



**UNITED NATIONS IN CAMBODIA**  
**MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 8 MARCH 2008**

**The United Nations in Cambodia marks International Women's Day 2008 by celebrating women's leadership and calls for more support from all levels to encourage women's participation.**

Women's leadership strengthens the economy. In Cambodia, women are a driving force of economic development and play a pivotal role in reducing poverty. Of the 350,000 garment factory workers in Cambodia's \$2.7 billion garment industry, 90 per cent are women. In most cases, these female workers not only support themselves but also their families. When women are empowered, the productive potential of 52% of Cambodia's population is unleashed. Investing in women's leadership has a multiplier effect on productivity and sustained economic growth.

Women's leadership improves living standards for all Cambodians. Experience shows us that when women are elected to office they advocate and vote for policies which make a long-ranging contribution to poverty eradication and social development. In Cambodia, maternal mortality remains alarmingly high with a ratio of 427 per 100,000 live births, one of the highest rates in Asia. In education, the female share of school enrolments decreases at each level. In primary education, girls are 47% of total enrolments compared with 39% of upper secondary enrolments and only 32% of higher education. Because women hold so much responsibility for the livelihoods of households and for the nutritional care, education and health protection of their communities, women and women's leadership are key to improving living standards for all Cambodians.

Women's Leadership helps reduce poverty and achieve the Cambodian Millennium Development Goals. Achieving gender equality is Millennium Goal Three. But empowering women and enabling women to contribute fully in all aspects of society is essential for meeting all development goals, including the CMDGs. Women's leadership is one of the most important measures to improve nutrition, reduce infant and maternal mortality, advance education, eradicate extreme hunger and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and other illnesses.

If Cambodia is to meet its Millennium Development Goals, greater advocacy for women's leadership and women's participation is essential. To be strong and equal partners in development, Cambodian women need more opportunity to participate. They must also receive practical support from all levels of society. Support from husbands, support from families, support from communities, support from work places, support from governments.

When we support women, positive change does happen. The 2007 Commune Election represents an excellent milestone in increasing women's political participation. For the first time recruitment of women was specifically encouraged. The number of women candidates rose from 16 to 21 per cent and the number of women elected to office from 8.5 to 14.6 per cent. (Report on the 2007 Commune Council Elections in Cambodia, United Nations Development Programme).

At the 2005 World Summit, all governments agreed "progress for women is progress for all". Cambodia has made great strides in promoting the status of women and can continue moving forward. But this despite progress, women in Cambodia still face significant inequalities in areas such as employment, education, access to health care and political participation as well as discrimination,

violence and social vulnerability. According to the 2007 UNDP Human Development Report, Cambodia ranks 83<sup>rd</sup> out of 93 countries on the Gender Empowerment Measure, an indicator of women's access to political and economic decision-making.

The United Nations is working closely with the Royal Government of Cambodia to look at gender issues and to identify the gaps. What is needed is more concrete action and more budgetary support. To turn political will into action, more finance must be allocated towards financing women's economic and political empowerment. The lack of resources and insufficient budgetary allocations undermine endeavours for gender equality and women's participation.

On this International Women's Day the United Nations in Cambodia is resolved in its mission to promote women's empowerment and gender equality and is calling for greater acknowledgement of women's achievements and greater support for women's leadership and participation.

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