

# REGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN PROMOTING PEACEFUL AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA



organized jointly by the Parliament of Cambodia and the Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENT**

While violent conflicts may vary from country to country, their causes are often related to ethnic division, discrimination and exclusion, social and economic inequalities and poor governance.

An effective parliament which is fully representative of all components of society and offers a national platform for a free and open exchange of views is essential to resolving these conflicts. Thanks to their direct contact with constituents, members of parliament, men and women, are ideally placed to initiate, lead and help implement the conclusions of a national debate on peace and reconciliation, and act as role models in promoting the values of tolerance and advocating the resolution of conflict through peaceful means. Moreover, an effective parliament itself is a clear sign to the people that there is reason to place one's trust in the country's public institutions.

Post-conflict countries have to grapple with a number of challenges. They all face the inevitable temptation of "swift justice", choosing justice and keeping the peace over justice and preserving democracy, in response to the legacy of large-scale human rights abuses which often characterize violent conflict. Nevertheless, experience has shown that success is most likely where governments – in spite of risks and against all odds – have attempted to deal with serious mistakes and abuses by holding those responsible accountable and by seeking to render a public account of what exactly happened through the establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions.

The pursuit of truth and justice, along with others challenges, are not unique to post-conflict situations. In fact, authorities faced with strong tensions within their societies or with internal strife frequently come up against the same moral, social, economic and political challenges as post-conflict countries. Often long-term calm and confidence require the necessary reforms to strengthen state institutions, including Parliament and the Judiciary, putting in place mechanisms, such as the decentralization of state powers, to bring governance structures and responsibilities closer to the people and to promote equal and fair opportunities for all sectors of society.

The seminar in Cambodia aims to strengthen the ability of parliaments in South-East Asia to address these challenges. It offers an opportunity for an exchange of views and for a better understanding of the fields of conflict resolution, reconciliation and transitional justice reform among participating parliamentarians.