

**The Sixth Annual  
Khmer (Cambodian) Studies Forum  
Ohio University, Athens, OH U.S.A  
March 14-16, 2014**

**TWO FUTURES: AT THE CROSSROADS OF HISTORY,  
GIVE CAMBODIAN YOUNG WOMEN A CHANCE**

By Limheang Heng, Candidate for Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Studies,  
University of Massachusetts

**Abstract**

Since the controversial elections in Cambodia in July 2013, in which the opposition party gained many seats, Cambodia is at a crossroads where I see two possible futures. First, there is the status quo, enforced by the government. The second path is change, especially change that takes advantage of the power of women. Without having Cambodian young women to join the crossroads, there is only the status quo. Giving Cambodian young women a chance, together with people who mean to invent real democracy in Cambodia, is the other path. Women in leadership is very important. Queen Indradevi and Queen Jayarajadevi were two brilliant advisers who helped the King Jayavarman VII change the course of Cambodian history shaping the Khmer Empire in the 12th century. Based on Sam Rainsy with David Whitehouse, Tioulong Saumura, Sam Rainsy's wife, in 1982, was leading the way, helping Sam Rainsy. Saumura took first step ahead of Rainsy approaching a delegation from Ivory Coast and explaining their position to them when they joined Cambodia delegation to United Nations General Assembly to lobby against the recognition by the UN of the pro-Vietnam regime headed by Heng Samrin and of which Hun Sen was the foreign minister. Saumura's breakthrough gave Rainsy confidence to start approaching other delegations himself. Now at the crossroads, Cambodia needs young women. Cambodia needs to train and utilize young women engineers, doctors, politicians, architects, agriculturalists, professors, economics, lawyers, mediators, peace-makers, diplomats, military, dentists. After graduating from the Royal University of Law and Economics, in Phnom Penh, in 2011, I received a scholarship to study for academic year 2011-2012 at Bard College in the U.S. At Bard, I participated in the Model United Nations program and learned to view national issues from an international perspective. Now, I am enrolled in a master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Massachusetts. I am one of young Cambodian women who are engaged in higher education and are preparing to give back to our country. As a young woman from Cambodia, a country where young women lack chances for higher education and lack senior positions in the public and private sectors, we have a long journey, and strongly need support. Giving opportunities to Cambodian young women means a lot to Cambodia at this crossroads.