

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 4, 2005

The Peoples' Caravan Fights Against HIV/ AIDS Pandemic

Canadia Industrial Park, Phnom Penh — In a second event of the Peoples' Caravan during the *World AIDS's Day*, Hundreds of Cambodians have come together to call for an end to discrimination of people living with HIV/ AIDS and Access to life saving ARV medicines for all. Traveling from 11 provinces, the Peoples' Caravan participants stopped along the road to educate the public about these crucial issues. The journey culminated in a rally that has brought together NGO representatives, garment factory workers, sex workers, youth and people living with HIV/AIDS. It includes role-plays on violence against women, songs written and performed by garment workers and sex workers on violence and the lack of access to HIV/AIDS medicine, and an awareness raising fashion show.

Today's event is part of the Asian Peoples' Caravan which is being held in 12 countries in the lead up to the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Sixth Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong on December 13th. It is a vehicle of people's struggle against the unfair rules of the global trading system, represented by the WTO which is controlled by the interest of the rich countries' corporations, and draws attention to some of the local impacts of international economic and trade policy.

According to the Cambodian Ministry of Health, in 2003, there were 123,100 HIV positive people of which 20,000 people needed Anti-Retro Viral (ARVs) drugs. However, only a small portion of those who need it are able to access this medicine. UNAIDS estimates that in Asia only 1 out of every 7 people who need ARVs have access to treatment. According to UNAIDS and WHO estimates, in 2004 22,000 need ARV treatment however only 4,500-6,000 actually received it in Cambodia. This is in part due to prohibitively high costs of patented medicines, which are protected under the WTO, essentially discriminating against the poor who can't afford them and ensuring pharmaceutical corporate profits.

"Because there is TRIPS and patent rights under the WTO, ARV drug producing by US Pharma are very expensive. Poor country like Cambodia can not afford to buy ARVs to provide to its HIV positive people. I would like to suggest countries that produce these medicines to sell it in very cheap price or allow the countries to produce those medicines so that they can provide to its people for free. We, the HIV+ people, are very poor and can not afford to buy ARVs. We all have to stand up both in Cambodia and in the world to fight against this unfair trade rule and tell to the rich countries stop put pressure to poor countries because this is not helping to develop the poor countries." P.R, member Women's Network for Unity.

One of the conditions for Cambodia joining the World Trade Organization was immediately halting the use of affordable generic versions of new medicines, even though the Doha declaration of the WTO allows least developed countries (LDCs), like Cambodia to wait until at least 2016 to comply with intellectual property laws that protect patented medicines.

The caravan was organized by representatives from the Womyn's Agenda for Change, Women's Network for Unity, ActionAid Cambodia, AUA, UPWD, BS, WPHO, Vithey Chivit, Hope of Children, and Cambodian garment workers.

CONTACT:

Where: Canadia Industrial Park, Veng Sreng Road, Sangkat Chom Chao, Khan Dangkor, Phnom Penh

When: 3:00-6:00 pm

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