



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

**Opening Remarks**

**Ms. Jamie Lee**

**Communication and Information Specialist, UNESCO**

**Consultation on the Access to Information Legislation with the Human Rights Sector in  
Cambodia**

**7 August 2015**

**8:00 am-5:00 pm**

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

**Ms. Wan-Hea Lee**, Representative of the UN Office of the High  
Commissioner for Human Rights,

**Mr. Suon Bunsak**, Chief of Secretariat, Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee  
(CHRAC),

**Mr. Sinthay Neb**, Director of the Advocacy Policy Institute,  
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today to open the consultation on the Access to Information  
Legislation with the Human Rights Sector in Cambodia.

As you may know, UNESCO, supported by the Government of Sweden, has embarked on  
three year initiative on Access to Information. The overall objective of this project is to  
promote an inclusive Access to Information law-making process through bridging the  
government and citizens in Cambodia. This project ultimately aims to create ownership of the  
Royal Government of Cambodia to engage the citizens, CSOs and media in a participatory  
and collective process of drafting and passing a legislation. For a law to be effective after its  
passage and to acquire a robust implementation phase, it is essential that the Royal  
Government of Cambodia is actively leading the drafting process, engaging the public and  
CSOs for input and feedback, and building the capacity of its public servants to effectively  
draft and debate the A2I law.

An Access to Information law in Cambodia will build the foundation in promoting a culture  
of openness, transparency and accountability. It is a crucial element in the efforts to reduce  
corruption, increase accountability and deepen trust in the government. Informed public  
which has access to quality information can better participate in the public sphere, and  
monitor and check activities of the public and private sectors.

Today, we focus on the issue of human rights and access to information in Cambodia. Human  
rights workers in the country need an A2I law to effectively monitor, collect and investigate  
human rights violations and to continue to provide assistance to the public. The sectoral  
forum on human rights will elicit experiences and challenges in this field, and present an  
opportunity for Cambodian human rights workers to integrate practical mechanisms into the  
A2I draft law.

The purpose of today's forum is to collect and compile information and recommendations on the legislation from a human rights perspective, and understand the information needs of institutions which are promoting and defending human rights. What barriers obstruct information access related to human rights? How can this new legal mechanism support your initiatives in working towards a more just society? We would like to pick your brains today to understand, in practical terms, the types of information needed to improve the human rights situation in Cambodia and how to improve mechanisms for efficient and quick information access all around the country. Be assured that the result of the forum will be presented to the government and the Access to Information Technical Working Group soon after the forum.

We think that you will understand why the passage of an Access to Information law should not be our sole objective. As we have seen time and time again in Cambodia, the effectiveness of the law will only be determined through its use. Human rights activists and organizations must build their capacity so that they can take advantage of this important legislative tool. Your participation here today is indicative of the effort to involve you from the very beginning of the process. We hope to create demand for information among human rights workers so that when the law is finally in place, you will be able to exercise your rights to seek, receive and impart information.

UNESCO underscores the importance of the participatory and consultative process in passing legislations. We have formed an A2I technical working group which is chaired by UNESCO and the Ministry of Information. Around the table, we have over 15 civil society groups, journalist organizations and academia. To inform this technical team, over the course of three years, UNESCO will support twenty-one sectoral forums covering 7 thematic issues

1. Women
2. Youth
3. Health
4. Human Rights
5. Education
6. Environment / Agriculture
7. Media

and 18 public forums covering all 5 regions of Cambodia will be implemented to gather input and feedback on the law.

The forums will act as a bridge for the citizens to voice public concerns and share information needs which will be incorporated into the draft law. A compilation of the feedback of all 39 forums will be published and a bridge workshop will take place with the Technical Working Group, Inter-ministerial Committee, and participants from the public and sectoral forums to integrate the resulting feedback. We believe that this participatory process will yield a legislation of a more practical nature and of higher quality which is accessible to the people who are the most vulnerable in society.

We will convene additional consultations on the Access to Information law with the human rights sector for the next two years until the law is passed to ensure that you will be able to monitor the development of the legislation.

We give you the floor today to participate in a dialogue which will shape the human rights aspect of the Access to Information legislation for Cambodia. Please share the experiences of

your daily work in the field of human rights, so that we can advise the law and draft a legal instrument which can improve the current situation.

I wish you a fruitful workshop.

Thank you for your kind attention.