



Press Release

Cambodia launches preparations for global landmines conference and calls for greater resolve to eradicate mines

SIEM REAP, 4 April 2011: The international community needs to show greater resolve to help land mine-affected countries like Cambodia eradicate the deadly remnants of war that continue to hinder efforts to lift people out of poverty, Cambodian government officials said Monday, celebrating the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

H.E. Prak Sokhonn, Minister attached to the Prime Minister, led the call at a two-day, 4-5 April, meeting to review the country's achievements and strategy in clearing landmines and explosive remnants of war.

"As we speak, the threat of landmines still remains in more than 60 countries including Cambodia. The world needs to rally in resolute terms to overcome the challenges by extending and expanding assistance to mine action in every possible way and available means," said H.E. Prak Sokhonn, who is also the Vice President of the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authorities (CMAA).

He spoke in the opening session of a workshop held in Siem Reap City to launch the 2010-2019 National Mine Action Strategy. At the event participants took stock of the achievements Cambodia has made in recent years in this sector to free land for productive use and to assist the victims. But more importantly, the gathering aimed to set off a momentum for collaboration around the preparations for the 11th Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention that Cambodia will host from 28 November to 2 December 2011.

The appeal came on the heel of the one made by the United Nations made on 18 March. It called for \$498 million in 2011 to address the problems of landmines in 29 countries, including Cambodia, which is a State Party to the Convention.

The Convention is the international community's framework for ending the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines through the pursuit of four core aims: ensuring universal adherence, clearing mined areas, destroying stockpiled mines and assisting the victims. Although 156 countries have acceded to the Convention, a few have yet to sign including in the region. In addition, a number of States Parties face challenges in implementing their obligations.

"I urge all States Parties to honor their commitments and all other States to join our common cause," said H.E. Prak Sokhonn, in his capacity of President designate of the 11th Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention.

Cambodia is one of most mine-affected nations in the world as result of 30 years of armed conflict. Financial support from development partners has helped it remove and destroy 902,913 landmines in the period of 1992-January 2011. It is estimated that some 650 million square meters are still contaminated by mines; one-third of landmine survivors are children living in the countryside.

The National Mine Action Strategy which was launched at the workshop will serve as a single guide for development partners interested in supporting mine clearance. It encourages directing financial resources to those areas where impacts of landmines still remain greatest to the most poor and vulnerable Cambodians. The Strategy translates Cambodia's vision for a mine free world into concrete actions for greater development result and achievement of its obligations under the Convention.

Central to this strategy is the completion of a Baseline Survey to identify all remaining mined areas and the release of land for productive use. Up to now, some 43 districts have been surveyed and 645,239,037 square meters of affected land have been released. The strategy also vows to support the implementation of the National Plan of Action for People with Disabilities.

"All of our gains on the Millennium Development Goals will not last if they continue to be crippled by the threat and danger of landmines and explosive remnants of war. That is why the strategy we now have provides a testament of how fundamental mine action is to the country's development plans and strategies," H.E. Prak Sokhonn said.

In his speech to the workshop, Mr. Douglas Broderick, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Cambodia, noted the journey Cambodia has undertaken – from a heavily mine-affected country to a leading one that has sent its de-mining experts to help other countries sharing similar experiences, namely Sudan and Lebanon.

He said the meeting of the State Parties planned for later this year will be "a major milestone in the history of mine action in Cambodia."

At the event, Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Norway and the UN signed the Partnership Principles, a symbolic document aimed at strengthening further the partnership between the Royal Government of Cambodia and development partners in addressing remaining threats caused by landmines.

"I would like to reiterate the UN's commitment to assist mine-affected countries in meeting their obligations to clear affected areas, assist victims, destroy stockpiled munitions, and educate men and women, boys and girls about the dangers of mines and explosive remnants of war".

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