

**Speech by NGO Forum on Cambodia
on the occasion of the 12th Commemoration of
the International Day of the World's Indigenous People**

My respect to His Excellency Leu Lay Sreng, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Rural Development;

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

The representatives of concerned Ministries, and Departments;

Distinguished representatives of national and international organizations;

Dear representatives of indigenous people from 15 provinces.

It is my great honour on behalf of the NGO Forum on Cambodia to share with you a few thoughts about this important celebration of the 12th anniversary of International Day of the World's Indigenous People and the second commemoration of the this International Day in Cambodia. This is a milestone event for indigenous peoples both in Cambodia and in more than 70 other countries of the world. At the same time, it gives us an opportunity to look at important developments with regards to indigenous peoples.

In 2004, the UN General Assembly proclaimed a Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The second decade commenced in January 2005 with the goal to further strengthen international cooperation to solve problems faced by indigenous peoples. Today's celebration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People provides an opportunity to reflect on positive changes and remaining challenges with regards to the situation facing indigenous people. It has been widely recognized that the self-determined development of indigenous communities in Cambodia represents an important contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Regarding advancements of the rights of indigenous peoples on the global arena, the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples during the first session of the Human Rights Council in June, marks a historical event for indigenous peoples in the world. Once the Declaration is passed by the UN General Assembly, this Declaration and Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization on Indigenous and Tribal People will become important international instruments for the protection and upholding of the rights of indigenous peoples.

The UN Declaration recognizes indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied or used. It obliges States to protect and give legal recognition to these lands and natural resources. Similarly, Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization calls upon governments to identify land traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples and guarantee effective protection of their rights.

Cambodia is to be commended for its laws and policies regarding indigenous peoples. The 2001 Land Law recognizes the rights of indigenous community to collective ownership of their lands. The Draft Policy for Indigenous Peoples Development has been finalized, and the Department of Ethnic Minority Development is working with the Office of the Council of Ministers to ensure its swift adoption. By-laws for indigenous communities are being drafted by the Department of Local Administration at the Ministry of Interior in cooperation with the Ministry of Rural Development. However, the legislation needed to register collective title and to protect indigenous land pending registration is yet to be adopted. It is a sad fact that indigenous people in Cambodia are continuing to experience rapid alienation from their traditional lands, which form the basis of their way of life and economic well-being.

NGO Forum on Cambodia once again would like to commend the high attention and support accorded by the Royal Government to the commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People in Cambodia. We appreciate the Royal Government's renewed commitment to adoption and implementation of national laws and policies that recognize and safeguard culture, identity and way of life of indigenous people in Cambodia. However, we would like to suggest the government and other institutions to continue paying special attention to ensure the rights of indigenous people to own their natural resources which include land and forest. NGOs community is strongly committed to work with government and other stakeholders to achieve this end.

Last but not least, I would like to give my profound thanks to the Ministry of Rural Development and the many NGOs who worked together to organise this celebration of International Day of the World's Indigenous People in Cambodia.

Best wishes to Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, with Buddhist blessings to you all.

Three cheers for the 2nd International Day of the World's Indigenous People in Cambodia!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your attention.