



MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

ASEAN-Australia dialogue in Phnom Penh

Phnom Penh is the venue for a major ASEAN-Australia international dialogue this weekend.

The Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) is partnering with Asialink, a non-government organisation based at the University of Melbourne, to host the sixth *Asialink Conversations*. The *Conversations* is a leading dialogue in what is becoming increasingly important in 21st Century international relations - "Track 2" diplomacy.

In 2010, the *Conversations* are held in Phnom Penh for the first time, and will be officially opened by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo **Hun Sen**.

"Track II" or "Track 2" is an informal kind of diplomacy which, in its relatively short existence, has been credited with major breakthroughs in international and ethnic conflicts around the world. Track II interventions allow non-official but influential members of societies to interact and work towards solutions to difficult problems. Sometimes termed a "public peace" process, the dialogues usually involve parliamentarians, opinion leaders from across sectors, activists of political movements, journalists, members of think tanks, and academics debating issues in a non-official setting.

The *Asialink Conversations* are a leading dialogue in this field. They bring together influential participants from across the 10 countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and from Australia to help solve political, social and economic issues of common concern.

In 2008, the *Conversations* were held in India and in 2006 in Vietnam, where they coincided with the first Leaders' Meeting of APEC in Hanoi. The then Australian Prime Minister gave the keynote address. Previously the *Conversations* have been also held in Melbourne (2002), Kuala Lumpur (2004), and Sydney (2007).

The *Conversations* were developed by Asialink, under the leadership of Professor Tony Milner, University of Melbourne Professorial Fellow and Asialink International Director, and Jenny McGregor, Group CEO of Asialink and the Asia Society in Australia.

They are hosted this year in partnership with CDRI, Cambodia's leading independent development policy research institute.



“This year is a special year for both organisations,” Chairman of Asialink, Mr Sid Myer, said today. “Besides the strengthening of old partnerships and the development of new ones, both Asialink and CDRI celebrate 20th anniversaries. So we look forward to these Conversations, not only in the spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility, but also in a spirit of celebration.

“We are honoured and delighted that the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, will deliver the plenary opening address.”

Participants range across sectors, including business, security and diplomacy, academia, policy research, health and development and the cultural sphere. Discussion this year will focus on geo-political trends following the Global Financial Crisis, Australia-ASEAN cooperation – in a wider East Asian regionalism, and in economic, political, security, cultural and social policy and health issues – and Cambodia today.

“The term ‘conversation’ is deliberately chosen,” according to Professor Tony Milner. “Our primary interest is to explore different perspectives on key issues – to encourage the exchange and debating of views in a relaxed and conversational manner.”

An informed dialogue, held outside government, the *Conversations* are a major initiative in ASEAN-Australia partnership building and contribute to ASEAN-Australia future planning in a changing global landscape.

The *Asialink Conversations* are an initiative of Asialink, and are sponsored by the University of Melbourne and the 2009 Myer Commemorative Grants Program. In 2010, Asialink would also like to thank corporate sponsors, Singapore Airlines and the ANZ Royal Bank Ltd in Cambodia.

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