



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Community Safety Policy Proving Unsafe For HIV Prevention Efforts

HACC calls on the government to help civil societies do their work without fear of harassment or threat

[Monday April 4th 2011] The HIV/AIDS Coordinating Committee (HACC), a network of civil society organizations working on HIV and AIDS in Cambodia, has today released a document outlining concerns that the manner in which the 'Safety Village Commune/ Sangkat Policy Guideline' is implemented is threatening the effectiveness of vital community based HIV prevention programmes.

This document is a response to disturbing reports received by HACC from affected non-government organizations (NGOs) in Cambodia. Reports received indicate that the 'Safety Village Commune/ Sangkat Policy Guideline' is being used by local authorities as grounds upon which to demand that NGOs working with injecting and non injecting drug users in Phnom Penn release private client details including addresses, telephone numbers, photos and numbers of drug users living in communities.

One well established and respected NGO reports that local law enforcement has visited its premises various times in the last month threatening to shut them down if it does not comply with the demands. For privacy and security reasons - and in keeping with article 89 of Cambodia's Drug Control Law - this NGO does not record or request such information from its clients, nor would it be able to comply with such a request if such information were stored.

Developed by the Cambodian government in 2010, the Safety Village Commune/ Sangkat Policy Guideline was designed to improve political stability, security and public safety and requires that local authorities eliminate a range of crimes including those related to illegal drugs. The reported justification for the heavy handed implementation of the policy is that the very presence of drug users is a sign of high crime rates and that NGOs working with drug users bolster community crime rates.

Fearing persecution, arrest or abuse, the actions of local authorities have driven many drug users into hiding; limiting their access to clean and safe injecting equipment and severely hindering efforts by NGO's to deliver prevention and education programmes. With the National AIDS Authority reporting HIV prevalence among injecting drug users as high as 24.4%, it is clear that jeopardizing their access to needle and syringe exchange programmes is a major health risk.

HACC's Executive Director Mr TIM Vora says that in order to facilitate effective HIV prevention efforts it is critical that the implementation of the Safety Village Commune/ Sangkat Policy Guideline does not threaten a person's right to privacy and confidentiality.



“The misguided implementation of this policy not only threatens the health of drug users, but has the potential to catalyze a major public health risk. NGOs working with drug users, aim to support communities by combating the spread of HIV and ensuring that those affected by HIV have access to the information and treatment they need. It is critical the local law enforcement respect citizens’ rights to privacy and work with community based NGOs to promote health and safety. As such HACC is calling on the government to lend its support to these NGOs to ensure that the valuable work they do can continue.”

HACC is currently monitoring and reporting incidents whereby the implementation of Commune/ Sangkat Safety Policy interferes with the activities of HIV and AIDS organizations and the rights of Cambodian citizens. Any organizations or individuals that have experienced The Safety Village Commune Policy being implemented in such a way that compromises HIV and AIDS programme implementation are encouraged to contact HACC’s Executive Director on hacc@haccambodia.org or phone on 023 217 964.

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Contact Info:

About HACC:

The HIV/AIDS Coordinating Committee (HACC) is a network of over 120 local and international civil society organizations (CSO) working on HIV/AIDS and related social health issues in Cambodia. Established in 1993 as a forum to enhance information and experience sharing, HACC has over 17 years coordination, information sharing, advocacy and awareness raising experience.