Statement on Land Issues by German Representative at the CG Meeting on Dec 6 th and 7th 2004.

In his opening speech for the Land Forum in Phnom Penh on 18 October 2004 Excellency Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen expressed his strong policy guidance on land issues.

The German Government highly appreciates the guidance he provided to suspend the further issuing and to review the existing contracts on economic land concessions. His commitment to solve the land problems and to allocate land to the poor is very encouraging for fighting poverty in Cambodia.

However Germany is concerned about reports on land grabbing and land speculation which resulted in the plundering of Cambodia's most valuable asset. Satellite imagery and aerial photography testify the huge loss of valuable forest cover and the sharp degradation of the eco-systems and vegetation cover. Cambodian farmers are forced to subsist on tiny plots of land, mostly below 1 ha, whereas few rich and powerful possess huge land areas which count more than ten thousands up to hundreds of thousands of ha.

Land concessions have not led to the increase of state budgetary revenue, but on the contrary to the further dispossession of the State's assets. Land Concessions did not contribute to the reduction of rural poverty but they block the access of small holders to productive lands.

In the face of this situation, Germany would strongly encourage immediate action e.g:

- the granting of further contracts for economic land concessions is to be suspended until the necessary legislation is in place and effective;
- based on Article 18 of Land Law, clarification is to be provided to local authorities emphasizing that private sales transactions on state lands are illegal and hence should not be validated by officials;
- existing contracts have to be reviewed and amended according to the 2001 Land Law;
- information on existing economic land concessions is to be made available to public, including status of those concessions under review for reduction and/or cancellation;
- Sub decrees on State Land Management and Economic Land Concessions have to be enacted by the next six months.

The German Delegation to the
2004 Consultative Group Meeting