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## Cambodia Resettlement Debacle Cover Up: ADB Conceals Critical Expert Report

For Immediate Release

(Phnom Penh, March 18, 2013) Equitable Cambodia (EC), Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT) and Inclusive Development International (IDI) regret the Asian Development Bank's refusal to disclose a critical independent expert report on the impacts of involuntary resettlement caused by the Railway Rehabilitation Project in Cambodia.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has denied disclosure of an independent monitoring report by the world-renowned resettlement expert, Dr. Michael Cernea, about the controversial project to rehabilitate Cambodia's railway. The project affects at least 4164 families who live alongside Cambodia's dilapidated railway tracks and requires the physical relocation of at least 1200 families. A joint venture of the Australian firm Toll Holdings and the Cambodian firm Royal Group secured a 30-year concession to operate the refurbished railways.

Dr. Cernea was commissioned by ADB in mid-2012 to examine the situation and prepare the report, *Monitoring of Population Resettlement in Cambodia's Railway Rehabilitation Project: Current Status, Strengths, Weaknesses, and Recommendation*, in response to the ongoing resettlement problems plaguing the Railway Project. Informed sources say that the report is highly critical of the resettlement process and the impacts on affected families, who have been left worse off as a result.

The ADB rejected an initial request for disclosure of the report. After an appeal was launched to the Public Disclosure Advisory Committee, ADB agreed to disclose the report's recommendations but refused to disclose the full report. The Committee stated that *"the harm that would result from the disclosure of the entire Report would be substantial, immediate, and likely irreparable, and outweighs the benefits of disclosure."* According to the ADB's Public Communications Policy, the decision by PDAC is final and cannot be appealed further.

"Harmful to whom? I really wonder what they are hiding that could be so harmful," said Eang Vuthy, Representative of Equitable Cambodia. "It seems that ADB is putting its own interests ahead of the public interest and the interests of people that have been harmed by the Railway Project."

"Forthcoming STT research on the resettlement impacts of the Railways Rehabilitation Project, conducted following Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction model, unequivocally shows that people affected by the project have been harmed", said Ee Sarom, Programmes Coordinator at STT. "By not disclosing Dr. Cernea's report, the ADB is trying its best to cover up that fact."

Households affected by the Railways Project also expressed their deep disappointment with the ADB's lack of disclosure.

"I believe that Dr. Cernea's report will effectively benefit the people so ADB will not release it because they are worried about losing their interest," said Sim Pov, community representative from Toul Sangke A in Phnom Penh. "I want the ADB to release the report and I want them to translate it into Khmer so that we can compare the report with ADB's policy – that people should not be worse off as a result of the Railways Project. I want to see the ADB comply with the recommendations made by Dr. Cernea."

"I am really sorry that the report prepared by Michael Cernea is not being disclosed," said Mr. Prom Sarith, a community representative at Trapeang Anchhan in Phnom Penh. "Our lives at the new resettlement site are in the harsh condition, where we are lacking basic infrastructure, adequate housing, jobs, and school for our children. This has made us become severe debtors and face losing our plot of land. We understand that Michael Cernea's report reflects our real situation at the ground and provides good recommendations to ADB to improve the situation of the affected communities. We would strongly request this report be disclosed. It is for our benefit."

"It is the ultimate insult by ADB to the families whom they have upended and impoverished with this project that they aren't even entitled to know what a global resettlement expert thinks about their situation," said David Pred, Managing Associate of Inclusive Development International. "Perhaps that is because Dr. Cernea's take is totally inconsistent with the whitewashed description of the resettlement situation that ADB's spin doctors have portrayed."

Lack of transparency and timely public disclosure of key documents has marred the Railway Project from the start, and is by no means limited to Dr. Cernea's report. Reportedly, the Cambodian government, the ADB, and AusAID are currently in the process of preparing an Addendum to the Resettlement Plan, which will see the resettlement of an additional 111 households in Phnom Penh. As with previous Resettlement Plans, it will not be publicly disclosed until finalised and approved, denying resettlers an opportunity to be informed and meaningfully consulted about plans that will profoundly affect their lives.

"The ADB claims it recognises transparency and accountability as essential to development effectiveness and to achieve its vision of an Asia-Pacific free of poverty," said Nora Lindström, Programme Development Manager at STT. "This project exemplifies everything but that. Affected households and civil society groups supporting them had high hopes for Dr. Cernea's report, and now we won't even get to see it."

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Extensive information, media reports and other news items about the Project are available at:

<http://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/railway>

<http://www.teangtnaut.org/>

<http://cambodiatrainspotter.wordpress.com>

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