

**Womyn's Agenda for Change ■ Women's Network for Unity ■ Action Aid
Cambodia ■ AUA ■ WPHO ■ UPWD
Vithey Chivit ■ Hope of Children ■ Cambodian Garment Workers**

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The People's Caravan spreads message to end violence and discrimination

“We are here today to raise our voices against violence and discrimination, including discrimination from big pharmaceutical companies that have a bigger say in the WTO rules, deals and regulations than the people of the world

Takhmao, Kandal Province— Hundreds of Cambodians have gathered carrying banners and singing songs that call for an end to discrimination of people living with HIV/ AIDS and an end to violence against women and children. Traveling from 11 provinces, the People's Caravan participants stopped along the road to Takhmao 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's People's Caravan which is being held in 8 countries in the lead up to the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Sixth Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong in December. 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. 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.

“not all of us can receive ARV's because they are so expensive, only the rich people can access treatments and the institutions in rich countries make sure that they continue to make profits and poor countries and poor people can die, this is oppression and violence from rich countries to poor countries”

In addition, conditions that international financial institutions have placed on loans contribute to an increasing vulnerability of women and children to violence by limiting the government's ability to make policies that provide for the health and welfare of its people.

According to the Ministry of Planning 1 in every 5 women experiences violence. This is a trend that is rising, in part due to the precarious living conditions women are placed in.

As they face the privatization of public services, such as health care; women are forced to take work which places them at increasing risk to violence and exploitation.

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

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