

**Statement by Thida Khus**  
**To the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination**  
**Against Women**  
**On the First Report of the Royal of Cambodian Government**  
**January 16, 2006**

Thank you, Madam Chair for giving me the opportunity to address the Committee on the first report from the Royal of Cambodian Government. I speak on behalf of the NGO Committee on CEDAW, a network organization of 68 local organizations, The Community Legal Education Center, and the NGO Coalition to Address Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia. I would like to raise five critical areas of systemic critical areas of discrimination against women:

**1. The Impact of Government Trade Policy**

Globalization and trade reform has great impact on women in Cambodia. This is relevant not only for women in the garment industries but to the other women working in the informal economy.

Cambodia has joined the WTO in 2003, by harshly negotiated without proper preparation for local farmers and products. No proper assessment of trade's impact on women has been conducted. Further, the textile quota system that previously protected Cambodian's garment industry has ended in the end of 2004. The garment industry has been the main source of growth over the last 7th years and made a significant contribution to the country GDP and to the export. About 200,000 is equal to 85% of women work in the garment factories. They support 4-9 people from the rural area. Their long-term employment is less uncertain, and without this work, these women and their families are more prone to fall back into poverty. We commend the achievement of the Government in achieving the decent working environment in garment industry; however, more needs to be done to provide support services to these garment workers. These women are now living in a deplorable living condition, surrounding their factories.

**We urge the committee to encourage the government to develop strategy to provide necessary services to these garment workers includes daycare services, housing, security services, counseling, health care, and vocational training to upgrade their skills or to move them out to other area of employment.**

**2. Access to productive land and Natural Resources:**

The lost of land was created by the fast economic development policy of the government in granting land and forest concessions, the uncontrolled land's speculation, and land grabbing by the rich and the powerful. This issue has been a burning issue to the rural population, especially women, making them vulnerable to food security. We recognized that the government has passed land law, and the forestry law. However, the implementation of these laws has been less than effective.

The land registration has left out the poor, especially women from their right to have land title because of their literacy capacity, lack of understanding of the registration process, and of the importance of land registration. This failure has resulted in many conflicts in the country, and has caused many communities to lose their productive land. Many women, head of household, lost capacity to support their families and are vulnerable to be pushed to seek employment outside of their home villages.

I like to bring to your attention, of the example of a conflict in OReang District, of Monduldiri province, involved 20,000 hectares, surpassing the maximum allowed by law of 10,000 hectares, and overlapped the land of the Phnong ethnic community in the district. A land concession was granted to Wuzishan company to grow pine trees. This area encroached on the community ancestral and spiritual land. The company has cut their spiritual trees, and replaced them with pine trees instead. These actions have caused the ethnic community to lose their cow grassing fields, and productive lands. Furthermore, the women of the community believe that their ancestors punished them with many illnesses because they blame themselves for their failure to protect their tree and land. The problem has caused the family to lose their access to the non timber forest products, their food product. Further, the development plan are carried out without the participation of affected community.

**We would like to request that the committee ask our government to develop a comprehensive strategy to make sure that the implementation of the land law be inclusive of women participation. That the information campaign be carried out to women so they can be protected. We request that all development objectives are to be carried out for the benefit of local community and not only for the rich and powerful. Therefore, economic and social assessment be conducted prior to any project to make sure that local community benefit from the project and that community participation, especially women are an essential part of all level of development plan and processes.**

### **3. Migration**

Cambodia serves as both sending, and transferring country for migrants, especially from Vietnam and China. Most Cambodian migrant workers go to Malaysia and Thailand. In Cambodia, female migrants make up 50.3% of the total number of migrants, particularly in the 15-19 years age group. These women mostly work in the informal service and manufacturing sectors, in female specific unskilled jobs (domestic workers, entertainers-usually a euphemism for prostitution, restaurant and hotel worker). The heaviest concentration of women is at the lower end of the job hierarchy as domestic workers and entertainers, where they might suffer human rights violations. Despite their economic and social contributions to both the source and destination countries, female migrant workers are subject to discriminatory practices, human and labor rights violations at every stage of the migration cycle. These rights violations occur throughout the migration cycle. The violations against Cambodian female migrant workers included: exploitation by recruitment agencies by the forms of job placement fees, training fees, and other hidden costs. They were deceived on the type of job they are placed, their level of wages, particularly as domestic workers.

Their travel documents are withheld by travel agencies or employers as collateral for their payment of the transaction fees. They are exploited with long working hours, suffers physical abuses and exposed to sexual assault without any recourse of legal protection in the receiving country. They would face arrest by local authorities as illegal migrants without their travel document. We recognized our government for working memorandum of understanding with neighboring countries to address the protection of these women; More oversight from the government to protect these women in receiving countries.

**We are requesting that the commission recommend our government develop a comprehensive strategy to provide safe migration to these women. The strategy must be developed by closed participation of civil society organizations, and must include the screening of recruitment agencies and employers in destination countries, and develop protection mechanism in the sending country.**

#### **4. The Affirmative Action for Political Representation**

The equal participation of women in all affairs of the Cambodian life has been guaranteed by the national constitution. Further, the government has developed a national strategy that includes gender as the backbone to all national development plan and program. However, the representation of women in political life remains low at all level. Cultural and current practice represent major obstacle against women in holding decision making position. There is a lack of segregation of women working at different levels in government administration. There is a lack of equal representation of women in local and national level where women only hold 8% of commune councils counselors positions and 17.2% in National Assembly. The rate is not going to change significantly to give women equal representation without special measure by national election policy.

**We would like to request the commission to recommend to our government to adopt affirmative actions measures in the election system and in promoting women in position of responsibilities in government administration.**

I thank you for your attention.