



On 7 and 8 February 2007, the International Labour Organization, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and NGO Forum on Cambodia hosted a seminar on Indigenous Peoples and Access to Land in Cambodia. The seminar brought together representatives of the Royal Government of Cambodia, indigenous communities, non-governmental organizations, development partners and United Nations agencies. Prior to the seminar, preparatory workshops were held with indigenous peoples in Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri, Kratie and Preah Vihear.

The seminar was opened by H.E. Chea Sophara, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction and Director-General of the Council for Land Policy, and closed by H.E. Sos Mosin, Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Rural Development. International guests included Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Indigenous peoples outlined the central importance of land to their livelihoods, culture and identity. International guests set out the international recognition of indigenous rights to land, territories and natural resources. Government representatives outlined the process of registration of indigenous communities and collective title in Cambodia. Community members and other participants expressed concern about obstacles to the implementation of indigenous rights to land, in particular land alienation, including through economic land and other concessions.

Participants welcomed the Government's commitment to the development of national laws and policies that recognize and safeguard the culture, identity and way of life of Cambodia's indigenous peoples. They also noted the importance of ongoing dialogue between indigenous communities and Government agencies at national and sub-national levels on development policies and the sustainable management of Cambodia's land and natural resources. They highlighted the need to strengthen the capacity of indigenous communities to participate meaningfully in this dialogue.

Key issues of concern raised during seminar discussions include:

- The alienation of indigenous land and loss of access to forests that are vital to livelihoods;
- Implementation of existing laws providing protection for indigenous rights to land and natural resources;
- Coordination between different Ministries with mandates relating to indigenous peoples' access to land and natural resources;
- The need for indigenous communities to define their own development priorities, and participate meaningfully in decision-making affecting their lands and natural resources.

Key recommendations identified by seminar participants include:

- Take concrete measures to halt land alienation in indigenous communities, for example, through a moratorium on the sale and registration of land, and grant of economic land and other concessions, in areas occupied by indigenous peoples.
- Assist indigenous communities to register as legal entities.
- Assist indigenous communities to map the boundaries of their communal land, and provide interim recognition of these lands pending the legal registration of indigenous communities and of collective title.
- Finalize the legal and policy framework for the registration of collective title as a matter of urgency.
- Support indigenous people to prepare claims for collective title.

The seminar was funded by DANIDA, UNDP Regional Indigenous Peoples' Programme and NGO Forum on Cambodia.