

# à propos

The KOFF  
Peacebuilding  
Magazine



## Cambodia: elections and violence

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## editorial

The purpose of elections is to legitimize governments at national, regional and local level. They aim to promote democratization and ensure greater justice. In fact, in some cases, elections contribute to peaceful conflict resolution. But especially in fragile states, they are often accompanied by violence. They can be a catalyst for deep-rooted social and political differences, causing them to flare up again. Elections that are perceived as unfair by the population – or at least part of it – are particularly explosive. It does not matter whether this perception is justified or not.

Cambodia held parliamentary elections on July 29, 2018. Any opposition was stifled beforehand. The victory of the Cambodian People's Party was therefore hardly surprising. Is Cambodia now heading towards a one-party system? What impact does this election have on tensions within the country? To what extent are elections and violence connected in a general sense and how can riots be prevented? Are there technological solutions that can make elections fairer and thus more peaceful in future?

These questions and more will be discussed in this edition.

I hope you enjoy reading it.

Editor KOFF Magazin, Amélie Lustenberger

# What future for Cambodia after the elections?



Omnipresent Ruling Party in Phnom Penh, July 2018. Photo from Katrin Travouillon

Over the past four decades, Cambodia has undergone multiple transitions. It has moved from war to (negative) peace, from the totalitarian regime of the Khmer Rouge and the authoritarian regime of the 1980s to a hybrid political system with multiparty elections, as well as from a command economy to free market capitalism.

These transformations have been the focus of much debate amongst researchers and analysts: what is the nature of peace, democracy and development achieved in Cambodia? This question has always implied parallel and at times fierce discussions on the relevance, success or failure of international interventions. Ever since Cambodia experienced one of the first major peacebuilding exercises after the Cold War, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in the early 1990s, the country has indeed been the terrain of far-ranging international interventions in state- and peacebuilding, post-war reconstruction and development, and most recently transitional justice.

The elections of 29 July 2018 initiated a new round of these debates. They represented the sixth parliamentary elections since the UN supervised the first democratic elections in



1993 in the implementation of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements.

### **The winner takes it all**

According to the preliminary results of the National Election Committee (NEC), the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won 76.78% of the votes. Based on this, the CPP has claimed all the 125 seats in Parliament, the 19 other minor parties receiving too few votes to win any seats. These alleged results reinforce the CPP and its Prime Minister Hun Sen, the longest-serving leader in Asia.

These figures do not come as a surprise since the only viable opposition was barred from competing. In November 2017, the Supreme Court dissolved the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), who had won 44.5% of the votes in the 2013 national elections and 43.8% in the 2017 commune elections. Its former President Kem Sokha remains in prison, whilst many CNRP officials, including CNRP co-founder Sam Rainsy, were driven into exile. The minor political parties were not expected to present any threat to the CPP, as they were too unknown or indeed government-aligned.

In such a setting, the main stake of the elections shifted from being about choosing a party, a set of political ideas or programme to the actual decision of whether or not to vote. This took place in a context of intimidation that in an ironic turn of events was facilitated by the long-standing use of indelible ink in Cambodian elections. The practice of dipping voters' index fingers into ink, used to prevent anyone from casting ballots twice, allowed the CPP to intimidate those who would follow the CNRP boycott call and "clean finger campaign", since they would become easily recognizable.

The turnout rate was therefore of particular interest to those following the elections. Whilst the number of registered voters decreased, the NEC announced a turnout of 82.89%, which is higher than the 2013 turnout of 69.6%. Yet, observers also followed the election results for the number of invalid ballots: the 8.6% announced by the NEC, about 600'000 voters, show a strong increase from the 1.2% of the previous national elections. However, these figures, along with the alleged number of CPP votes, cannot be trusted since the NEC is not an independent body, and conditions for free and fair elections were not met. The European External Action Service, Canada, Australia or Germany, as well as international organisations such as Human Rights Watch, all strongly criticized the elections.

### **The end of an already shattered democracy?**

CNRP members, but also journalists and long-term analysts, have framed the 2018 elections not only as a "farce", but also as signaling the "death" of democracy in Cambodia. The process undermining democracy has however started well before international media focused on Cambodia on election day. It clearly exceeded the known phenomenon of increased repression intimately linked to election cycles. Ahead of the elections, the ruling party proceeded to a crackdown upon every part of the political system with unprecedented scale, and with the extensive use of the legal system, whilst an independent and impartial judiciary is lacking. With the dissolution of the CNRP in November 2017, 118 CNRP lawmakers and senior officials were banned from political activity for 5 years. Some of the main independent media were closed down or sold, and journalists imprisoned. Since the 2015 adoption of the Law on Associations and NGOs, the space for civil society has

drastically diminished. Intimidation has also expanded online, with increasing surveillance and prosecutions initiated for online activities, after social media had become a platform for dissent in the context of the previous national elections in 2013.

These concerning developments are reflected in the recent deterioration of Cambodia's ranking in several international indices. Cambodia was ranked 142 in Reporters without Borders' 2018 World Press Freedom Index, slumping from rank 128 in 2016. Transparency International's corruption perception index placed Cambodia at 161 out of 180 for 2017. This is the worst ranking for countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) this year, and places Cambodia third to last for the Asia Pacific region before North Korea and Afghanistan.

These developments consolidate the analysis of political scientists of a shift from competitive authoritarianism to a hegemonic authoritarian regime in Cambodia, the country thereby moving towards the one-party states of its neighbouring countries Laos and Vietnam. In this regard, the CPP mobilized practices reminiscent of other authoritarian regimes, such as the use of shadow election monitors or the use of taxation laws to silence independent media.

### **Empowering civil society in the context of increased intimidation**

The debates on the nature of the transitions that Cambodia has undergone are not abstract for Cambodian citizens, as I observed during repeated research stays in Cambodia over the past ten years. In 2014, for instance, an elder man who had come from a rural province to participate in protests in the capital Phnom Penh, noted: "Since UNTAC until today, I don't see true peace. [...] [So far], it is only a picture to show that the job was implemented, that elections were organised in the country, but the democracy has not been really practiced, it is only on paper, not for the people. It is only one person who has control and power." Also in 2014, a representative from a community facing land grabbing in North-Eastern Cambodia said that democracy means "a regime which takes into consideration the people in a more important way than the authorities. The authorities are only the representatives of the people, [...] the people need to be respected."

Such voices, who refuse the ways in which the meaning of democracy, peace or development are subverted in an authoritarian context, now strongly risk remaining silent. In this context, many observers rest their hopes on a fourth tremendous transition that the country has undergone: the demographic transition, coupled with improving socio-economic conditions despite inequality. The majority of the population today does not have own memories of the Khmer Rouge regime or civil war. It remains, however, that for those young people who had amongst their first voting experiences in 2013 and actively demanded political change, this year's elections were a particularly disheartening experience, too.

There is therefore a need for concerted efforts to empower in particular the youth, but also to preserve safe space for civil society, to protect human rights defenders and independent journalists, and to think about creative ways and partnerships to support Cambodian researchers to continue to work independently in this difficult environment. This year's elections also call for a reconsideration of how international interventions should be designed in this context to make sure that the voices of Cambodian citizens not only

continue to be heard but can also participate in shaping the country's direction.

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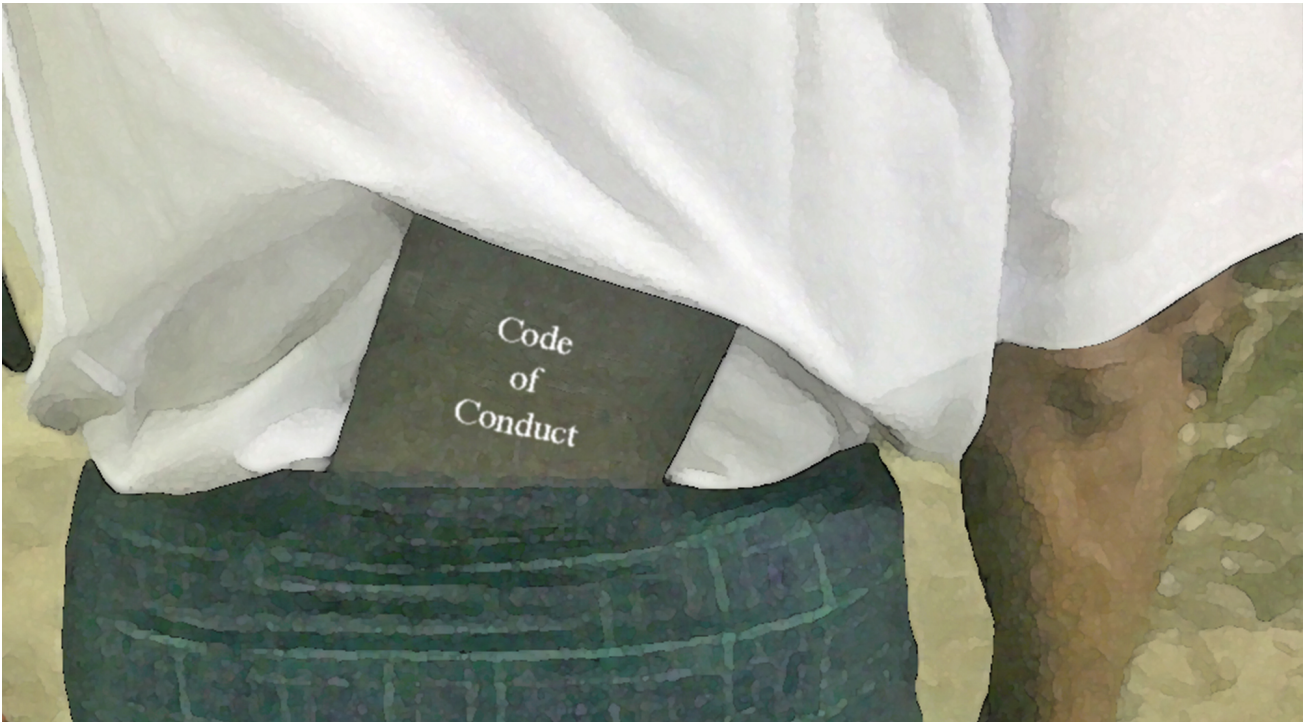
[links](#)

- [Corruption Perception Index for 2017, Transparency International](#)
- [2018 World Press Freedom Index, Reporter Without Borders](#)
- [Preliminary results of the 2018 National Assembly elections, NEC, 30 July 2018](#)

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reports

# Promoting peace and democracy in the context of elections – FDFA



Prevention by negotiating a code of conduct for the political parties on preventing fraud and violence at elections, in Myanmar, 2015. Picture: FDFA

**Elections are an important mechanism in democratic and peace processes. Their purpose is to provide citizens with an opportunity to choose freely their political leaders and allocate power peacefully. However, underlying tensions in a society and high-stake competition can also result in violent and fraudulent elections. Based on its mandate in peace, development and democracy promotion, FDFA is supporting countries in a democratic transition as they address the challenge of holding elections.**

## **A challenge for Human Security**

Less visible and more complex than armed conflicts, political and electoral violence remain an important threat to human security and regional stability. In Asia, numerous examples from the last ten years reflect the frequency of political and electoral violence (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and East Timor (1)). In Africa, 20 percent of elections over the last two decades were marred by violence (2). Such episodes of violence do not result directly from elections, but reflect instead the breakdown of political processes. If they are legitimate and inclusive, elections can pave



the way for freedom of expression and promote peaceful transitions. Thus, relying on its mandate of peace promotion, the FDFA's Human Security Division (HSD) combines election expertise with diplomatic tools to reinforce the positive impact of elections.

### **High-level engagement with political leaders: Opportunity for peace**

HSD relies on its electoral expertise and experience in conflict prevention to support the negotiation and the verification of codes of conduct for political parties during elections. These negotiation processes were held in countries experiencing democratic transition after long periods of autocracy, such as Tunisia in 2014, Myanmar in 2015 or Zimbabwe in 2018 (3), where the level of risk of violence and fraud was significant. By committing voluntarily against personal or interfaith attacks, physical violence or intimidation, political parties take responsibility to prevent violence, in particular during electoral campaigns, and lay the basis for democratic dialog (4). In Nigeria, HSD also assisted the National Peace Committee in its prevention activities and contributed to an agreement among the 2015 presidential elections candidates, which is now being updated for 2019. HSD also supports the Kofi Annan Foundation's "Electoral Integrity Initiative" for its conflict prevention and mediation activities during elections (5). In order to build on these existing measures aiming at creating a conducive environment for free and peaceful elections, HSD brought together high-level political and diplomatic actors as well as election officials and international experts for a conference in Spring 2018 on "Elections to Peace".

### **Supporting democratic and peaceful elections: SDC activities and risk management**

Also for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), elections are an important pillar of a wider agenda supporting democratic processes. It is a moment when citizens can hold their political representatives accountable and when power can be redistributed. Inclusive, transparent elections, free from violence and fear are important conditions to meet these expectations.

SDC is aware that elections can bear the risk to divide a society and stir up violent conflict along ethnic, regional or political lines. In order to make an informed decision on if and how to engage in election support, it recommends starting with a careful political risk analysis. It also adapts its existing cooperation programs accordingly.

SDC engages in different ways in its electoral support. It supports election commissions in their function to conduct well-managed elections. For example in Macedonia, SDC continued to engage in election assistance in the context of the 2016 political crisis ; via the expertise of International IDEA, an intergovernmental organization supporting electoral processes worldwide, it supported the use of an Election Risk Management Tool by the State Election Commission in order to anticipate risks and design prevention strategies.

Support to civil society and media are other typical support strategies; SDC trains journalists to provide fact-based information. It promotes a conflict-sensitive approach in media, for example in Mali, which should avoid inflaming already tense situations. It supports civil society organizations, for example during the 2015 elections in Myanmar, in informing citizens about the election process and the significance of broad and peaceful participation. It further supports civil society platforms conducting domestic election observation. This is important to enhance the legitimacy of the election process.

A recommended good practice is, instead of ad hoc contributions, to rather engage on the long term, ideally during the entire election cycle as part of a larger governance/democracy promotion portfolio ; it is particularly important in order to build trust and legitimacy in fragile contexts.

### **Cambodia: how SDC adapts to political developments**

Since 1995, SDC contributes to development in Cambodia especially since the opening of a cooperation office in 2012. It funds programs of a total value of CHF 13 million per year; local governance and citizen participation (LGCP) is one of its three domains of action, endowed with CHF 2.9 million per year until 2021.

SDC's LGCP program has the objective of contributing to accountable state institutions providing accessible and affordable quality public services and promoting space for dialogue. The supported projects focus on capacity development of parliamentary and sub-national administrations; their ultimate goals are improved service delivery, effective local economic development councils, accountable authorities and *in fine* a more peaceful society.

After the forced dissolution of the political opposition party in November 2017, SDC decided to cut all support to the election cycle but it wished to stay engaged with adaptations in its LGCP program. Its conflict sensitive approach is now strengthened to ensure that activities do not expose beneficiaries and partners to political risks, but also to make sure funds are not misused for partisan purposes. Programmes implemented through the Royal Government of Cambodia are reduced to a minimum, but still to an extent that allows to keep an open door for policy dialogue and promote Human Rights.

In-depth analysis with various stakeholders including government representatives at national and subnational level showed that if safety measures were cautiously taken, opportunities would outweigh the risks: support for good governance at local level is needed and desired by the Cambodian population.

Thus, SDC reduced its contributions to the decentralization reforms through national authorities and focuses now more on the sub-national level actors. Support to local economic development councils is continued, but with the active involvement of civil society organizations and the private sector in local decision-making bodies. Funding for capacity development of the parliamentary administration will be increasingly linked to international and regional level initiatives; nevertheless, the technical assistance of the Swiss Parliament Services was already suspended in November 2017.

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Decentralisation and Local Governance

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- [1\) Asia Foundation, The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia, 2018](#)
- [1\) UNDP, Understanding Electoral Violence in Asia, 2011](#)
- [2\) Hyde and Marinov, 2012, Which elections can be lost?](#)
- [2\) Straus, Scott, and Charlie Taylor, 2012, Democratization and Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Pp. 15–38 in Voting in Fear. Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, edited by Dorina Bekoe. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace.](#)
- [3\) Zimbabwe: Switzerland welcomes political parties' commitment to prevent electoral violence](#)
- [4\) Dialogues on Code of conduct, Ed. International IIDEA and FDFA/HSD, 2017](#)
- [5\) Electoral Integrity Initiative](#)

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# In the wake of Cambodia's farcical election



Head of government Hun Sen after the vote on July 29, 2018. Photo courtesy of Heng Sinith/AP

## **Woe betide those without inky fingers!**

As anticipated, Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won the national elections of July 29. Those who boycotted these elections will now face discrimination. As China's influence in Cambodia continues to grow, the West is turning a blind eye despite the farcical nature of the election.

Even before the official election result was due to be revealed in mid-August, the Cambodian autocrat, who has been in power for 33 years, announced that his party had won all 125 seats in parliament. Once the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), the only serious opposition party, was banned in the fall of 2017 because it had allegedly committed treason, victory for the CPP was assured long before the election itself.

And while the opposition was being suppressed, the freedom of the Cambodian media was



also restricted on a massive scale. The daily English-language newspaper *Cambodia Daily* was forced to shut down in September 2017 due to supposed tax offenses, while the newspaper *The Phnom Penh Post* was taken over by a Malaysian investor closely associated with the government. Any radio stations that were critical of the regime were shut down too.

As the regime was keen to preserve a veneer of legitimacy, however, a whole range of new parties were permitted to register and repressive measures were used to ensure a respectably high turnout. The suppression of media freedom meant that the opposition's calls for an election boycott went largely unheard. Anybody who did call for a boycott was also threatened with legal consequences for obstructing the election, and those unable to present an ink-stained finger after election day – after filling in their ballot paper, each voter dipped their forefinger in permanent ink – are facing discrimination. For instance, notarizations required for a range of transactions may be refused on spurious grounds. Both civil servants and factory workers face discrimination at work or even losing their jobs if they are unable to prove they took part in the election.

The farcical nature of the election has been obvious for a long time, yet it has not attracted much interest internationally. The US and the EU did take some measures beforehand, such as making visa requirements slightly stricter for several government officials, shelving a few development projects and threatening further sanctions. They also decided not to send any election observers. However, none of this has affected the regime in the least. In the past year, Hun Sen publicly declared that it would not matter to him whether or not the election result is recognized by the international community. Following the elections, he urged the election authority to announce his victory quickly so that he would be able to form a new government as early as August and appear before the next United Nations General Assembly, freshly legitimized. "I will go to the United Nations to deliver a speech and show that we held our elections as a sovereign state that does not need approval from anybody."

However, Hun Sen does rely on one strong ally in China, which sent a host of uncritical election observers into Cambodia and is very interested in further increasing its influence in this Mekong country. China's huge investments in Cambodia, as part of the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) have made the country far less dependent on development aid from the West. The only measures the EU and the US could take that would really hurt Cambodia and its Chinese investors would be suspending trade preferences. After all, they are the leading consumers of Cambodian textile exports. The Cambodian clothing industry employs around one million people and makes up about 80% of exports. It is therefore no wonder that opponents of the regime who dare to call for the EU to implement a trade boycott are now facing accusations of treason. However, the EU does not appear very eager to consider imposing any serious sanctions. Any severe criticism of the regime is not to be expected from the current US administration either, as the upholding of human rights and protection of media freedom are known to carry little importance under President Trump. Europe and the US are currently preoccupied with their waning influence in Asia. So unless Hun Sen carries out a large-scale massacre, both powers will quickly return to business as usual, in spite of the farcical nature of the election, to avoid voluntarily ceding the field to China.

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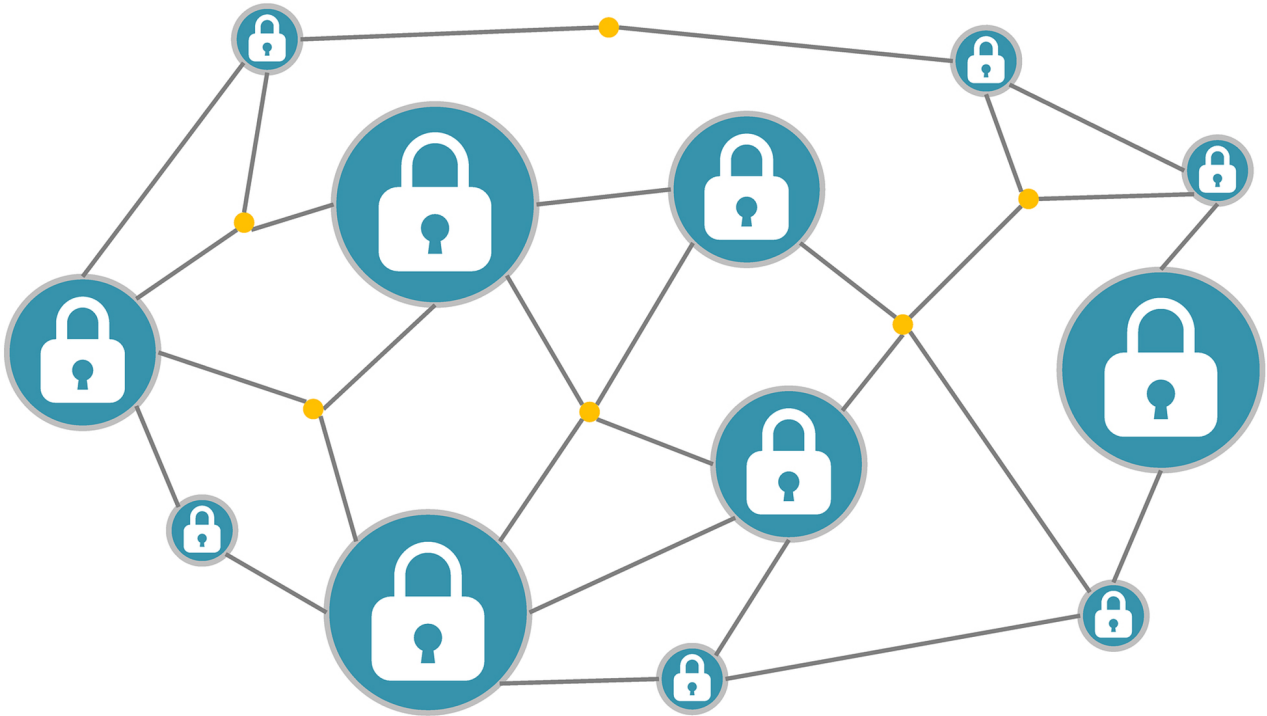
## links

- [Farcical election announced in Cambodia \(in German\)](#)
- [VOA Cambodia \(local source providing critical media coverage\)](#)
- [Democratic facade \(article by Peter Achten in Journal21, in German\)](#)
- [A farewell to Everything But Arms?](#)

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reports

# Blockchain: the elections of the future?



Picture: Creative Commons

**Elections and referendums could now be held over the Internet using blockchain technology. A number of companies have already developed the relevant software. The new systems promise more flexibility and improved security, as they would make rigged elections and cyberattacks virtually impossible. What kind of impact could blockchain have on elections held in fragile contexts and what obstacles and problems should we be looking out for? Thomas Imboden, Digital Product Manager at the Swiss Red Cross (SRC), tells us what he thinks.**

## **What would a Blockchain election look like?**

The entire election process would be digitalized. A central authority, the federal bodies for example, would send a token (electronic key) via a channel such as e-mail or text. This token would be sent to every eligible voter and, ideally, would be linked to a digital identity. The token would be based on a closed blockchain controlled by public institutions and allow one single vote from each individual identity. Every election candidate would have their own digital account for the election, where the votes cast could be saved and tracked.

## **Could you tell us a bit more about this digital identity?**

The connection to a digital identity provides additional security. It means that the token

would only be valid if persons identify themselves, ensuring that the voter is definitely the person linked to the token. Swiss Post already uses a digital identity system called Swiss ID, while SBB has plans to implement one.

**An election needs to fulfill a number of requirements in order to be fair. For example access to polling stations and of course vote counting. What areas could be improved by blockchain?**

Counting votes using blockchain has an error rate of almost zero. Access to polling stations would also become an irrelevant issue, as eligible voters would be able to vote from home, work or hospital. It could also save considerable costs. However, the entire issue of unfairly distributed campaign funds and influence exerted via social media would continue to be a problem with this technology. Ultimately we are all still individual people and we will make up our own minds.

**What new problems and challenges do blockchain elections present?**

Security remains a key issue. Of course, everybody tries to protect their digital identity but even here, force and threats could unfortunately still lead to elections being rigged, although it would be to a much lesser extent and a lot more difficult. The encryption technology available today certainly provides enough security, but new generations of computers coming out could make that a problem very quickly by potentially undermining the anonymity associated with past elections. Another crucial aspect would definitely be the neutral authority providing the technology. It could cause difficulties if the technology itself is provided by a corrupt system, as this could potentially allow the election to be rigged.

**Blockchain elections require an Internet connection. Couldn't that be a problem, especially in poor countries?**

Of course it's a problem. But even back in 2016, approximately 47% of the world's population had access to the Internet, and that figure is increasing every year. Neutral countries would need to make improvements in this area, for instance by providing satellite Internet access. This would not only make it possible to hold the election, but would also promote democracy and freedom of expression. Of course, there is still a long way to go before isolated communities become familiar with the technology. But 100% coverage isn't actually necessary for fair elections. The neutral authority could ultimately provide polling stations with an Internet connection and a computer, for example.

**Blockchain technology is complex and difficult to understand. Isn't it a critical problem if elections are held using technology that people don't understand?**



Only a very small number of people understand how particular pieces of software work and they still use their cell phones and computers every day. Generally, it isn't important for people to understand the technology, but rather that people become familiar with it, recognize the purpose behind it and see the positive opportunities it affords. Raising awareness is the right approach. If blockchain was introduced by a recognized, neutral country such as Switzerland, it would generally build people's confidence in the technology more quickly.

**Blockchain could increase transparency and fairness, especially in authoritarian countries that hold sham elections. However, the leaders of these countries will be opposed to new systems like this. Are there approaches for resolving this kind of issue?**

Yes, having a neutral country provide blockchain would definitely help, as I've mentioned. Beyond that, I'm no expert in this field but I believe that existing options such as election monitoring, raising public awareness and, if necessary, imposing sanctions would be the right approach in future.

**How would blockchain elections change the role of election observers?**

The entire election monitoring process would begin earlier, as the election would need to be observed from the point at which the technology is provided. Furthermore, it must be ensured there and then that people are being instructed correctly.

**Could blockchain elections help to restore public trust in democracy and reduce tensions?**

I think it absolutely could. The technology would have to be introduced gently and with excellent media coverage. People need to be aware that this technology is fair and neutral. If this awareness is raised, it could also reduce tensions and violence.

**What do these developments mean for the Swiss Red Cross? Are you preparing for these changes?**

We are very interested in blockchain technology. The possibilities it affords for transparency and automation are an important issue for us, but the Red Cross distances itself from any political disputes. Neutrality is one of the seven principles of the Red Cross and an essential reason why we are trusted by people from the most disparate backgrounds. It is also the reason we are able to help suffering people in places that are inaccessible to other aid organizations. However, given our humanitarian role, we are interested in supporting developments that also give disadvantaged communities a voice and allow them to exercise their rights.

**A lot of things that are technically feasible simply do not catch on. What do you think the future holds for blockchain elections? Is blockchain just a fad or will it facilitate the elections of the future?**

I believe that blockchain technology has potential for the future and will lead to improvements and new positive opportunities for many sectors. Hopefully, blockchain will also help to increase transparency and fairness in elections and referendums.

### Swiss Red Cross

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### links

- [Swiss Red Cross \(German\)](#)

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reports

# Cambodia: uncontested elections



The opposition party CNRP brought the masses out onto the streets in 2013. The party has since been banned. Photo courtesy of: Ali Al-Nasani. This image is published under a Creative Commons License.

*This article by [Ali Al-Nasani](#) was published [here](#) on July 9, 2018.*

**On July 29, Cambodia will hold general elections to vote for members of its National Assembly. However, the only opposition party in parliament has been banned in the run-up to the election. The country is heading towards a one-party system.**

When Cambodia's newly formed opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), received over 40% of the votes at the general elections in 2013, the country experienced a kind of political spring. All of a sudden, the country's problems were being discussed openly, tackling issues such as excessive corruption, nepotism, land theft, an inadequate education system and a lack of social security. Young people took to the streets in celebration of democracy and themselves.

## **The opposition party's success was also its downfall**

When the CNRP received almost 50% of votes in the 2017 local elections, the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) realized that by holding fair and free elections in 2018, it would run the risk of having to hand over power. What followed was nothing less than the reduction of the scope for democracy on a massive scale. Any pro-opposition radio stations

or newspapers were shut down, while the CNRP itself was banned under the pretext that it had committed treason. Sam Rainsy, the leader of the opposition, was sent into exile, while his deputy Kem Sokha was imprisoned. From that point onward, Facebook and Twitter were monitored, and anybody expressing critical views was hauled to court.

The murder of prominent regime critic Kem Ley under circumstances that remain unclear, the arbitrary imprisonment of activists and violent political rhetoric have had an impact on the work of civil society. The massive restrictions on democratic freedoms have pushed back the positive developments of the past few years. Women are worst affected by this dismantling of democracy, which is evident in the glaring failure of both the government and the opposition to commit to the promotion of women in politics.

### **Anybody who raises their voice is shut down**

The government is repeatedly threatening to shut down any organization that does not operate with political neutrality. These threats are directed particularly toward NGOs that are critical of the government. So “politically neutral” might as well mean “silent”.

After the CNRP was banned, all of its seats in local councils were allocated to the ruling party. The government had no legal basis on which to do this. The local councils then elect the senate, so it is little wonder that the ruling party (the CPP) gained 100% of the seats in the senate elections that followed in February 2018. Without the participation of the major opposition party, the general elections for the National Assembly, to be held at the end of July, are in danger of becoming a farce. Although a number of small parties have registered for the elections, they are either considered to be pro-government or are completely unknown.

### **Using carrot-and-stick tactics to secure victory at the elections**

At the same time, the government is bestowing gifts upon the Cambodian people. Hun Sen himself, who has governed the country for over 30 years as Prime Minister, gave out cash to textile workers. In addition, every army veteran has been promised a new house, and in future pregnant women will supposedly receive 40 dollars during their pregnancy. Across the country, new construction projects have been approved for the local population. The government has also repeated its promise – made many times before – to abolish the practice of creating so-called ghost employees (names of non-existent people on payrolls) in government departments and public administration offices in order to bring an end to corruption.

These measures also finally led to the definitive resolution of several land conflicts that partner organizations of the Heinrich Böll Foundation have been working on for many years. For instance, 138 families living just south of Phnom Penh have now been given land titles after years of fighting for them, protecting them from displacement.

With this carrot-and-stick policy, the election result may be decided already: anything other than an overwhelming majority for the governing party would be nothing short of a miracle. Cambodia is therefore heading towards a one-party system.

## Not looking good for democracy in Cambodia

In light of the present circumstances, the EU has withdrawn its support for the general elections, and the elections will not be officially monitored either. However, the West is struggling to take any further action. It has been known for years that Cambodia's trading benefits, which allow the country to export goods to the EU duty free, go hand in hand to some extent with human rights violations. Although the EU announced an investigation as long ago as 2013, it has still not been carried out.

The typical argument in support of further cooperation with the Cambodian government is always that nobody wants to drive the country into China's hands. This overlooks the fact that China has always been a strong ally of every Cambodian government. China provides Cambodia with huge investments, blank checks for military spending and financial support for pro-government NGOs, and Cambodia returns the favor by supporting China on the international stage. At the same time, China needs Cambodia to prevent the ASEAN member states from taking a joint stance in the conflict in the South China Sea.

This makes the partnership between Cambodia and China a win-win situation for both countries. This does not bode well for democracy in Cambodia.

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links

- [Kambodscha: Wahlen ohne Opposition \(in German\)](#)
- [Heinrich Böll Stiftung](#)



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in depth

# Complexity and short-termism: the causes and consequences of violence at elections



Presidential elections Iran 2009. Picture: Creative Commons

Elections are a key component of a democracy. In an ideal scenario, they pave the way for the peaceful transition of power. However, in regions already affected by conflict, they often result in even more violence. What circumstances give rise to violence at elections? And does it always lead to the desired result?

Kristine Höglund with her article titled *Electoral Violence in Conflict-Ridden Societies: Concepts, Causes, and Consequences* and Emilie Hafner-Burton, Susan Hyde and Ryan Jablonski with their piece *Surviving Elections: Election Violence, Incumbent Victory, And Post-Election Repercussions* have analyzed elections that were accompanied by violence. Based on a theoretical perspective, Höglund focuses on the circumstances that encourage violence at elections, as well as their consequences. Hafner-Burton and her colleagues conduct an empirical investigation into how successful the use of violence actually is when it comes to manipulating elections.

The different kinds of violence seen at elections are mainly determined by the specific

actors and activities involved, the timing and the motivations behind the violence in general. Both articles place particular emphasis on the latter two of these factors. Examples of groups that commonly participate in violence at elections include the military, political parties and rebel groups. Typical activities are bullying, making threats, intimidating or assassinating candidates or instigating riots.

It seems logical that violence at elections can happen before, during or after the event. However, according to Höglund, what might seem obvious is more complex in reality. The pre-election period can begin as early as the voter registration process, which may in turn start as early as one year before the elections, as was the case in Cambodia in 1993. Even the elections themselves do not necessarily take place on one single day. They can be drawn out over several days as happened in Palestine in 2006, when security forces voted a few days before the elections proper. Last but not least, violence can break out in the period following the elections, which, according to Höglund, can be defined as the period of time between the elections and the inauguration of the newly elected body.

The main motivation for violence at elections is to influence the election results. This means that violence is used as a manipulative tool, along with others such as election fraud and vote buying. However, in contrast to other methods, violence presents the greatest threat to the safety and security of those concerned.

The circumstances conducive to violence can vary considerably. For example, some societies in the grip of conflict do not experience any violence at elections. Violence also varies in terms of its form and intensity. Since, according to Höglund, there has been a lack of academic studies into factors conducive to violence, the author identifies “potential” determinants. Specifically, there are three factors: the nature of the politics, the nature of the elections and the electoral institutions. For example, violence at elections is particularly encouraged by patrimonial political systems, political actors who are still armed or mobilized, a history of violence and a culture of impunity. Even the nature of elections themselves plays a role. Elections supposedly help mobilize broad sections of society. This would seem to highlight differences instead of similarities and could, in turn, intensify existing social conflicts. Other factors that emerge from the holding of elections may also encourage conflicts. For example, according to Höglund, candidates could be exposed to violence by appearing in public. Elections also inevitably have losers. Uncertainty and the fear of losing may be further drivers. Even Hafner-Burton and her colleagues stress that violence at elections occurs more often when incumbents are uncertain about the election result. Last but not least, the likelihood of violence before, during and after elections has also been influenced by voting mechanisms, administration and the structure of the electoral system. Höglund argues, for example, that in societies with systems where just a few votes could have a major influence on the result, such as first-past-the-post systems, the occurrence of violence is more likely.

The consequences of circumstances conducive to violence are as complex and diverse as the circumstances themselves. Violence at elections can, for example, lead citizens to stay away from the polls, as well as causing candidates to withdraw, elections to be postponed, or existing or past conflicts to intensify or flare up again.

If violence is used by the incumbent government to influence the election, there is often the assumption that this also leads to the desired result – namely retention of power. But is

this assumption actually correct? Looking at the following graphic from the article by Hafner-Burton and her colleagues, this seems to be the case.

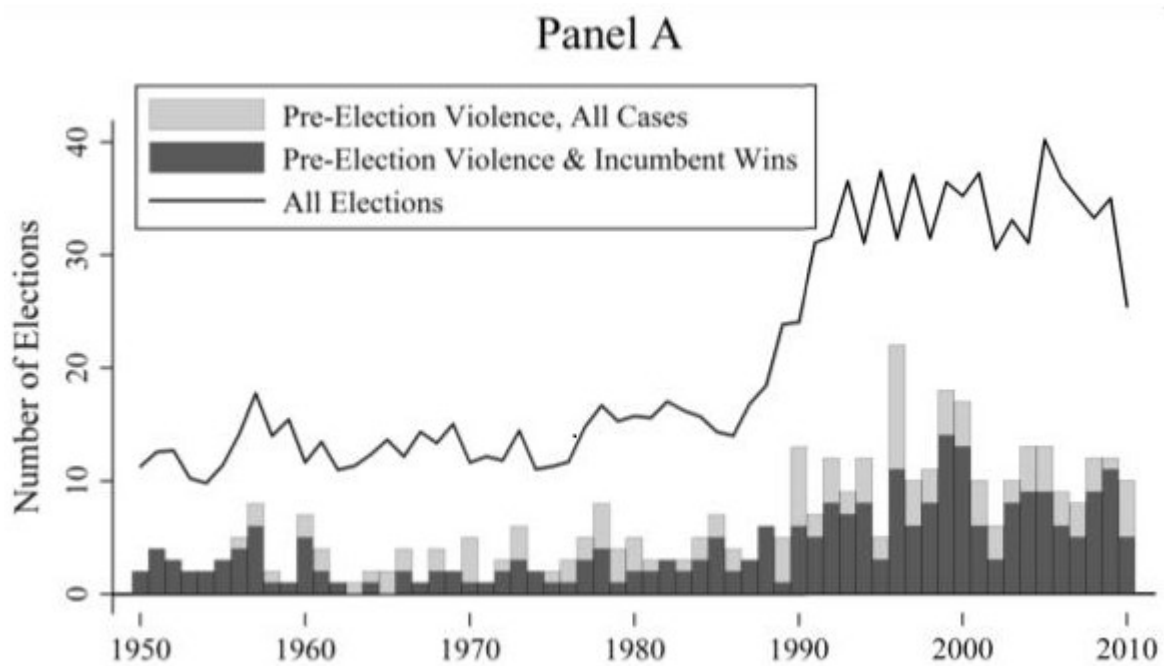


Figure 1: The occurrence of violence at elections and victories for incumbents

The authors analyzed 1,322 elections between 1950 and 2010. They were particularly interested in violence initiated by governments before elections, the occurrence of protests after them and governments' ensuing concessions. Their empirical investigation shows a positive correlation between the use of violence and an election victory for the government. More specifically, violence leads to a higher voter turnout and more votes for the government inciting the violence. According to the analysis carried out by Hafner-Burton, this "success" is usually short lived. In fact, although the chance of an election victory increases, so does the chance of protests after the election. If protests occur, they usually lead to concessions by the government. The subsequent protests, for example, increase the probability of government concessions by 500 percent. Violence against the protests, i.e. post-election violence, cannot change that.

Why do incumbents still rely on violence during elections? The study by Hafner-Burton does not offer any empirical answers to this question. Nevertheless, the authors assume that the majority of incumbents value short-term goals, i.e. winning the election, more highly than long-term strategies. Uncertainty also seems to be a reinforcing factor for choosing this strategy. For example, leaders are often uncertain about their own popularity and electoral chances among the people and then underestimate the opportunities for the population to mobilize and the resulting consequences.

This synthesis shows that the causes and consequences of violence at elections are complex. And although violence instigated by the incumbent government often leads to the retention of power, long-term success is not guaranteed. On the contrary – the study by Hafner-Burton and her colleagues shows that violence before elections leads to government concessions in the end. However, the authors of both articles acknowledge that the complexity of violence at elections is still a largely unexplored issue. Further

studies are required, particularly concerning the different forms of violence at elections and how they interact with other ways of manipulating elections.

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Communications

[links](#)

- [Electoral Violence in Conflict-Ridden Societies: Concepts, Causes, and Consequences, Terrorism and Political Violence](#)
- [Surviving elections: election violence, incumbent victory, and post-election repercussions](#)

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news

# KOFF member organizations



„Dialog International“ on the Church’s potential as peacemaker in South Sudan 22 June 2018. Picture: Mission 21

## **The Church’s potential as peacemaker in South Sudan**

The “Dialog International” event held by Mission 21 and attended by a selection of prominent figures on June 22, 2018, on the Church’s potential as peacemaker in South Sudan shed light on the complex civil war and the peace work carried out by Mission 21 and its partner organizations. In the politically charged civil war in which ethnic groups are being exploited and incited against each other, the Church is one of the few institutions to still enjoy the trust of the people as it unites the different ethnic groups and gives aid to those in need every day.

The country’s churches have come together in a spirit of ecumenical solidarity to form the South Sudan Council of Churches comprising members of opposing parties and ethnicities. An action plan for peace has been developed collectively, as its Chairman Peter Gai explains. He claims that it is important to create platforms for dialog at all levels in order to promote reconciliation and cope with trauma: “The stories need to be told,” is the message from Peter Gai. This initiative is supported by measures to build advocacy and capacity at various levels.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) has also recognized the Church’s

potential as peacemaker. The FDFA has appointed Ferdinand von Habsburg-Lothringen as Senior Advisor for the peace and reconciliation work being done by the South Sudan Council of Churches. Ferdinand von Habsburg-Lothringen claims that the Council of Churches made more progress between the opposing parties in three days – when it was last invited to act as moderator – than the politicians managed in a year. One of the greatest challenges comes from people’s repeated traumatic experience of war: “Every single person in South Sudan has been hurt so badly, both mentally and physically. That makes it extremely difficult to reach a peaceful consensus and a human solution.” Politically speaking, the economic interests of different actors in oil-rich South Sudan are considered one of the biggest obstacles standing in the way of peace.

The next “Dialog International” to be arranged by Mission 21 is about Nigeria and is taking place in Basel on September 10 between 18.30 and 20.30: “How hatred originated and how peace is growing in Nigeria.”

Mission 21 is also organizing a full-day conference on reconciliation and appreciating diversity in Indonesia and Switzerland on September 14 in Basel.

#### Mission 21

Katharina Gfeller

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Program Manager for Asia and Focal Point Peacebuilding

#### links

- [Upcoming Mission 21 events](#)
- [Previous Mission 21 events](#)

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news

# swisspeace / KOFF





2030 Agenda press conference. Picture: Martin Bichsel

## Civil Society Report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

On June 20, the Federal Council published its voluntary national report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in and by Switzerland. The Swiss Platform Agenda 2030, in which KOFF is a member, published its own report on 3 July with the title « How sustainable is Switzerland? Implementing the 2030 Agenda from a civil society perspective ». In the Report, Civil society highlights the challenges ahead for Switzerland and completes the country report, which missed out on many important points. The platform shows in 11 recommendations, which measures need to be taken, to get Switzerland on track for sustainable development. Chapter 11 (p. 58) of the report is dedicated to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”. It emphasizes the interaction of Peace and Justice with the other SDGs. Particularly the reciprocal influence with poverty, education, gender equality, economic growth, social inequality, sustainable cities and partnerships between countries are mentioned.

[swisspeace](#)

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Head of KOFF and member of the 2030 Agenda platform's management board

[links](#)

- [Civil Society Report](#)
- [Country Report](#)

# Business, Conflict & Peacebuilding Course

What is needed for businesses to operate responsibly in volatile areas? The course explores this question from various angles. It discusses state of the art international standards on business and human rights and ways for companies to implement them. It sheds light on the roles and strategies of companies, governments, international organizations and civil society in promoting responsible business practices.

By joining this course, you will get a global understanding of the various impacts companies may have in conflict-affected areas and fragile regions. Furthermore, you become familiar with relevant regulations, and initiatives at national and international levels in the area of business & human rights; learn about best practices and improve your ability to practically implement and promote responsible business. The course will also enable you to understand better the perspectives of other stakeholder groups and to enlarge your network of international practitioners and experts.

The course takes place from November 23-24, 2018 in Basel. It is designed for practitioners from business, civil society and government involved in promoting responsible business in volatile areas. It may be particularly interesting for participants attending the United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights in Geneva, taking place from 26-28 November, just after the course.

[swisspeace](#)

swisspeace academy  
academy@swisspeace.ch

[links](#)

- [Further Information](#)
- [Registration until 30 September](#)

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calendar

## Upcoming events

18 August – 25 October 2018

Bern, Switzerland

## City tour – Places of Participation

Where do migrants in Bern have a voice? Which social changes did they influence? In which social and political questions should they be implicated in the future?

[Further Information](#)

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24 August 2018

Bern, Switzerland

## Annual assembly 2018 of the Swiss Helsinki Committee

Dr. Thomas Greminger, Secretary General of the OSCE, will give a talk about the challenges the organization is currently facing.

[Further Information](#)

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From 27 August 2018

In different cities of Switzerland

## HEKS-Lunchcinemas 2018

In this annual event the work of HEKS is presented in a documentary.

[Further Information](#)

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30-31 August 2018

Bern, Switzerland

## Confederations and cantons in migration law

The fourteenth Swiss Migration Days are dedicated to the federal interactions regarding foreigner law, asylum and civil rights.

[Further Information](#)

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1 September 2018

Bern, Switzerland

## 80 years cfd (the feminist Peace Organisation) – Open Day

Seize the opportunity and get to know everything about the cfd at first hand.

[Further information](#)

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6 September 2018

Kloten, Switzerland

## Sustainability in purchasing and procurement

How can purchasing be environmental friendly, fulfil legal requirements and still be economically successful?

[Further Information](#)

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10 September 2018

Basel, Switzerland

### [How hate occurred and peace is growing in Nigeria](#)

The ongoing violence in Nigeria leaves people perplexed: How could hate and violence escalate that much?

[Further Information](#)

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14 September 2018

Basel, Switzerland

### [Reconciliation, Appreciation of Diversity in Indonesia and Switzerland](#)

Participants of this Study Day openly discuss the increasing tensions between religious groups in Indonesia.

[Further Information](#)

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Until 16 September 2018

Bern, Switzerland

### [Exhibition: Displaced](#)

The exhibition presents visitors with stories of people who are forced to flee from violence, war and persecution.

[Further Information](#)

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9-10 November 2018

Basel, Switzerland

### [Conflict Transformation & the Role of Religion Course: Methods & Approaches](#)

What is the significance of religion in conflicts around the world and how has it evolved? Apply for this course and find out.

[Further Information](#)

[Application until 30. September 2018](#)

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30 January – 1 February 2019

Basel, Switzerland

### [Theories of Change in Fragile Contexts Course](#)

Learn how to make your program more effective in fragile contexts.

[Further Information](#)

[Application until 30. November 2018](#)

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## KOFF

Die Schweizer Plattform für Friedensförderung  
La plateforme suisse de promotion de la paix  
La piattaforma svizzera per la promozione della pace  
The Swiss platform for peacebuilding

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KOFF is a dialogue and exchange platform facilitated by swisspeace. It is jointly supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the following Swiss NGOs which are members of the platform:

|                                    |                                  |                                |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ae-Centre                          | HEKS                             | Schweizerischer Katholischer   |
| Alliance Sud                       | HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation  | Frauenbund                     |
| APRED                              | IAMANEH Schweiz                  | Society for Threatened Peoples |
| artasfoundation                    | Interpeace                       | Switzerland                    |
| Baha'i                             | Lucerne Initiative for Peace and | Solidar Switzerland            |
| Brücke · Le pont                   | Security (LIPS)                  | SOS Children's Villages        |
| Caritas Switzerland                | medico international schweiz     | Stiftung für Integrale         |
| Caux – Initiatives of Change       | MIR Switzerland                  | Friedensförderung              |
| Foundation                         | mission 21                       | Swiss Academy for Development  |
| cfd                                | miva – transporte l'aide         | Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund     |
| DCAF                               | Peace Brigades International     | Swiss Peace Council            |
| Eirene Suisse                      | Schweiz                          | Swiss Red Cross                |
| Fondation Hirondelle               | Peace Nexus Foundation           | Swiss Refugee Council          |
| Grains of Peace                    | Peace Watch Switzerland          | SWISSAID                       |
| Green Cross Switzerland            | PeaceWomen Across the Globe      | Terre des Femmes Switzerland   |
| Group for a Switzerland without an | Pestalozzi Children's Foundation | terre des hommes schweiz       |
| Army                               | Quaker United Nations Office     | Verein Palmyrah                |
|                                    |                                  | Women for Peace Switzerland    |