

Technical workshop on Integrating Social Policies and the Delivery of Social Protection Floors
29-31 May 2013, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Opening Address by Ambassador Jean-François Cautain

European Union Delegation to the Kingdom of Cambodia

Excellency Dr Yim Chhay Ly, Deputy Prime Minister,

Excellency Yuji Kumamaru, Ambassador of Japan,

Ms Claire Van der Vaeren, UN resident Coordinator,

Mr Maurizio Bussi, Director of ILO Office in Bangkok

Mr Francisco Simplicio, Division Chief, UNDP New York

Other dignitary representatives of Government and Development Partners from Cambodia and other countries, Members of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to represent the European Union in this important knowledge-sharing workshop on social protection. Indeed the EU attaches a lot of importance to promoting social protection in developing countries. Social protection is a key area in our fight to reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. In particular, the EU and its Member States are strongly supportive of recent calls for developing nationally defined social protection floors in the context of the United Nations, especially the ILO, and the G20.

As you probably know, the European Commission presented in October 2011 its 'Agenda for Change' which aims at setting a more strategic approach for EU's external assistance to reducing poverty. The Agenda for Change calls for a more comprehensive approach to human development, including a focus on increased access to quality health and education services and enhanced social protection in support of inclusive growth. As a follow-up to this emphasis on social protection, the EU undertook a number of consultations in 2012, including in Asia, which informed the development and approval of a formal Communication on Social Protection. The Communication explains the role of social protection in underpinning inclusive and sustainable development, and it outlines the role of EU development cooperation in strengthening social protection policies and systems. The communication also makes specific reference to EU's commitment to support the design and implementation of Social Protection Floors.

Why is social protection becoming a central theme in the development agenda now? Well, there have been growing concerns in recent years about the fact that, in spite of high levels of growth, countries graduating to Middle Income Country status have shown only a marginal reduction of poverty. In this context, it can be argued that properly designed social protection systems are more important now than

ever, because they support a reduction of inequality and thereby foster inclusive and sustainable growth.

This issue is particularly relevant for Cambodia as it embarks in a new growth path on its way to reach the status of middle income country and better integrate with its neighbours. Cambodia has already taken very important steps to set the institutional and legal framework for social protection and establish a National Social Security Fund in particular. The EU is very supportive of the long-term vision of the 2011 National Social Protection Strategy for the Poor and Vulnerable, which is to ensure a basic guarantee of social protection especially for the poor and vulnerable.

In this regard, further efforts are now needed to strengthen the institutional capacity of the NSSF and expanding its scope, notably through the planned introduction of the Social Health Insurance and a pension branch. As Cambodia's economy continues to grow and generate significant additional revenues for Government, this will make the expansion of social protection more affordable. We expect that the new National Strategic Development Plan 2014-18 will make a clear political and financial commitment in this regard. It is very important that expanding social protection is actually regarded as an investment rather than a 'cost', as it ultimately supports inclusive and sustainable growth, as well as improvements in the delivery of public services.

I am confident that this workshop will bring a lot of good practice experiences from other countries to inform the expansion of social protection in Cambodia and understand well its benefits. The EU and other Development Partners will continue to support Cambodia in this regard, but it is obvious that, as revenues continue to grow, the Royal Government of Cambodia will need to step up its financial resources to ensure full implementation of the Social Security Law and the NSPS.

I wish you all a successful workshop.

Thank you