



# UNIAP

UNITED NATIONS INTER-AGENCY  
PROJECT ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

## PRESS RELEASE

### **CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS JOIN FORCES WITH PRIVATE SECTOR TO STOP EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING FROM GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS**

**Phnom Penh, 16 July 2009** – As the demand for exports from Cambodia has dropped dramatically and tens of thousands of Cambodian workers have been laid off at home and abroad, the risk of increases in exploitation and trafficking is significant. Helping poor and vulnerable communities affected by the global financial crisis is a responsibility that should be shared by all. This was the basic principle for a workshop on “Addressing the Implications of the Global Financial Crisis on Exploitation in Cambodia” held this week at the Cambodiana Hotel in Phnom Penh.

“The ILO projects that job losses in Cambodia may surpass 45,000 this year, with a disproportionate burden of the crisis falling on young workers. According to the World Bank, this means that 200,000 more people may be pushed into poverty,” said UN Resident Coordinator a.i. Richard Bridle. “This paints a very bleak picture for the country’s poorest and most vulnerable, leaving many to make desperate choices and decisions.”

The Royal Cambodian Government and partners from the policy to grassroots level are developing measures and programmes to help address the needs of these vulnerable communities.

Hosted by the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), this week’s workshop brought together a diverse team of experts including representatives of the Cambodian Government, the United Nations, diplomatic community, donors, NGOs and the private sector. Participants were able to present and discuss their collective research and perspectives on the global financial crisis, how it is affecting Cambodia’s labour force, and the nature and scale of its impact on human exploitation and trafficking in the country.

“The aim of this dialogue is to enable key organisations and government departments to better understand and respond to the exploitation risks and challenges posed by the financial crisis”, said UNIAP Regional Project Manager Matt Friedman in his opening remarks. “UNIAP and others have conducted crucial research on this issue, and we’ve learnt a lot. It’s important to ask the questions, get the answers, and use the information gathered to help protect vulnerable people.”

H.E. Dr Ing Kantha Phavi, Cambodia’s Minister of Women’s Affairs, highlighted the challenges faced with human trafficking in Cambodia due to the financial crisis. “A good partnership between the Royal Cambodian Government, civil society and the private sector is critical to address the increased risk of exploitation of men, women and children”.

**UNIAP Regional Management Office | [www.no-trafficking.org](http://www.no-trafficking.org)**

United Nations Building 7th floor, Block B | Rajdamnern Nok Ave. | Bangkok 10200

Tel: +66-2-288-2213 | Fax: +66-2-280-0268

UNIAP's investigations found that during the crisis, women are seeking alternatives due to unemployment and declining working conditions in industries such as the garment sector. This includes lower pay and longer working hours. Those who enter the sex trade are turning to their sex establishment bosses and owners for more cash advances, which leads to increases in debt bondage.

In response to these findings, private sector firms such as Emerging Markets Consulting and microfinance institutions like AMK Co. Ltd identified practical interventions to answer to the needs of vulnerable women. "At the very least, we could provide immediate information to these women about the risks and realities of taking loans from informal money lenders and going into debt bondage," said AMK representative Katie Davis. "There are safer alternatives that should be readily available to them to access cash loans, and we should let them know about this."

Michael Smiddy of Emerging Markets Consulting presented his firm's nationwide industry analysis on the sectors most vulnerable and resilient to the financial crisis. "Keeping good workers in good working conditions is not only an anti-trafficking goal, but also benefits the private sector's bottom line," he said.

The two-day event generated key recommendations shared with all relevant Cambodian Government ministries, donors, the private sector and NGOs. Participants emphasized the importance of taking these ideas and recommendations forward immediately, to guide policies and interventions aimed at easing the burden of the crisis on people who are suffering the most.

Finally, H.E. Dr Ing Kantha Phavi highlighted the problems faced by Cambodian workers abroad who are laid off but do not return to Cambodia because there is no work to come back to at home.

"Other countries are facing difficulties to protect our Cambodian workers," she said. "Events such as this workshop should provide the basis for collaboration to protect those workers too." /END

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For further information, please contact:

**In English:**

Ms. Dominique Larsimont, UNIAP  
[dominique.larsimont@undp.org](mailto:dominique.larsimont@undp.org)  
+66 878 23 8810 (Thailand)

**In Khmer:**

Mr. Huot Vichheka, UNIAP  
[vichheka.huot@undp.org](mailto:vichheka.huot@undp.org)  
+855 23 211 240 ext.334 (Cambodia)

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