

STRENGTHENING COORDINATION AND NATIONAL OWNERSHIP

"A CASE OF CAMBODIA"

**PRESENTED AT THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, COOPERATION,
AND ASSISTANCE**

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Mr. President and Chair of the Standing Committee,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Thank you for inviting Cambodia to present a case on this very important subject. My presentation will cover the following main items:

- Mine Action in the Context of Development Priority
- Challenges in Coordination of Development Assistance
- Enhancing Coordination and Development Results through National Policy and Strategic Framework
- Institutional Mechanism and Coordination Process

Cambodia has inherited one of the most complicated mine problems due to decades of wars and conflicts. As the country went through different phases of political transformation and economic development, we faced a major obstacle. Cambodia was overwhelmed by human casualties from mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), which peaked 4,320 in 1996. The country needed to move on and humanitarian and development imperatives called for our urgency to address the problem systematically and successfully.

Although mine clearance began since early 80s, a formal and full-fledge effort only commenced in 1992 when peace and national reconciliation process started and the country opened up. We had to make available lands for settlement and farming for 350.000 refugees who returned to the country following the Paris Peace Accord. As we started from very basic, mine action was integral to all efforts during the period of national reconstruction and rehabilitation. At that time, the Government had little means but to seek and embrace all forms of assistance with all sorts of modalities to curb the casualties and give way for human settlement, livelihood activities, and development of infrastructures. From the outset, our Prime Minister attached the importance of mine action to all our national development policies and strategies. We have set mine action our 9MDG. We had made it clear to our development partners that mine action is our development priority at both policy and operational levels.

For more than a decade, our mine action had enjoyed great assistance and generosity from our friends around the world. With extensive support from our partners, we have achieved remarkable results. Improved socio-economic development and economic growth has given a

new face to Cambodia, yet the country still has a long way to go. During the decade, we had little room to debate about the best model of aid coordination or national ownership.

But over time, development paradigm has shifted. Available resources have been declining and development assistance has called for more coordination, harmonization, alignment and better results. The Paris Declaration and aid effectiveness agenda took new effect and we all were marching towards a new chapter of our works. We all pledged to honor our commitments to the aid effectiveness agenda at the country policy and strategy levels.

Nevertheless, what we face is the reality on the ground. Development Partners-funded programs and projects are still not fully coordinated and sometime overlapped and ineffective. Different donors pursued their own-tailored projects and various institutional agenda and modus operandi also contributed to the matter. Although Cambodia was ranked high in its success to coordinate overall development assistance compared to others, strengthening coordination and national ownership for some sectors such as mine action is no easy task and cannot be achieved in a short time frame.

The Government and Development Partners (DPs) alike recognized that inadequate coordination and lack of national ownership was part of the problem. Declining resources for mine action also means we need to be more optimal, efficient and effective.

I would like to highlight just one key challenge in coordinating development assistance, which Cambodia experienced. The Government authority lacked the leverage in various projects and interventions by different actors supported by DPs, especially during actual implementation. In brief, we lacked the bargaining power. This in turn limits the role and effectiveness of the Government in leading and owning the sector. Although the sector has enjoyed good cooperation and assistance, it was clear it could benefit greater from a more disciplined and better partnership environment in the sector.

The Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Authority (CMAA) was established in 2000 with the mandate to lead, regulate and coordinate the sector. However, operations preceded its creation by 10 years. This was another challenge faced by the Government authority in asserting its ownership and leadership of the sector. Over the past decade, we have been working hard to strengthen our stature by improving our institutional capacity, human resources and the approach in dealing and partnering with the development partners. As a result, our status has improved and we are now in a better position to ascertain our mandate.

In our effort to strengthen coordination, we have introduced and adopted a National Mine Action Strategy (NMAS), a single strategic framework for coordination of policy and assistance for all stakeholders to follow. Cambodian Mine Action Standards have also been put in place to standardize the approach by various operators. We also have successful aid coordination forums to help guide the outcomes and bring all stakeholders to the same table to dialogue and agree on action. Still, more disciplines and principles on how we partner are needed in practice. Technical Working Group mechanism is a forum for policy dialogue between the Government

and DPs. Chaired by CMAA, it is facilitated by a Lead DP (i.e. UNDP). It works to promote information exchange in policy as well as dialogue on operational aspects including consultation on programs and projects. It was designed to enable the Government to deal with one coordinated voice rather than individually and separately.

Despite Paris Declaration, we still need sector specific commitment and disciplines. Facilitated by UNDP, CMAA has introduced Partnership Principles for the implementation of NMAS aiming at enhancing our results and the way we partner together. The principles stipulate good practices that promote national ownership and leadership. The principles reaffirm DPs' respect of the Government's ownership and leadership in the formulation and implementation of mine action policy and strategy. They commit DPs to support the capacity development of national institutions and agencies involved in mine action. The principles also require DPs to align their support with the NMAS and consult with the Government during the formulation of programs/projects as well as the predictability of their financial support. They aim to harmonize the project implementation modality with that of the Government, as well as how to manage for better results and be accountable together. They aim to inspire stakeholders to join force in strengthening and enhancing aid effectiveness. We would be pleased to share a copy of the partnership principles with interested colleagues. While the process to agree among key stakeholders on all the principles took months and a lot of debates, majority of us finally agreed to abide by them and honor them. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Governments of Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations System for joining Cambodia in the signing thereby going an extra mile and honoring what they had committed. Although not all stakeholders could sign up (some due to their institutional constraints), all believe in its merits and those who have not yet signed would be guided by these partnership principles for better development outcome.

As a result of better partnership, increased confidence in the national ownership and leadership of the sector, implementation modality of the multi donors-funded project (Clearing for Results, Phase 2) was changed from previously Direct Implementation Modality (DIM) by UNDP to National Implementation Modality (NIM) by CMAA. Of course such arrangement could only take place after we have strengthened our institutional capacity including financial and project management capacity. It has been a good success thus far for the Government and the sector as a whole. Our effort has also been reciprocated with increased interest on the part of the DPs to engage and partner more together.

Thank you.