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## VISIT OF WFP EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS TO CAMBODIA

**3–9 June 2001**

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The following members of the World Food Programme Executive Board visited Cambodia from 3 to 9 June 2001: H.E. Badir J. Allawi, Ambassador, Permanent Representation of the Republic of Iraq; Mr Rolf Gerber, Minister, Permanent Representation of Switzerland; Mr Miguel Barreto, First Secretary, Embassy of the Republic of Peru; Mr Rufin Gabriel Ambero, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of the Republic of the Congo; Mr Ioan Pavel, Counsellor, Embassy of Romania; Mr Patrick Saint-Hilaire, First Secretary, Embassy of the Republic of Haiti; Mr Mobido Mahamane Touré, Second Counsellor, Embassy of the Republic of Mali; Mr Yong Xu, Third Secretary, Permanent Representation of the People's Republic of China; and Mr Timothy Lavelle, Humanitarian Assistance Attaché, United States Mission/Rome. Mr Thomas Yanga, Secretary to the Executive Board, represented the WFP Secretariat. Mr Lavelle was selected by the group as team leader.
2. The visit underlined that there was a clear justification for continued food aid to Cambodia, given that: (i) the country is both a least developed country (LDC) and a low-income, food-deficit country (LIFDC); (ii) agricultural production there still suffers from the after-effects of war, from the internal displacement of farmers and agricultural labourers and from the widespread presence of landmines; and (iii) the country continues to be wracked by natural disasters. The team (which visited a disaster site along the Mekong River) noted that major flooding in 2000 had caused an estimated US\$162 million in damages. Furthermore, a national nutrition survey conducted in 1996 indicated that 56 percent of Cambodia's children under 5 suffered from stunting, 52 percent were underweight and 13 percent were wasted.
3. Cambodia remains heavily dependent on external financial and technical assistance. The team learned that during the past decade bilateral donors have used United Nations agencies to channel around 25 percent of their collective Official Development Assistance to Cambodia.
4. The team concurs with the poignant observation of Dr Henry Kissinger that "no country suffered more as a result of the Indochina conflict than the verdant land of the Khmer." The good news is that recent agreements between the Government and former members of the Khmer Rouge have virtually eliminated military activity in the country. This was hence an ideal time for Executive Board members to travel throughout Cambodia and see for themselves the vulnerabilities and opportunities in the "relief to development continuum".
5. The team visited the provinces of Siem Reap, Kampong Cham and Takao and reviewed food aid-linked demonstration fish ponds, income-generation activities, rural road construction, tuberculosis (TB) and handicapped safety-net interventions, orphanages, school feeding sites, and food assistance support to street children. WFP is presently the largest United Nations player in Cambodia, with an annual protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) budget (2001-2003) of approximately US\$20 million. WFP's present core programme food assistance covers on the average 12 percent (1.5 million) of Cambodia's population.



## RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE/MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

6. Labour-intensive, community-based food for work (FFW) has been the cornerstone of WFP's programming in Cambodia. The roughly 500 km of laterite-covered roads constructed through the Tertiary Rural Roads Improvement Project (TRIP) and the 5,700 km of road constructed through labour-intensive FFW are the results to date. The laterite roads have attracted the financial support of the German Credit Institution for Reconstruction (KfW) (16 million DM) and German engineering assistance from *Dorsch Consult Ingenieurgesellschaft*.
7. The team travelled over a number of these roads with the Royal Government of Cambodia's Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Rural Development, Mr Nuy Chanphal. The team was impressed both by the quality of the roads and by the personal dedication of Mr Nuy Chanphal and his staff.
8. One point that was stressed in the team's meeting with H.E. Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng was that increasing the road maintenance budgets was an important start, as was the Government's adoption of a long-term funding plan that would look at both government and alternative sources of road maintenance funding. The Board members also stressed the need for a "deeper" partnership between WFP and the host country, which would involve the Government's willingness to defray a percentage of WFP's operational costs, including in-country warehousing (presently a US\$30,000/year WFP expense), in-country transport and other costs.

## SCHOOL FEEDING PILOT PROJECT AND THE GLOBAL FOOD FOR EDUCATION INITIATIVE

9. Cambodia's primary education statistics border on abysmal. Large proportions of school-age children, particularly girls, are left outside the system. In 2001, PRRO resources and commodities under the School Feeding Initiative (1,660 metric tons) will reach approximately 125,000 children enrolled in 204 primary schools. And there is the prospect of increasing this coverage, with 270,000 children attending morning classes receiving a daily hot meal by 2003.
10. A take-home ration for the families of girls in grades 4–6, as an incentive for them to keep those girls in school, is being piloted this year for 16,000 beneficiaries, and will be expanded to benefit 40,000 by 2003.
11. Deworming is being introduced in participating schools. At present WFP's partners include UNICEF and the World Bank's Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP). H.E. Deputy Prime Minister Tol Lah (who also serves as Minister of Education) told the team that Cambodia's Education Strategic Plan (2001–2005) addresses *inter alia* the "declining numbers of girls in attendance in higher grades." He directly asked Executive Board members to support Cambodia's request for continued primary school feeding assistance.

## "WOMEN ARE PRECIOUS GEMS"

12. The Minister of Women's and Veterans Affairs, H.E. Madame Mu Sochua, told the team that nearly half of all Cambodian women over the age of 25 were illiterate and a further 38



percent had completed less than a primary school education. She asked WFP and the United Nations to intensify their efforts related to female literacy, training, childcare, micro-business start-ups and other areas beneficial to women and girls. She explained that the Government and the United Nations needed to “throw in the dust bin” the old Cambodian adage that says, “women are cloth, whereas men are gold”. She reminded the members that in her Ministry's five-year plan, “Neary Rattanak”, “women are precious gems”, and that the real key to poverty reduction was through rigorously addressing Cambodia's gender inequalities.

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## DEMOBILIZATION/POSSIBLE ROLE FOR FOOD AID

13. Within the country's demobilization programme, the Government conveyed its intent eventually to reduce its armed forces by as much as 24 percent (around 30,000 troops). The initial registration of some 15,000 soldiers for the demobilization programme is in progress. Food aid might have a role in complementing bilateral cash donations as part of demobilization “package”. WFP's 2001–2003 PRRO is broad and flexible enough in scope to be able to cover, and adjust to, the needs of the demobilization. The demobilization programme is seen as crucial for redirecting what are acknowledged as government resources to the most needy social sectors.

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## PROPOSED UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE DEPOT FOR ASIA

14. WFP has proposed to the Government the establishment of a regional United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) in Cambodia, to be managed by WFP. The UNHRD would respond to the increasingly recurrent natural disasters throughout Asia, and would provide storage for mobile cooking facilities, shelter materials, medicine, electric generators, water-treatment systems, a dedicated fleet of trucks, shipping containers, emergency telecommunications equipment and mobile offices. All this equipment would require testing and constant maintenance by WFP.
15. Agreement with the Government would require waivers for the importation and/or exportation of food commodities, materials, equipment, trucks, etc. Also required is a customs clearance facility for new and used materials and supplies, with special procedures to ensure export within 24 hours, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including weekends and holidays. The facility would be modelled on the state-of-the-art UNHRD base opened in March 2001 in Brindisi, Italy.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Board members need to explore how best to sell the Cambodia relief and development agenda to other members in collaboration with the other two major Rome-based agencies, namely the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), particularly regarding those agencies' greater integration with WFP activities. For example, it was noted that Cambodia's average rice yield of 1.85 metric tons/ha is among the lowest in the world, an issue that FAO would be well suited to address.
17. The WFP Secretariat may wish to reconsider converting its efforts in Cambodia from a PRRO into a Country Programme as early as 2004, given the magnitude of Cambodia's reconstruction and rehabilitation after decades of war and widespread devastation.
18. Training of WFP Cambodia national staff needs to be both accelerated and expanded, using both in-country and regional facilities.
19. Given its vast experience and network of partnerships, WFP should become the United Nation's "centre of excellence" on disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation in Cambodia, including in strengthening and refining its working relationship with the Cambodian Red Cross and other national Red Cross entities throughout the region.
20. The United Nations is encouraged to intensify its support to enable the Cambodian National Mekong Committee and relevant government ministries to play an expanded role in the Mekong River Commission.
21. On demobilization, reform has started, but only 1,500 soldiers have been demobilized out of a target number of 31,500; thus the programme momentum needs to be accelerated. WFP and the United Nations are encouraged to think carefully about how they can best assist this vital national effort.

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## AFTERWORD

22. The Executive Board members listed in paragraph 1 take this opportunity personally to thank the Royal Government of Cambodia; the WFP Rome Secretariat; WFP's Deputy Regional Manager for Asia, Mr Kenro Oshidari; Acting WFP Cambodia Country Director, Mr Praveen Agrawal; and the entire staff of WFP Cambodia, for their tireless efforts in making this trip a most useful and productive endeavour.

