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### USAID Sponsors Philippines Study Tour for Ministry of Justice Officials

Manila, Philippines  
June 22-28, 2008



Two members of the Cambodian Ministry of Justice recently returned from a USAID-sponsored legal study tour in the Philippines. The trip, which took place on June 22-28, allowed the Cambodians to observe techniques used in the Philippines to make the legal system more accessible and efficient. The delegation visited the capital city of Manila and the province of Cebu.

Phov Samphy, Director General of the General Department of Research & Judicial Development, and Sar Chanrath, Deputy Director General of the Legal Education & Dissemination Department, returned to Phnom Penh hopeful that they could apply some of the lessons learned from the trip in Cambodia.

“There were a lot of things that I learned from the Philippines study tour that can be used here,” Phov said, citing a village-level mediation system that allows disputes to be settled locally, thereby easing the caseload of the already overburdened higher courts. “The tour was well organized and I met a lot of key people from different departments.”

Although the countries have different legal systems – the Philippine system is based on English common law, while Cambodia’s is based on the French civil code – they share some of the same challenges.

One such challenge is making the legal system more accessible to poor people in rural areas. To address this, the Philippines uses mobile courts, called Justice on Wheels, that take the justice system to the people, ensuring that all people have access to it, regardless of income. The delegation also observed mediation annexes attached to courts that allow claimants to resolve their disputes before entering the formal legal system.

The U.S. has provided \$1.2 million this year in Cambodia to strengthen the court system and rule of law through the Legal Education Fund. With USAID support, the Ministry of Justice is unveiling provincial court information boards, which make court rules accessible to the public, throughout the country. USAID also worked with other donors to assist the ministry in establishing a model courthouse in Kandal Province.