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**International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
9 August 2007**

Today marks the 13th commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous peoples have a special relationship with their traditional land and natural resources, which are central to their identity, culture and livelihoods. The protection and implementation of indigenous rights to land and natural resources are of critical importance for indigenous peoples in Cambodia and around the world.

The sixth session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, held in May 2007, focused on indigenous rights to lands, territories and resources. It was noted that despite progress in the legal recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, territories and natural resources, in practice there has been insufficient action to protect and implement these rights. The Permanent Forum urged States to take measures to protect these rights and halt land alienation in areas occupied by indigenous peoples.

The Cambodian Land Law recognizes the right of indigenous communities to collective ownership of their lands, which include land reserved for shifting cultivation. These rights are to be implemented through the registration of collective land title. The Land Law states that indigenous communities shall continue to manage their communities and land according to traditional customs, pending the determination of their status as legal entities that can hold collective title.

However, the process of defining the framework for registration of collective title has been lengthy, and there are continuing concerns about the protection of indigenous land. Of particular concern is the growing number of economic land concessions and mining licences granted over indigenous land, without community consultation. In February 2007, during a seminar on indigenous peoples and access to land in Cambodia, indigenous representatives identified land alienation as a major obstacle to the implementation of their rights to land and natural resources.

At the Cambodian Development Cooperation Forum in June 2007, the Royal Government of Cambodia highlighted the preparation of a draft policy on indigenous land registration, and a new pilot project to register collective land title in three indigenous communities. On the ground, however, progress remains slow. Development partners reiterated concerns about the failure to halt land alienation in indigenous areas, and noted that not a single collective land title had been registered in the six years since the passage of the Land Law.

In order for indigenous communities to exercise their rights to collective ownership of traditional land, urgent action is required to protect this land and halt land alienation in indigenous areas. Swift action is also required to recognize indigenous land and advance the registration of indigenous collective land title.

Today, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, is an occasion to renew commitment to the protection and implementation of indigenous rights to land and natural resources in Cambodia, and to take practical action to achieve this end.