

## Cambodia

### **Period of democratic transition: 1991–1993**

### **Pro-democracy civic movement: not present**

Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia in 1978, toppling the genocidal Pol-Pot government and setting up a Hanoi-backed Communist administration. Fighting continued throughout the 1980s among the government, Khmer Rouge rebels, and other political contenders.

However, with the collapse of Eastern European communism in the late 1980s and the fall of the Soviet Union—Vietnam’s closest ally—Vietnam came under increasing international pressure to enter into peace talks. In 1991, Vietnam yielded to China’s demands for a full military withdrawal and a role for the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia’s new government. In October 1991, the leaders of four rival groupings—Prince Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge’s Sonn Sann, Prime Minister Hun Sen, and Khieu Samphan—and representatives of 18 other countries signed a peace treaty in Paris. The agreement called for a new constitution to be drafted by a freely elected National Assembly, for the United Nations to run five key ministries in advance of national elections, and for the UN to place over 20,000 troops in temporary cantons. In May 1993, Cambodians elected a new government led by the United Front for an Independent, Neutral, and Free Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) in the country’s first multiparty voting since the 1972 presidential election. Despite some irregularities, security issues, and the UN’s inability to fully provide a neutral political environment, the vote was the freest in the country’s history. A new constitution was adopted on September 21, creating a constitutional monarch in which the king “reigns but does not rule,” with the power to make governmental appointments after consultation with ministers and to declare a state of emergency if the prime minister and cabinet agree.

However, Cambodia’s democratic transition was short-lived; persistent violence plagued the country, and the Khmer Rouge refused to disarm or participate in the electoral process. Rule of law remained weak in the countryside, and those living in areas controlled by the Khmer Rouge were denied basic rights. The steady erosion of freedom following the peace accord culminated in a 1997 coup launched by leaders of the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), the nominally junior member of the new coalition government, and Co-Premier Hun Sen, in which the leader of FUNCINPEC was ousted and hundreds of FUNCINPEC party members were imprisoned. Currently, the CPP continues to dominate national and local politics, and both political and civil rights in Cambodia are severely restricted.