Briefing of the National Conference on Access to Information in Cambodia 30-31 May 2013, Hotel Cambodiana
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I would like to inform your Excellency that the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in cooperation with the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), and the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) with the support of the Embassy of Sweden and United Nations Democracy Fund have organized an international two-day conference on Access to Information on 30 – 31 May 2013.

The objective of the conference is to engender dialogue among relevant government ministries, civil society, and development partners about the issues and challenges involved in passing an international-standard Access to Information Law in Cambodia, and to learn from regional and international experts about drafting, passing and implementing the law.

International government officials, lawmakers and experts from Sweden, Thailand, Indonesia, India, the Philippines and Cambodia working in the field of Access to Information contributed in the conference. The Ambassador of Sweden, Ambassador of EU, Ambassador of UK, Representative of Switzerland and other key development partners have attended the conference. There are over 200 representatives from the Ministry of National Assembly, Senate Relations and Inspection, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance and Economics, and the Cambodian parliament, provincial and district local authority and communities from 15 provinces joined the conference from the Cambodian side.

I have the honour to report your Excellency that the two-day workshop on the speakers and participants recognised the importance of an A2I law and that 90 % of all conference participants confirmed their support for passing an Access to Information law for Cambodia based on the survey. With various stakeholders to renew their efforts on this important law.

H.E. Secretary of State, on behalf of Minister of the Ministry of Information opened the first day conference. He indicated the support this conference’s objective on A2I. The Government welcomed other country experts to share on A2I conference. The Royal Government of Cambodia recognises the importance of A2I for Cambodia. Its efforts on A2I have mainly been through the media. Cambodia’s constitution supports A2I. A2I supports Freedom of Expression. Press Law, Organic law supports A2I strongly supports A2I. RGC supports rights access to information since 2004 but it needs to be consulted with all other ministries because it is a cross cutting issues. It is slow progress.

Ms. Anne Höglund, Ambassador, Embassy of Sweden confirmed that access to information is very high agenda of A2I of Sweden government for international and Cambodia development agenda.
The international, national, government, CSOs speakers shared key important aspects on importance of international and national legal frameworks on A2I in Cambodia and other countries, importance of A2I in different sectors; background, progress and commitment of Royal Government of Cambodia.

Speakers shared experiences from the Asia-Pacific Region: successes and challenges in drafting and implementing A2I legislation in ASEAN countries, particularly Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea and China and national experiences from civil society actors working towards access to information on national budget, demographics, and development projects in Cambodia.

Cambodia needs an Access to Information (A2I) Law because Cambodia is working towards human development and democracy through transparent and accountable governance. The conference confirmed that A2I promotes government good governance and livelihoods of people, private sector for economic growth, promote media. It promotes trust and relationship between government, communities and CSOs such election information for a good decision for voting and reduce rumours that effect social safety. No law on A2I, it is not clear types of info to be disclosed.

A2I is important to all including citizens, government, especially media who regular report to citizens. If media cannot access to information, it is even harder to provide people accurate information to people through independent media. Accessing information by internet: Cyber Law and its impact on privacy, civil liberties and other fundamental values”. He gave lots of practical cases about the challenges on a2i in Cambodia. He confirmed Cambodian Constitution and international legal instrument support for freedom of expression and freedom of information. So, this is role and obligation of government to have A2I law. IT found that A2I support to Anti-corruption efforts, if country has A2I law, corruption reduced.

**Political platform on A2I**

H.E. Mr. Cheam Yeap, Representative of Cambodia People’s Party (CPP), and H.E. Mr. Son Chay, Representative of Cambodian National Rescue Party confirmed about the political platform on A2I.

Both parties acknowledged the importance of A2I which positive contributed to all sectors of development and human rights recognised by the Cambodia Constitution and Press Law and Organic law and Universal Human Rights Declaration. However, some information considered as confidential related to public security, individual, health, legal process, and commercial secret…. etc.

Both parties acknowledged the need to have a closed cooperation between CSOs and the state actor. It is very important with principle of good governance and state of law. Constructive engagement with private sector and media are necessary.

MPs always consider the importance of A2I law if it is proposed by MPs or drafted by the government that confirms consistent the constitution.

Both parties confirmed the support of maximum disclosure with narrow exception such as national security and financial crisis.
However, first proposed law on A2I and second proposed law on A2I were not successful. Both parties will make sure that A2I law will be considered or negotiated as one of the most important conditions in next government term. Both parties are ready to get the law passed or debated soon as soon possible.

**Recommendations:**
The conference called for

1. The government should adopt an access to information law, following the Cambodian constitution and adapting with Cambodian geography culture and legislation process must be participated and receive the comments from all stakeholder.
2. Further disclosure practices, increase the public information disclosure by all means
3. CSOs work well with government to support A2I and A2I disclosure at subnational level of all sectoral issues, public services, economic land concessions, including national budget and audited report to the public and public participation in drafting national budget law and audited report.
4. Private sector and development partners should continue to support on A2I law and provide technical support.
5. Protect journalist safety should The new law; I law and Press law2the combination of A
6. Investigator ensure the law enforcement independently and participate from media group
7. The national government should provide and disseminate public information to the sub national level. The national government should support sub national government to implement the access to information law.