

SPEECH

Remarks by Joan Silver, USAID/Cambodia Acting Mission Director, Signing Ceremony with MoNASRI on Access to Information Consultancy

Phnom Penh
June 21, 2007

Senior Minister Men Sam An, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today as a witness to the signing of this Action Memorandum between USAID and the Ministry of National Assembly-Senate Relations and Inspections (MoNASRI).

The Memorandum lays out the implementation plans and responsibilities, under which USAID will provide financial support for the Royal Government of Cambodia's work to develop a comprehensive "Access to Information" policy paper.

This Access to Information policy framework is a necessary step towards the future passage of an Access to Information law. This kind of a law provides for access to government information - it lays out what are the rights of access being granted, what are the government's responsibilities for providing this, and what are the procedures for obtaining access to information as provided for under the Law.

Access to Information laws are important because they help to ensure that government and public institutions are accountable to the people, and that citizens feel confident in their government and public institutions.

The RGC recognizes the importance of developing Access to Information. It has committed, in the context of the recent Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum between the Government and the donor community, to a Joint Monitoring Indicator which calls for development of a policy framework for Access to Information. USAID is pleased that we will be contributing towards your Government's achievement of this indicator of progress.

USAID funds are providing expert consultants to work with MoNASRI's drafting team to develop an international standard Policy Paper in the area of Access to Information. These funds are being provided to Cambodia through USAID's development partner, Pact Cambodia. They support the assistance of Professor Rick Snell and Dr. Sau Sisovanna over the next two months. (Both are present today and are ready to immediately initiate the important work they are here to do.)

Professor Snell is the Senior Lecturer in Public Law at the University of Tasmania Law School in Australia, and is considered an international authority on Freedom of Information (FOI). He has served for ten years as Editor of the FoI Review journal, and is regularly consulted by journalists, international NGOs, and parliamentary committees on freedom of information, public sector governance and other issues.

Dr. Sau Sisovanna holds a Ph.D in Economics from the University of Kiev in the Ukraine. He has over 14 years of professional experience working as a consultant with various international organizations, including UNDP and TAF, and a number of local organizations. He has also worked within the Royal Government of Cambodia and has been a lecturer at the Royal Academy of Cambodia and Norton Private University in Phnom Penh.

The development of the Policy Paper on Access to Information will involve a very open and collaborative process in which a wide range of stakeholders will be consulted through workshops, training, and one-on-one discussions.

This process will take into consideration the views of various RGC Ministries, including MoNASRI, the Ministries of Information, Defense and Interior, and other RGC agencies. We also welcome the involvement of civil society groups in this drafting process, through the Freedom of Information Working Group.

USAID shares the RGC's perspective that, by getting the input of critical stakeholders in the Policy Paper drafting process, the Access to Information Policy Paper will provide a firm foundation for a quickly transition from the drafting of the Policy Paper to the development of the Access to Information Law.

By providing technical experts such as Professor Snell and Dr. Sau, USAID intends to also enhance the technical knowledge of the Ministry staff, in the areas of international best practice for Access to Information legislation.

On behalf of USAID and the American people I congratulate the RGC, and the Ministry of National Assembly, Senate Relations and Inspection on taking this important step forward to draft a national Access to Information Policy. And, I wish the entire Drafting Team the best of luck with this most important undertaking.

Thank you.