



## **OPENING REMARKS**

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Journalist Training on Access to Information  
Cambodia Communication Institute (CCI)  
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H.E. Khieu Kanharith, Minister of Information, Ministry of Information,  
H.E. Dr. Chet Chealy, Rector, Royal University of Phnom Penh,  
Mr. Ratana Som, Director of the Cambodia Communication Institute,

Journalists,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of UNESCO to the training on **Investigative Reporting and Access to Information**. UNESCO has been working cooperatively with CCI for over twenty years now to produce professional and qualified journalists in Cambodia, to promote excellence in journalism and to advocate for freedom of expression. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the CCI and the Royal University of Phnom Penh for organizing this important training.

First of all, I would like to congratulate each journalist here today who has passed a rigorous process to enter this one-year program supported by UNESCO. You have each demonstrated a long-term commitment and dedication to the field of journalism, and we believe you to have the leadership potential to play an important role in carving a new path for information access in Cambodia.

As you may know, following the elections in July 2013, the Ministry of Information has been appointed by the government to draft a law on Access to Information. The Ministry of Information and UNESCO have been cooperating to draft and implement this important law in Cambodia as part of a three year initiative. The overall objective of the initiative is to promote an inclusive Access to Information law-making process through bridging the government and citizens in Cambodia. This is a flagship effort in this country where we are mobilizing the government, civil society and media for a participatory law-making process. We are creating new platforms for the communities and civil society to comment and give feedback on the legislation, and to create discussion around transparency and openness of the government.

Access to information is a key to democracy. It is an essential development tool and a critical element in contributing to the transparency of the government and winning the fight against corruption. An Access to Information law allows citizens to participate in decision-making processes, to hold their governments accountable, and to ensure justice and fair treatment for all. With information, citizens can better secure their democratic rights.

Cambodian citizens today lack mechanisms to access information on basic livelihood issues such as human rights, public services, environment, health, education, public expenditure and more. Moreover, there is a limited understanding by the Cambodian people, civil society organizations and the media of the key role that Access to Information plays in improving livelihoods and promoting citizens' political and socio-political rights.

Journalists are at the forefront of the fight for information access. An Access to Information law that is passed without the media sector prepared to utilize the new information mechanism would be an inactive and powerless legislation without any force for change. As such, we believe that preparing journalists for the usage of the A2I law will create a more thorough understanding of the importance of the legislation among the public, and strengthen advocacy efforts in the lead up to its passage. We believe that having journalists onboard from the beginning will create a strong foundation for a relevant and applicable law.

This course will teach participants the general concepts about conducting investigative reporting, navigating through institutions to find sources, analyzing documents, using information on social media, and writing independent and fair stories. Further, this intensive training will focus on building the participants' capacity and knowledge of international-standard Access to Information systems and basic principles of Access to Information.

You are a very special group as you are the first of the 45 journalists who will be the first to test the Access to Information law in Cambodia, and to create a culture of requesting official information in your news agencies. We rely on you to share with your colleagues good practices you learn from here, and to inform them about the progress of the development of the law.

The trainers and teachers who will lead this one-year effort are experts in their fields and are recognized practitioners who have much insight to offer. But we also recognize that you too are the experts. We would like to ask you to share with us your experiences in obtaining information from different institutions for your stories, and the challenges you face in doing so. This will help us to create a better and more realistic law for working journalists.

I wish the participants a productive and engaging training. I trust you will find this one-year journey to be a most dynamic and important one for the Cambodian media sector. Thank you for your attention. I wish you all the success on this training.