

SPEECH

Remarks by Erin Soto, USAID Mission Director, U.S. Grants \$32.48 Million for Health and Education Projects in Cambodia

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

September 18, 2006

Your Excellency, Royal Highness, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: It is very gratifying to participate in this ceremony that adds \$32.48 million to our existing strategic objective agreements in support of the Royal Government of Cambodia's health and education plan responding to national policies, as contained in the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP).

Since 1992, the United States Agency for International Development has provided more than \$550 million to support economic and social development in Cambodia.

Through this amendment to the strategic objective agreement signed today adding \$32.48 million, USAID will continue its support to the Royal Government of Cambodia to improve health services in HIV/AIDS, infectious disease, maternal and child health and to improve education by providing assistance to implement your new national education curriculum.

USAID has been a major partner with Cambodia in its fight against HIV/AIDS through comprehensive service delivery and capacity building at the national, provincial and district levels. The Cambodia "success story" in stemming the spread of HIV is now recognized worldwide and TOGETHER our early prevention efforts played an important role in decreasing HIV prevalence. We now look forward to working closely with the Ministry of Health and the National HIV/AIDS Program to provide the types of technical assistance you will need to fully assume the technical and managerial leadership of these national HIV programs.

Reducing child mortality remains a key challenge. More than 50,000 children under the age of 5 die each year yet, most of these deaths are preventable. We consider the improvement of maternal and child health services in Cambodia to be a MAJOR priority and through these resources added today we will TOGETHER expand existing efforts and initiate new efforts to reduce maternal mortality and continue to support the enormous achievements the Ministry of Health has made in the last five years in reducing child morbidity and mortality.

In this next year, USAID, in coordination with other donors, will focus our assistance on strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Health and to work to support the government

in its effort to reform the health sector to be more sustainable and to better serve the Cambodian people with quality prevention and curative services.

Over the last several years, Cambodia's educational system has made enormous strides with regard to enrollment levels yet quality of instruction must improve if we are to keep these children in school. With these additional resources, USAID plans to focus our support on the quality and relevancy of basic education through grade nine. Specifically, USAID intends to support YOUR initiative to implement the newly approved National Curriculum by providing the training and technical assistance necessary to implement the curriculum. In fact, we have already begun and to date, over 600 teachers and administrators have been trained and are prepared to institute the new curriculum in 288 schools next month.

In addition, teaching strategies are being tested with an aim of reaching marginalized children so that they may reach their full potential and be productive citizens of Cambodia. Like you, our hope is that this added assistance will provide more relevant and quality education for all of Cambodia's children.

I look forward to continued successful collaboration with the Royal Government of Cambodia and the host of donor and NGO partners who, TOGETHER with Government leaders and thousands of civil servants are making a difference every day in the health and education of the citizens of Cambodia.