

## Welcome Remarks

### International Literacy Day 2015

Anne Lemaistre, UNESCO Representative in Cambodia  
Prey Veng Province, 8 September 2015

Excellency Dr. Hang Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Youth, and Sport,  
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, learners

I am honored to be here with you to celebrate International Literacy Day. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport for organizing this important event. Also, I would like to extend warm welcome to you all, especially those who have traveled a long distance from provinces and districts to attend this event.

Excellency, Excellencies, Teachers, Ladies and Gentlemen

Year 2015 has been an important year for literacy in Cambodia. To enable more and more Cambodian adults become literate and empowered people, UNESCO is pleased to partner with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in implementing the National Literacy Campaign this year to make 92,125 adult learners nationwide. As of now 67,893 learners, over 70% women are enrolled in the literacy classes. As these classes are nationwide, we will need support and encouragement from everyone presents here today to encourage the learners to continue and complete the programme. We also need yours support to monitor and assist the literacy teachers who are functioning in challenging environments and working conditions.

*I would like to share with you the words of a female literacy learner from Kampong Chhnang, the daily situation she experiences for being illiterate. She said this with tears in her eyes, "just because I cannot read and write, many times people have called me an illiterate fool, compared me to an animal like a cow, a pig, a cat. It makes me feel so helpless and humiliated". She is committed to become literate and thanks the Ministry for providing her this opportunity. Another learner expressed her commitment to become literate and help others in her community.*

These are just a few quotes among other expressions, comments, and feedbacks we have learnt so far through the visit to literacy classes. People are willing to become literate so that they can make well informed decisions about their daily lives and contribute to the social development. Literacy is not just about basic reading, writing and numeracy: literate mother provides better hygiene and nutrition to her children, literate parents help their children to read and write at home, literate parents children have lower drop-out and higher school

completion rates, literate people can acquire technical and vocational skills faster than non-literate people and as a result literate household will have higher household income than their non-literate peers.

Excellency, Excellencies, Teachers, Ladies and Gentlemen

While we recognize the importance of literacy, we all also know that engaging adult learners in the literacy classes is challenging. There are many issues such as economic opportunities, employment, domestic work and migration. As more and more employment opportunities become available in urban areas, more people will leave rural areas, which means rural areas will not have the literacy learners. Hence, as part of the Royal Government's efforts to reduce "at risk migration", which is the theme of this year's literacy day, we need to create opportunities for literacy learners who have migrated to work in factories in Phnom Penh and at other provinces such as Kampong Speu, Kampong Chhnang and Svay Rieng as advised by the Samdech Prime Minister during the launch of the National Literacy Campaign on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. UNESCO will be pleased to support Your Excellency's leadership in enhancing partnerships between public Institutions, CSOs and private sector to reach more learners in coming years so that Cambodia attains the 2016–2030 Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4 which focuses on key issues of equity and quality in education within a lifelong learning perspective.

As I said – we need support from all. In this regard UNESCO would like encourage active engagement of young high-school students to volunteer and assist literacy classes in their communities. This will provide a valuable an excellent opportunity for voluntary experience for the Young People to contribute to the development of your community. For your support and contribution MoEYS and UNESCO will provide you with a certificate of appreciation and Smart, the telecommunications partner for the National Literacy Campaign will offer free access to Facebook until December 2015. You can get all the details on how to become a volunteer in the Ministry of Education, UNESCO and Smart Facebook pages.

Your Excellency, Excellencies, Teachers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO is committed to support the Royal Government of Cambodia in promoting lifelong learning, particularly through literacy and skills development for youth and young adults to enhance the Human Capital of Cambodia. As we have observed during the past years that many students have not continued their education at the lower-secondary level, and these people will be an important human capital for Cambodia, there is an opportunity for alternative approaches to make these learners to complete basic education, such as a recognized basic education equivalency programme targeting the out-of-school youth. UNESCO will be pleased to work with the Ministry and the partners to support this initiative.

I would like express my sincere thanks to Your Excellency Minister and the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport for inviting me to be with you today. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Smart Axiata for your support in promoting the NLC 2015.

As noted by the UNESCO Director General, Madam Irina Bokova *“Literacy is fully recognized as one of the most powerful accelerators of sustainable development. The future starts with the alphabet”*.

**Thank you!**