

**Remarks by Erin Soto, USAID Mission Director, U.S. Grants \$30  
Million for Health and Education Projects in Cambodia**

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

September 12, 2007

H.E. Hor Namhong, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

His Royal Highness. Sisowath Chivannariddh, Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

H.E. Nuth Sokhom, Minister of Health

H.E. Kol Pheng, Senior Minister, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

H.E. Bun Sam, Secretary of State, Ministry of Economy and Finance

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: Over the last 15 years, the United States Agency for International Development has provided more than \$600 million to support the political, economic and social development in Cambodia. It is very gratifying to participate in this ceremony today that adds \$30 million to our existing bi-lateral agreements in support of the Government of Cambodia's health and education program responding to national policies, as defined in the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP).

Through this amendment to the bi-lateral agreement signed today adding \$30 million, USAID will continue its support to the Royal Government of Cambodia to improve health services in HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases, maternal and child health, reproductive health, family planning, and nutrition, and to improve education by continuing to provide assistance to implement your national education curriculum and to get and keep all children in school.

Although the recent Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey indicates remarkable progress in almost every social indicator, there is a compelling need to remain engaged. USAID and the USG has been a major partner with Cambodia in its fight against HIV/AIDS. HIV prevalence rates in Cambodia have declined to less than 1 percent — over the past decade. While the decline in general population prevalence rates are encouraging, HIV transmission continues in high-risk groups indicating strong prevention efforts remain critical.

Fewer children are dying; however the child mortality rate remains unacceptably high with some 50,000 children under the age of 5 dying each year – that is over 130 children a day -

due primarily to preventable diseases. Also, more than 1700 women die each year while giving birth. 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 the coverage of quality cost-effective neo-natal and child health interventions; expand micro-nutrient supplementation for Cambodian children and women; and reduce maternal mortality by strengthening community-based maternal health programs. In addition, we will help to strengthen the national response to infectious diseases such as dengue and avian influenza. USAID will continue to support the enormous achievements that the Ministry of Health has made in the last five years improving the health of Cambodians, particularly Cambodian children.

Cambodia's educational system has made impressive strides as well with regard to enrollment levels. Over 92% of children enroll in school, but sadly half drop out before the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Quality of education must improve if we are to keep these children in school and ensure that they learn. Specifically, USAID will continue to build capacity of school officials and staff to implement your National Basic Education Curriculum designed to keep students and parents engaged in their child's education. Together with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, we will assist to institutionalize a sound method of teacher and school administration training which will enable student achievement.

In addition, USAID will continue to focus on reaching the 8% of children who are not enrolled in school. Many of these children are very poor, from minority groups, disabled and/or living in remote areas. For these children, USAID will assist in removing obstacles to school attendance, so that all children can exercise their right to education.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am proud of our 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.