

PRESS RELEASE

The Royal Government of Cambodia launches report of Violence against Children Survey and pledges core commitments for action

UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children at launch of first-of-its-kind survey in East Asia and Pacific region

PHNOM PEHN, Cambodia, 22 October 2014 – The Royal Government of Cambodia today revealed the findings of Cambodia’s Violence against Children Survey (CVACS), the first survey of its kind in East Asia and the Pacific region. Now, for the first time, Cambodia has credible data and national estimates that show the magnitude and nature of violence against children across the country.

Speaking at the launch event, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Men Sam An said, “The Royal Government of Cambodia is strongly committed to end violence against children. We express Zero Tolerance towards violence on children. All ministries, government institutions, development partners, civil society organizations, private sector, citizens and children themselves should work together to eliminate abuse and exploitation against children. I hope that the results of this survey are used to develop a National Action Plan to Prevent Violence on Children in order to ensure effective prevention strategies, legal protection and service response to child victims.”

The survey was conducted in 2013 by the National Institute of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning, led by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. It was coordinated by UNICEF and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2,376 children and young people aged 13 from 24 years old from across the country were asked about their experience of physical, emotional and sexual violence before the age of 18.

The research found that over half of Cambodian children had experienced at least one form of violence before the age of 18. Roughly a quarter of Cambodian children were emotionally abused and 5 per cent experienced some form of sexual abuse prior to age 18.

Cambodian Minister of Women’s Affairs Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi added, “Line ministries have joined efforts and effectively contributed for undertaking the survey. Core commitments from ministries and government agencies have been developed and will be translated into action. The report highlights that many children never talk to anyone about their experiences of physical, emotional and sexual violence. I am sure that this unique survey will contribute to improve interventions to hold the perpetrators accountable for their crimes.”

The Cambodia Violence against Children Survey revealed that children are usually physically abused by people they know and trust: parents (especially mothers) and

teachers (especially male teachers). Neighbours, friends, romantic partners and family members were found to be the most common perpetrators of sexual abuse – **not** strangers.

For children that have experienced violence, the survey clearly confirms its association with a number of important short term health consequences and risk taking behavior, with those who experience violence more likely to report moderate mental distress, sexually transmitted infections, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Physical and mental effects which may last long after the violence has ended.

As a result of this survey, thirteen Ministries¹ and governmental agencies have jointly agreed on a set of core commitments which will form the basis of a costed national multi-sectoral action plan to prevent and respond to violence against children in Cambodia. The government commitments will also translate into priority actions for 2015 to develop and implement effective child-friendly prevention strategies as well as to improve service provision for all Cambodians, especially children, who experience violence.

UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, Marta Santos Pais, praised the government for conducting this ground-breaking survey and encouraged the government to integrate the findings into its overall policy agenda. “The elimination of all forms of violence against children must be a core indicator of national social improvement. It should be a reference for all government sectors, for the budget and for relevant coordinating mechanisms, with a clear monitoring and evaluation plan to assess progress and maintain momentum.”

Santos Pais said that six steps are key for governments to eliminate violence against children: to develop a national, child-centered, integrated, multidisciplinary and time-bound strategy to address violence against children; enact an explicit legal ban on violence against children backed by effective enforcement; increase efforts to make violence against children socially unacceptable; Ensure the social inclusion of girls and boys who are at special risk in the prevention and response to violence against children; Build or enhance strong data systems and sound evidence to prevent and address violence against children; and join with other governments to ensure the protection of children from violence is at the heart of the post-2015 international development agenda.

Noting that 2014 marks the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Cambodia acceded in 1992, Santos Pais emphasized that violence against children not only has an impact on child victims and their families but also has far-reaching costs for society. “[It diverts] billions of dollars from social spending, slowing economic development and eroding human and social capital. The economic

¹ Ministry of Women’s Affairs; Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation; National Institute of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Tourism; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Justice; Cambodian National Council for Children; National AIDS Authority; Ministry of Cult and Religion; Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training; Ministry of Information

returns from investment in early child development are now well established, yet violence severely limits young children from reaching their full potential resulting in huge losses to society. Ending violence against children is an ethical imperative, but it also makes economic sense as the figures on the costs of violence show.”

The launch of the Cambodia Violence against Children survey provides an opportunity for the Cambodian government, individuals, civil society organizations and development partners to combine forces to address child protection in general, and violence against children in particular. The support and commitment of all are required to promote a change in perceptions, attitudes and practices; and to implement and monitor actions to end violence against children in Cambodia.

Editors’ Note

To complement the Cambodia Violence against Children survey report, UNICEF Cambodia has launched a social media #EndViolence awareness campaign. Join and follow the campaign here: <https://www.facebook.com/unicefcambodia>

For further information please contact:

- H.E. Mrs. Khieu Serey Vuthea, Standing Vice-Chair of the Survey Steering Committee, Director General for Social Development of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs; Email: ksvuthea@gmail.com; Mobile: (+855) 12 836 031
- H.E. Mrs. Hang Lina, Director General of the National Institute of Statistics-Ministry of Planning, Email: linahang2002@gmail.com; Mobile: (+855) 12 723 107
- Denise Shepherd-Johnson, Chief of Communication, UNICEF Cambodia, Email: dshepherdjohnson@unicef.org; Mobile: (+855) 92 555 294