

SPEECH

Remarks by Joan Silver, Acting USAID Mission Director, ASEAN-WEN Presentation of Survey Results

Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh

October 19, 2006

Your Excellency, Uk Sokhonn, and distinguished guests: welcome to the first ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network Support Project meeting to take place in Cambodia. Thank you for coming.

As your Excellency is aware, Cambodia joined the other ASEAN member states to create ASEAN-WEN on December 1, 2005 in Bangkok, at The Special Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for the Implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

It was with then, with the signature of Your Excellency Uk Sokhonn, and other Ministers from ASEAN nations, that the ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network was officially launched.

Up to that time, ten different countries were acting independently of each other in attempting to stop the illegal trade in flora and fauna. With the creation of ASEAN-WEN, Southeast Asia took the first steps to change this situation.

With the creation of ASEAN-WEN, each country will now also have the benefit of the knowledge, training, and resources of an entire region, a region united to combat this destructive activity.

The Governments of the ASEAN countries that have signed up to join ASEAN-WEN, including the Royal Government of Cambodia, understand the importance of this new initiative.

I think that all of us here today know that once endangered animals such as tigers, bears, monkeys and birds disappear from the forests; once wild orchids and other plants are gone; they are gone forever and can never be replaced.

With this loss, we lose a kind of beauty that no human can create, and we lose something of our spirit because something of life is lost forever.

More practically, the loss of wildlife and flora leads to the loss of ecosystems over time, and impacts negatively on human health and food security.

We also understand that the profits from the illicit trade in flora and fauna are linked to other types of illegal activity, such as drugs and arms that may threaten peace and security.

ASEAN-WEN's goal is to see a national crime task force to combat illegal trafficking in flora and fauna established in each country that is part of the network:

- Each task force is to be comprised of the multiple ministries and departments required to address the problem of illegal trafficking; and
- Each task force is to be part of an Asian regional network of cooperation and coordination.

This goal is an important one and an ambitious one. Coordination among different branches of government, and between countries, takes work. But this is a goal that is achievable - with the commitment and support of individuals such as yourselves.

The U.S. Government also recognizes the importance of combating the illegal trade in flora and fauna, and appreciates ASEAN's will to achieve its goal.

For these reasons, the U.S. is committed to provide assistance to Cambodia, and other countries in the region, through the ASEAN-WEN Support Project. The ASEAN-WEN Support Project is a partnership with the NGOs WildAid and TRAFFIC.

Through this Project, USAID has funded the team of experts here today, who spent the month of June interviewing you and your ministries and departments, and learning from you -- and today, you will evaluate the results of this survey together.

I understand that the team plans to propose that the Project offer training for Cambodians in Nature Crime Investigation early next year as a next step.

This training, if you agree to accept it, would be provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

There are many conservation projects in Cambodia, including many supported by USAID such as those being implemented by WildAid, Conservation International (CI), Flora and Fauna International (FFI), and Community Forest International (CFI).

The ASEAN-WEN Support Project is, however, the first project to focus on enhancing the capacity to increase transnational enforcement. This is a necessary step for a country to be able to apprehend and convict serious offenders in the illegal trade of wildlife or plants.

Your presence represents Cambodia's first step toward involvement in what many have called the new "Interpol of the wildlife trade."

I hope that you will commit yourselves and your ministries and departments to the ASEAN-WEN agreement, and take active ownership of the activities that USAID is offering to support and to work on with you.

Cambodia can retake control of its irreplaceable bio-diversity, and ensure that it preserves the wealth and the beauty of its flora and its fauna for the future -- as you have learned to protect your beautiful monuments such as Angkor Wat.

Thank you all, and I look forward to hearing that you have a very productive meeting today, and to seeing your efforts bear fruit in the coming years that I will be in Cambodia.