

## **SPEECH**

### **Remarks by USAID/Cambodia Mission Director Erin Soto, Launching of the RTI Media Campaign**

Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh

April 25, 2007

Excellency Im Sethy, Secretary of State for Ministry of Education;  
Mr. George Taylor, Project Director for Cambodian Basic Education Project;  
Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen; Colleagues.

It is with great honor for me to join all of you here today with our partners, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and Research Triangle International at the launch of the National Basic Education Curriculum. Education is one of the central goals of USAID program in Cambodia. Why? Because well-educated Cambodians and a strong human resource base is vital to the development of the country. Right now, enrollment rates are 91.3% which is an impressive level but the drop out rate is still extremely high. By the third grade, half of those students drop out. The Ministry of Education recognized this issue and designed a curriculum for grades 1-9 that will keep children in school because what the children are taught is relevant to children and parents. Today marks the official introduction of that National Curriculum and accompanying materials. USAID is a proud supporter of the Ministry's efforts to make the curriculum more relevant in hopes of keeping more children in school. When this curriculum is used not only will it keep children in school but it will provide an opportunity for students to learn, fully develop themselves, and prepare to enter the workforce – whether in agriculture, commerce, business, or industry. USAID welcomes this occasion to recognize accomplishments of the Ministry of Education and encourage further success of our partners and colleagues for the good of the children of Cambodia and for the development of the country.

To date, USAID's support to Cambodia's Basic Education project (CBE) has been \$7.2 million. In the space of three years since 2004, USAID's support has contributed to the development of the national basic education policy and the national curriculum for grades one to nine in four areas – student learning standards, Local Life skill policy and modules, teacher support units, and student assessment tools.

As well, the project has developed the abilities of approximately 50 members of the Ministry of Education from the Departments of Pedagogical research, Teacher Training, Primary Education, Secondary Education, and the Inspectorate General. We have helped to build capacity to write, test, measure, and train using these materials. Progress has been

impressive and the combined results of the new materials and increase capacity of education staff will ensure a long term impact on the education system.

Of course, a new curriculum does nothing if teachers and school directors do not know about it and do not use it! So in addition to providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Education centrally, through RTI, USAID is training every teacher in country over the next two years. Currently more than 5,000 teachers are receiving training in all classrooms, grades one through nine in 8 provinces. USAID will continue to support a national training plan over the next two years to ensure that all of the more than 70,000 teachers and administrators in the remaining 16 provinces will receive training in the new curriculum and standards. If the teachers and administrators apply what they learn all of the nation's 2.5 million school children will benefit. I congratulate the Ministry of Education for your vision and leadership in developing this new curriculum. This skills-based curriculum will be the foundation upon which Cambodia will continue to develop its human resource potential.

Again, after the initial training, the curriculum must be put to use and that is everyone's responsibility—administrators, parents, teachers and students. Parents must send their children to school every day, without exception. It is your obligation as a parent. I know it isn't always easy – I am a parent of a 12 year old and a 14 year old – believe me, I empathize with you. Sending children to school regardless of whether it is raining, or whether you need them to do other chores, is critical to their development. If we don't send children to school, we rob them of the chance to become productive members of society, effective community members, good family members, and valuable citizens of Cambodia. The new curriculum is designed to address the needs of all children, be they disabled, very poor, non-Khmer speakers, and yes, girls, but first they must go to school to benefit and parents have to get them there.

USAID recognizes the noble efforts and dedication of teachers throughout the country. They are needed on a daily basis to ensure that children receive a good education. After parents, there are no more impressionable or influential individuals in a child's life, than good, caring teachers. Teachers sometimes must overcome extreme personal and professional difficulties in order to give their best efforts to their students. We recognize this and applaud you.

Good teachers who are dedicated and motivated are the key to the development of Cambodia's children. By the end of September 2008, USAID through our agreement with Research Triangle International together with the Ministry of Education will work with 140 provincial level administrators and provincial officers, 11,326 peer teachers and all 64,550 teachers in all provinces. Together, your ability to impart knowledge and motivate students to learn can make a difference in the future of Cambodia. The National Curriculum, Learning

Standards, and the training you will receive are designed to assist you to the fullest to give your students the best education possible.

USAID offers its continued support to the Government of Cambodia and the Ministry of Education to deliver the most effective, fair education service possible. Your vision, your dedication, and concrete support of all education staff, including teachers, administrators, directors, inspectors, will ensure the integrity and advancement of the entire national education system. The great progress made up to this point proves your ability and willingness to improve the education system and this is tribute to your leadership.

Results have been impressive but there is still much work yet to be done. The continuing development of Cambodia depends on a strong education system to produce the trained workers needed to move the country forward. This launch of the National Curriculum today is the first of many steps toward an invigorated national education system and a stronger Cambodia. USAID is proud of its affiliation with this effort and looks forward to a continued successful partnership with the Ministry of Education.

Thank you.