

## Press Release – MMN Book Launch

On the 7th of December 2011, the Mekong Migration Network (MMN) launched two new publications, "Speaking of Migration: Mekong Vocabulary on Migration" and "Legally Binding: A Summary of Labour Laws in the Greater Mekong Subregion" at the Cambodiana Hotel in Phnom Penh.

The guests included the Guest of Honour, Her Excellency Ms. Chou Bun Eng, Secretary of State, Ministry of Interior, Royal Government of Cambodia, and panellists from the Mekong countries. In attendance were over 40 people, including representatives from respected government ministries, members of the media, international and local NGOs and civil society representatives, and members of the MMN.

"Speaking of Migration: Mekong Vocabulary on Migration" contains 117 definitions of terminology necessary to discuss migration and labour issues, in the six Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) languages (Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Laotian, Thai and Vietnamese) and English. The main target groups for the handbook are migrant advocates, civil society organisations and policy makers.

"Legally Binding: A Summary of Labour Laws in the Greater Mekong Subregion" is a concise guide to understanding labour standards according to the national labour laws of the six GMS countries. Labour protection has been classified into 14 key elements, with relevant international laws also included.

At the book launch, the Guest of Honour, Her Excellency Ms. Chou Bun Eng and the four panellists gave presentations about the importance of regional cooperation and increased dialogue in regards to rights protection for migrants. They emphasised the need for enhancing common understandings of migration terminology and labour laws in the GMS.

During her presentation, Her Excellency Ms. Chou Bun Eng said that:

"Undocumented migrants are not illegal people, they simply do not have legal documents. Migrants bring great benefits to both countries of origin and destination. We must provide them with protection not punishment."

Ms. Po Po, the MMN representative from Burma/Myanmar, told the audience:

"There are borders, but people move everywhere. We need a policy to promote integration in this region, so we as neighbours can live together happily. Policy makers need to think about integration and multiculturalism alike– we need to keep a space in society for multiculturalism, so that migrants can lead a better life."

Ms. Pranom Somwong, MMN panellist from Thailand, appealed to members of the press:

“We hope that the media will become sensitised in choosing the terms that they use... For example, MMN urges the media to stop using the terms ‘illegal migrants’ and ‘boat people’ in reporting.”

While demonstrating examples of how the publications could be used, the representative from Vietnam, Ms. Huynh Thi Ngoc Tuyet expressed the hope that the books would become useful tools for empowering migrant leaders.

Furthermore, in his introduction of *Legally Binding: A Summary of Labour Laws in the GMS*, the panellist from Cambodia, Mr. Sokchar Mom declared that:

“Migration is a driving force for economic growth in Thailand. If not for the migrant workers from other countries Thailand’s economy would not be growing so fast. Cambodian migrants come and work as seafarers, in domestic work, in construction, in plantations and in factories – these are difficult and dangerous jobs, and many problems arise for them in terms of long working hours, poor compensation, and other abuse – but they rarely have access to legal services. Law enforcement authorities also tend to ignore these issues. [...] We hope that policy makers can use *Legally Binding* to set a higher standard for good practice and legislative reform, and that civil society will use it as an advocacy tool.”

In response to comments from members of the audience regarding workers who are excluded from protection under national labour laws, Ms. Jackie Pollock, Chairperson for the MMN stated:

“We are aware of the sectors, e.g. domestic work, sex work, and migrant workers, which are not covered by the labour laws. But work is work, a worker is a worker, and we believe that all workers should be entitled to the protection of labour laws.”

Finally, Her Excellency Ms. Chou Bun Eng affirmed that she would distribute these books at the provincial and national levels. She also highlighted the importance of producing accurate information in order to conduct research, to reach common consensus and understanding, stating that, ‘every time we work together our understandings differ, and I strongly hope that they will become official documents that the six countries will utilise.’

The online interactive versions of these sister publications will be launched by December 2011, which will include information on new laws as they are developed.

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