



## **AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY PHNOM PENH**

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

#### **Australia Hosts Celebration of Ability**

On 29 November hundreds of delegates to the Eleventh Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention attended an Australian-hosted reception celebrating inclusive arts and culture at the Cambodiana Hotel. The event was not just another cocktail reception.

The evening featured performances and displays from Cambodian groups, inclusive of people with disabilities, in the fields of arts, theatre, circus, music and handicrafts. The concept was developed in concert with inclusive arts groups in Cambodia who jumped at the opportunity to explore the possibilities of future collaboration with one another and with the international delegates to the Eleventh Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, currently being hosted at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh.

In her opening remarks, H.E. Penny Richards, Australian Ambassador to Cambodia, said that “Australians believe in a fair go for all and that’s the basis for the Australian Government’s ‘Development for All’ Strategy, which aims to ensure that persons with disabilities participate in and benefit from the Australian aid program on an equal basis with others”.

The event highlighted approaches to arts and culture that demonstrate Australia’s inclusive policy in action – people with and without disabilities working together on a celebration of ability. Epic Arts, Arrupe Group and Krousar Thmey performed traditional and contemporary Khmer music, dance, theatre, shadow puppetry and circus acts. Artists and sculptors ran workshops for willing delegates, while 15 members of the Artisans Association of Cambodia displayed and sold their handmade products to the international crowd - whilst also explaining the philosophy behind their organisations.

Speaking at the event, H.E. Ith Samheng, Minister of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, explained that “Inclusive arts and culture is an important component of disability inclusive development as it can provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to reach their full potential and contribute to the social and cultural life of their communities.”

The Australian Government believes that development can only be effective if persons with disabilities are involved in a meaningful way in planning and implementing development programs. All citizens have equal rights and should be afforded the same level of respect. Unfortunately, there are some groups of people for whom this doesn’t happen: persons with disabilities are one of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in the community. This is because they face barriers accessing services and participating in decision-making. Australia is pleased to support the Royal Government of Cambodia and non-government organisations and community groups across Cambodia that are working to improve the lives of people with a disability.

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