



Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

MEDIA RELEASE

World Wetlands Day Celebrations in Phnom Penh

31 January 2006

World Wetlands Day 2006 will be celebrated at Chhroy Changva Garden, Russey Keo, Phnom Penh, at 8am on 2 February 2006. The event is organised by the Ministry of Environment in collaboration with Mlup Baitong and supported by the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP)*. The theme of World Wetlands Day for year 2006 is "*In the face of poverty... wetlands are lifelines*"

Each year on 2 February, World Wetlands Day (WWD) is commemorated around the world with the purpose of promoting the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

There are four main activities organised for the event this year:

1. Speeches by senior policy makers from Ministries concerned, academics, NGOs and donor agencies;
2. Comedian performance about wetlands management in Cambodia;
3. Exhibition of wetlands activities from local and international NGOs; and
4. Boat parade conducted by fisher communities.

WWD involves local communities, university students, private sector investors, local and international NGOs and government officers in taking action for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands in Cambodia for supporting local livelihoods and national economy, which feeds into the national government policy on poverty reduction.

In reference to the Prime Minister's statement on Fisheries Day, "*There is water, there is fish*" the importance of water and wetlands, and their contribution to livelihoods and protein intake in Cambodia is illustrated.

General Director of Technical Affairs of Ministry of Environment also said, "... the celebration of World Wetlands Day would highlight and raise awareness to the public about the values and benefits of wetlands."

Over 30% of Cambodia is wetlands, and over 20% or 36,500 km² can be classified as internationally important. This represents over 5% of the total area of internationally important wetlands in Asia. The majority of these wetlands are found along the Mekong River and its floodplains, and the Tonle Sap Lake and its flood plains and along the coastline. During the accession of the Ramsar Convention, three Ramsar sites were nominated by the Royal Government of Cambodia, Stung Treng Ramsar site, Boeng Tonle Chhmar and Koh Kapik. The Royal Government of Cambodia is working toward more sustainable use of wetlands. In the year 2001 the government has released 56% of commercial fishing lots to the local communities for community fisheries management for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The Stung Treng Ramsar Site is the Cambodian demonstration site for the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme. The diversity of wetlands such as rivers, streams, rice fields and fish are fundamental to the livelihoods of community. At the site, MWBP demonstrates Ramsar management planning through integrating community development for biodiversity conservation, agriculture and other sectors, with emphasis on alternative livelihoods such as access to finance and increasing opportunities.

A JOINT UNDP - IUCN - MRC GEF-FUNDED PROGRAMME



CAMBODIA



LAO PDR



THAILAND



VIETNAM



IUCN
The World Conservation Union





On the occasion of this celebration, we would like to invite press agencies to participate and use this opportunity to interact with WWD participants and visit the exhibition.

World Wetlands Day will also be celebrated in Koh Sneng Commune, Thalaborivath district of Stung Treng Province on 06 February 2006. Approximately one thousand participants from local communities, primary school children, local and international NGOs and the Provincial Department of Stung Treng will be involved in the celebration. Further information will be issued to the media.

For more information please contact:

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*The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) is a joint programme of the four riparian governments of the Lower Mekong Basin – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with other key stakeholders. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Government, MRCS, the Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) and other donors, the programme tries to address the most critical issues for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Mekong wetlands. MWBP aims to strengthen the capacity of organisations and people to develop sustainable livelihoods and manage wetland biodiversity resources wisely. It is a five-year (2004-2009) intervention at three levels – regional, national and local – with demonstration wetland areas in each of the four countries: in Stung Treng, Cambodia; in Attapeu province in southern Lao PDR; in the Songkhram river basin, Thailand; and in the Plain of Reeds in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam.

The programme aims to:

- Improve coordination for wetland planning from regional to local levels
- Strengthen policy and economic environments for wetland conservation
- Generate and share information
- Train and build capacity for the wise use of wetlands
- Create alternative options for sustainable natural resource use and improve livelihoods

The programme, a partnership between governments, aid agencies and NGOs, provides a framework for complementary work for wetland conservation and sustainable livelihoods in the Lower Mekong Basin.

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