

SPEECH

Remarks by USAID/Cambodia Mission Director Erin Soto, Launch of the Ministry of National Defense HIV/AIDS- STI Prevention, Care and Treatment Strategic Plan, 2007- 2011

Cambodiana Hotel, Phnom Penh
June 8, 2007

Your Excellency Moeung Samphan, Secretary of State, Ministry of National Defense (MoND) and Chair, HIV/AIDS Prevention Committee;
Major General Dr. Thou Tharith, Director, Health Department of MoND;
Your Excellency Dr. Teng Kunthy, Secretary General, National AIDS Authority;
Ms. Bettina Maas, UNFPA Representative;
Mr. Tony Lisle, UNAIDS Country Program Coordinator;
Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of USAID, it is an honor to be with you here today for the launch of the Ministry of National Defense's HIV/AIDS-STI Prevention, Care and Treatment Strategic Plan, 2007-2011.

First, let me congratulate the Government and the Ministry on your overall success in reducing HIV prevalence from 3% in 1998 to less than 1% in 2005.

The MoND's HIV/STI peer education program has proven to be an efficient way to prevent sexually transmitted diseases by making use of the well-organized, existing military structures. Strong leadership makes a big difference. This program has consistently been reinforced by high level commitment from commanders and the strong participation of soldiers. The HIV/AIDS peer education program now covers 100% of the military. Studies show that military men consistently use condoms with non-regular partners. These same men also report a decrease in the number of sexual partners they have. This success, achieved with USAID support, clearly shows that men can reduce their risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases through partner reduction. However, to maintain and exceed current achievements, the MoND will need clear direction, a tightly focused strategy and adequate resources for continued HIV/AIDS prevention. This is a call for leadership.

I believe that the Ministry of National Defense's new strategic plan will accomplish this objective. The Plan will also serve as an important guide for the Ministry to work on its annual HIV/AIDS operational plan, and it will serve as a tool to advocate for additional

financial resources from the government and other sources. In an environment where financial resources may be limited, I would like to provide the following cost-saving recommendations for your consideration:

- In the past, the MoND HIV/AIDS programs viewed the entire “universe” of uniformed servicemen as “at risk” of becoming infected with or transmitting HIV/STIs. Recent surveys and other analyses performed by MoND, NCHADS, and FHI have confirmed that, in fact not 100% of all uniformed servicemen are engaged in high risk behaviors; rather, it is a sub-set of perhaps 25% or less whose behaviors put them and their sexual partners at higher risk for infection. Therefore, prevention education and commodities can be more effectively targeted by focusing on this subset of 25% of military engaged in high risk behaviors.
- Over the past five years, the MoND, with support from USAID and the Global Fund, has developed educational materials and curricula that are effective and efficient tools for HIV/STI prevention education for Cambodian military men, their spouses, and other sexual partners. These tools also promote referrals for VCCT, TB testing, and other HIV/STI services. These existing tools are still very effective. It would be a wise use of existing resources to continue to use them under the new MoND Strategic Plan.

Further reducing HIV prevalence rates among military men ensuring those already infected receive the services they need and ensuring the sustainability of the program are key challenges. Although MoND’s human resources have been allocated to the programs financial support directly from the Ministry is still quite limited. As I mentioned before, the new HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan should be utilized as an advocacy tool. It can serve as a basis to encourage the national government, and others, to mobilize resources to implement this important strategy.

Donor Funds won’t last forever. Especially as new public revenue streams come on-line your leadership is needed to secure resources to sustain your achievements. We have already moved to hold discussions with the Royal Government of Cambodia, our implementing partners, and other key development partners in an effort to focus USAID support on prevention programs targeted at populations with the highest risk of contracting and transmitting HIV. These populations include a subset of military personnel, specifically those who live away from their families, and those who have multiple sexual partners. This is important work for the future of Cambodia, and we will continue to do our best to support it even though funding may be limited. USAID will also continue to support key Continuum of Care programs outside of the military that ensure a broad range of HIV-related services, including facility and community-based services, as well as addressing pediatric AIDS.

In closing, I would like to again congratulate you on your leadership and your success to date and to wish the MoND and all of you every success in meeting the challenges ahead. I encourage you to carry out your new Strategic Plan, and the excellent prevention, care, and treatment activities that the MoND has put in place over the past five (5) years.

Thank you.