

## **9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Government-Donor Coordination Committee (GDCC)**

### **12 February 2007 - Statement on the Land Sector H.E. Donica Pottie, Ambassador of Canada**

Your Excellency Chairman Senior Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The National Strategic Development Plan identified land as a fundamental resource that serves as a basis for socio-economic development and poverty reduction, particularly in rural areas. The effective regulation of land is one of the most important development challenges facing Cambodia today.

Development Partners would like to recognize the Royal Government of Cambodia's recent achievements in relation to land management. Over 280,000 land titles were distributed in 2006. Cadastral Commissions are now operational across the country and receiving and handling cases, despite the lack of clarity on their jurisdictional relationship with the National Authority for the Resolution of Land Disputes. In this regard, Development Partners would like to recognize the dedication and hard work of Cambodians involved in land titling across the country. Finally, efforts are underway on the establishment of a Programme-Based Approach in the land sector that will be guided by a Code of Conduct for both the Development Partners and the Royal Government of Cambodia

Despite some achievements, land is as contentious an issue in Cambodia today as it has ever been. Progress in key land sector Joint Monitoring Indicators has been less than encouraging. Regulations to enforce crucial elements of the Land Law have not yet been approved with respect to state private land use planning and state land mapping or measures against illegal state land holdings. While the land sector JMIs are understandably of a technical nature, the slow pace of reform cannot mask its real consequences for Cambodian citizens.

It has led to the proliferation of land conflicts affecting the most vulnerable segments of Cambodian society. These conflicts have resulted in lost livelihoods, disruption in traditional ways of life, illegal or forcible displacement and evictions, the destruction of property and, in some cases, violence. To its credit the Royal Government of Cambodia has taken steps to develop a regulatory framework for the management of state land. Unfortunately, the privatization of state land continues apace and it appears that the agencies of the state cannot be brought to adhere to the Royal Government of Cambodia's own regulations.

The situation of indigenous peoples represents the most severe expression of this unacceptable state of affairs. Indigenous people's rights to communal ownership of traditional lands are established under the existing Land Law. However, six years have now passed since the adoption of that law and still not a single indigenous group has been issued with title. While a draft policy on the rights to land of Indigenous Peoples has been released it has not yet been approved. Urgent action is therefore required to protect indigenous rights to land as there is a genuine risk that little land will be left to register once a regulatory framework for collective title is in place.

In these circumstances, Development Partners would welcome the Royal Government of Cambodia's views on the following critical question: What immediate and concrete measures is the Royal Government of Cambodia considering to protect indigenous rights to land pending the finalization and implementation of an effective regulatory regime for the registration of indigenous land title?

Thank you.

31 January 2007