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PRESS RELEASE

(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

Supporting the Royal Government of Cambodia in health compliant border response to limit the spread of COVID-19 variants of concern and meet the immediate needs of returning migrant workers from abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Phnom Penh – The United Nations in Cambodia, with the support from the Government of Japan, begins the implementation of a new joint programme aimed at supporting the Royal Government of Cambodia in health compliant border response to limit the spread of COVID-19 variants of concern and meet the immediate needs of returning migrant workers from abroad.

The COVID-19 has created uncertainty and continuous emergency, with new variants such as Delta and Omicron. Currently, the infection prevention and control measures at the Points of Entry which witness large movements of people, such as at the Thai-Cambodian borders, remain vulnerable to high risks of transmission and spread of the COVID-19 variants of concern into rural communities and subsequently overwhelming the already fragile health system of Cambodia. Therefore, the priority is to strengthen measures for smart containment and protection to prevent larger scale community transmission of variants of concern into Cambodia, as part of border reopening with Thailand expected to take place in 2022.

It is important to follow a health and human rights' compliant approach to border management in order to effectively control and manage further transmission of COVID-19 to rural communities, while fulfilling migrants' basic rights when they cross the border, stay in quarantine facilities or undergo treatment for COVID-19 in treatment centres.

Cambodian migrants returning from abroad, mainly Thailand, are considered one of the most vulnerable populations impacted by COVID-19 pandemic. Migrant workers in Thailand have limited access to testing and COVID-19 treatment, and many are unable to adhere to public health recommendations due to their living and working conditions, with home isolation being unavailable for those tested positive. Only a small portion of regular migrants in formal employment are eligible to access the social protection schemes offered by the Royal Thai Government and COVID-19 vaccination in Thailand.

During their migratory journey, the migrants and their families return to Cambodia through both official and unofficial Points of Entry. Migrants who cross the border irregularly with limited or no

access to COVID-19 preventive measures, testing or quarantine arrangements can contribute to COVID-19 spread in their home communities.

His Excellency Mr Mikami Masahiro, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Kingdom of Cambodia commented that “Ensuring health compliant border response to limit the spread of COVID-19 variants of concern is imperative for protecting the lives of not only migrants but also people living in project areas.” He then confirmed that “The Government of Japan is committed to supporting the Royal Government of Cambodia in response to the COVID-19 crisis and restoration. We feel fully confident that our contribution through IOM will make significant and sustainable impacts, particularly on vulnerable populations, and accelerate the progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, Goal 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries and Goal 17 on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. ”

Kristin Parco, IOM’s Chief of Mission in Cambodia commented that “delivered by a UN system-wide response led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, the joint emergency response funded by Government of Japan will address the priority needs of returning migrant workers by ensuring the flow of returning migrants at the border is managed using a humanely, dignified and health-compliant approach and return systems are in place for returning migrants that meet their health, well-being and protection needs. “

Ms. Pauline Tamesis, UN Resident Coordinator in Cambodia added: ‘The joint programme generously funded by the Government of Japan contributes to the broader effort of the United Nations country team to build back better with human rights at its core. By focusing on effective, dignified and health-compliant border management and quarantine arrangements for vulnerable migrants during their journey back to Cambodia, it promotes safe and humane return and more inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.’

The joint programme will run for 12 months and provide assistance in Banteay Meanchey, Oddor Meanchey and Battambang where the majority migrants cross the border.

SDGs: 3, 10, 17

ENDS

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Notes to the editor:

IOM, as the specialized UN agency for migration, acts with its partners to assist in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration management, advance understanding of migration issues and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants and dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all and works with government and partners to ensure that the SDG goals and targets linked to migrants' rights remain part of the Government agendas. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants and works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, be they refugees, displaced persons or other uprooted people. At present, IOM has been responding to the mass migrants returns in POE's and areas of return and support the Ministry of Interior in managing the return of migrants and with operational presence in Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Siem Reap and an office in Poi Pet, Banteay Meanchey.