate:

- Cambodian Women’s Crisis Centre (“CWCC”)
- Gender and Development for Cambodia (“GADC”)