



Opening Remarks
3 May 2016
World Press Freedom Day
Access to Information is Your Right!
Ms. Anne Lemaistre, UNESCO Representative in Cambodia
Cambodiana Hotel, Phnom Penh

Excellency, Khieu Kanharith, Minister of Information,
Ms. Anna Maj Hultgård, Ambassador to Sweden,
Excellencies Ambassadors,
Mr. Say Sok, Representative, Cambodia Communication Institute,
Distinguished guests, journalists, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and pleasure for me to be among distinguished participants on this special day to celebrate the World Press Freedom Day 2016.

I would like to first of all acknowledge the great cooperation of the Ministry of Information, UNOHCHR, Cambodia Communication Institute (CCI), the Club of Cambodian Journalists (CCJ), the Women Media Center (WMC), the Cambodian Association for the Protection of Journalists (CAPJ), and the Department of Media and Communication at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (DMC-RUPP) for making today's event possible.

This year, we celebrate under the theme of *Access to Information is Your Right!* This theme is celebrated across the world as well as in Cambodia. It is a very relevant theme for us here because currently the Royal Government, UN agencies, civil society organizations and the public are collaboratively engaged in a participatory Access to Information law-making process thanks to the support of Sweden. We have a dynamic Working Group drafting the future Access to information Law chaired by the Minister of Information and I am pleased to recall that this draft Law is accessible on the Ministry of Information's website for comments by any citizen in Khmer and English. UNESCO and all partners wish to congratulate and encourage the Ministry of Information for this remarkable on-going work.

As you know, Access to Information is a fundamental human right for all Cambodian citizens, and it will help strengthen the government by supporting its efforts to be more open, transparent and responsive to the public, thereby increasing trust between the government and its people.

Further, journalists who can access official information can work in a safer environment as they do not have to base their reporting on speculations or rumours, which ultimately leaves them vulnerable to confrontation or legal and physical attacks. It is important, therefore, for Cambodian journalists to have the protection and safety offered by an Access to Information Law.

In a climate where journalists are safe, citizens find it easier to access quality information and many objectives become possible as a result: Democratic governance and poverty reduction; conservation of the environment; gender equality and the empowerment of women; justice and a culture of human rights.

Around the world, there have been increasing attacks on media professionals. In many countries, journalists and media workers face obstacles to reporting the truth through arrest, imprisonment, intimidation, and violence. The UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova, states in her message on the World Press Freedom Day that “At this time of turbulence and change across the world, the need for quality information has never been so important – this requires a strong environment of press freedom and well-functioning systems to ensure the people’s right to know.”

Worldwide, since 2015 until today, 82 journalists and media workers have been killed. The most dangerous places for journalists this year have been Syria, Mexico and South America. May I recall that tragically, a media professional is killed every five days. Now, on this day of celebration, and following the UNESCO Director-General’s invitation, I would like to call on all of us here to observe a moment of silence to remember the journalists and media professionals who had paid with their lives for our right to know.

[Minute of Silence]

According to Reporters Without Borders 2016 World Press Freedom Index, Cambodia has ranked 128 out of 180 countries for press freedom which is 11 places higher than its position in the 2015 index, and above the ranks of Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Although this is a great improvement, much work needs to be done in terms of protecting journalists covering sensitive issues related to the environment and natural resources, governance, and corruption.

In Cambodia, recently, there has been a host of events which seems to reflect a narrowing of freedom of expression and freedom of public assembly.. Films have been banned from public screening, constitutional immunities of parliamentarians have been questioned, citizens have been threatened for social media activities, local government and NGO staff have been implicated for political causes. We would like to urge the Cambodian government to ensure due process, freedom of expression of its citizens and government officials, and just application of its legislations.

Last year, the world agreed on the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* to guide all efforts over the new fifteen years, to end poverty, to protect the planet, and to ensure prosperity and lasting peace for all.

The link between press freedom and sustainable development is made for the first time this year, following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, which recognize the need to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements,” (SDG 16 point 10). So public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms are

interrelated objectives because they are key accelerators of progress across all of the new agenda.

Receiving and imparting information, both offline and online, is indeed a cornerstone of democracy, good governance, and rule of law.

This implies the safety of journalists, . and UNESCO is working with Governments around the world to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers everywhere. UNESCO is acting as the leading UN agency to implement the *UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*. The Action Plan provides an overarching framework for the UN system to work together with all stakeholders including the national authorities and international and national organizations to improve the safety of journalists and media workers and to combat impunity.

In this spirit, I call on everyone to stand united in defending and encouraging press freedom and the right to access to information. This is essential for human rights and dignity, for our aspirations for sustainable development, for common determination to build lasting peace.

Finally, we believe that the Access to Information legislation will be indispensable for the country's democratization process, and will support its citizens' efforts towards building a more accountable government. We urge the support of the public to participate in this participatory law-making process by engaging with the A2I participatory website, and by asking questions, making comments and demanding an international standard law.

I am confident that the exchange of opinions and ideas today will contribute to the promotion of press freedom, safety of journalists and access to information in Cambodia, and help us to develop more initiatives in favor of these basic human rights.

I wish you a very fruitful meeting.
Thank you for your kind attention.