

Press Release



Opening ceremony of global anti-landmines meeting reminds the world of Cambodia's contribution to the movement

Phnom Penh, Cambodia 27 November 2011 – Hundreds of delegates attending the world's largest annual landmine meeting were welcomed to Cambodia with a touch of Khmer hospitality at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh, during the opening ceremony of the Eleventh Meeting of the States Parties (11MSP) of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, or *Ottawa Convention*.

The colourful opening ceremony featured the Prime Minister of Cambodia, H.E. HUN Sen, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Helen CLARK, landmine survivor and ambassador of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines SONG Kosal, and H.E. PRAK Sokhonn, the senior Cambodian Minister who will preside over the 11MSP. Delegates were also treated to moving performance by the Royal Ballet of Cambodia.

“For Cambodia, this presidency is a privilege to serve and a major responsibility to fulfill,” said Cambodia's Prime Minister HUN Sen. “The history of mine clearance and the release of land for agricultural production began after the liberation of the country from the Pol Pot genocidal regime in the early 1979, where Ms. Kong Saroeun became a national heroine for having bravely led a mine-clearance company to remove landmines in the eastern part of the country. Humanitarian demining formally commenced since 1992 in order to provide safe land to more than 350,000 repatriates under the Paris Peace Agreement,” said the Prime Minister.

“As the world comes to Cambodia, one of the birth places of the movement, we all embrace a golden opportunity where we can reflect on two decades of effort and make important decisions to save more lives and spare more arms and limbs,” said H.E. PRAK Sokhonn during the opening ceremony. “It is the political commitment at the highest level of our government and our genuine commitment to the Convention that shaped our decision to host and assume the presidency of the meeting.”

Helen CLARK, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), who participated in the ceremony, talked about the hindering effect of landmines. “In countries emerging from conflict, these weapons slow the repatriation of refugees and the return of other displaced persons. They hamper the provision of aid and relief. They deprive communities of the productive and safe use of land and natural resources. Their persistent threat impedes the use of traditional hunting grounds, the development of livelihoods, and access to places of cultural and religious significance. The overall impact on human security and basic freedom of movement is huge.”

SONG Kosal, a young Cambodian woman who has represented the plight of landmine survivors everywhere and is one of the best known faces of the Convention, talked about the movement:

“The first survivors who told their story to the world were Cambodians. We did this at the United Nations in Vienna in 1995 and in Geneva in 1996. Tonight, six of us from that era are here with us. A conference we held here in Phnom Penh in 1995 was the beginning of anti-landmines campaigning around the world. In Cambodia we were so proud that our King and Prime Minister supported our

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campaign to ban landmines as early as 1993. They were part of the movement that led to the Ottawa Convention and they remain part of the movement today,” said SONG Kosal.

The formal sessions of the 11MSP begin tomorrow, 28 November, bringing together over 1,000 participants, including Ministers, diplomats, landmine experts and survivors. The 11MSP is the largest multilateral meeting ever to take place in Cambodia.

At the 11MSP, delegates will consider the *Phnom Penh Progress Report*, a detailed document measuring progress in the past year and highlighting priority areas of work to be acted upon for the year to come.

On 30 November, the 11MSP will feature a special session marking two decades since the anti-landmines movement emerged from countries such as Cambodia. In addition, throughout the week, over 30 side events will take place with several showcasing Cambodia’s efforts to clear mined areas and to assist survivors.

The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention was adopted in Oslo in 1997, opened for signature in Ottawa the same year and entered into force in 1999.

To date 158 states have joined the Convention with 153 of these reporting that they no longer hold stocks of anti-personnel mines. Over 44.5 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed by the States Parties.

34 of 50 States that at one time manufactured anti-personnel mines are now bound by the Convention’s ban on production. Most other parties have put in place moratoria on production and / or transfers of mines.

Demining has resulted in millions of square metres of once dangerous land being released for normal human activity.

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For interviews or more information regarding any aspect of the Convention kindly email: ISU@APMineBanConvention.org or contact Laila Rodriguez at +855 97 6890 977 or +41 79 960 2274. Connect with the Convention through our [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#) or [Twitter](#).