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## The Messenger

### Editorial

In recent months there has been a growing concern in Cambodia about the sexual abuse of children within their own families. Several NGOs and government organizations have raised the issue in an attempt to call the attention of society in general and in particular the scrutiny of the responsible authorities. These concerned groups are looking to develop clear laws to punish severely the perpetrators of child abuse within the family. The Catholic Church in Cambodia supports these efforts in several ways, such as through educational institutions and in each of the centers of the local Church spread throughout the country.

The Catholic Church teaches that human life and human sexuality are inseparable and sacred. Therefore, the correct exercise of human sexuality contributes to the growth of human kind, and follows the Will of God and is a good thing. God created human beings man and woman and considers the love between husband and wife as a precious aspect of humanity which leads to the creation of new life. It is for this reason that the Catholic Church considers the union of a man and a woman a union blessed by God since the beginning of time. And this blessing is extended to all human beings. Within the Christian tradition, the conjugal act leads the couple to a deep unity with God and all creation because it is not only the union of their bodies that takes place but a deep spiritual union with God Himself. We understand from this that each family is a sacred place for God. In this context, it is extremely painful to discover the many forms of violence and abuse of children, even by their own parents and close relatives. In Cambodia we sadly acknowledge that these kinds of crimes are part of daily life in a number families. THE MESSENGER calls the attention, not only of Christian families, but of all Cambodian

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families, in order to raise the awareness of this painful reality that many children are facing in our society today.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 13 addressed his readers calling their attention to this same problem of immoral attitudes concerning the exercise of sexuality: "...so let us throw off everything that belongs to the darkness and equip ourselves for the light. Let us live decently, as in the light of day; with no orgies or drunkenness, no promiscuity or licentiousness, and no wrangling of jealousy."(Rom. 13: 13-14). The correct exercise of sexuality, following the Christian tradition, which is not contrary to many other religious traditions, must lead the individual person and the family to grow as human beings. Unfortunately all too often the actions of individuals result in diminishing their own humanity.

How then to confront this family problem? To start with, clear laws to punish severely sexual crimes against children must be promoted. It is also necessary to develop programs for the education of children and their parents and relatives in sexual matters. The Church document "Familiaris Consortio", No. 37, of the late Pope John Paul II, gives some advice we can follow concerning the urgency of good sex education within the broader context of the education of children on love. When children relate their own sexuality to their capacity to love, of self-giving, they grow in healthy ways. Sexual education cannot be separated from moral principles –given in the cultural and religious context of each family. When moral principles are absent, hedonism takes hold within a family's existence and, therefore, promiscuity and the abuse of children can take place. Let us unite our efforts in this most important mission of saving and protecting our children.

### Church-run Pediatric Facility Expands

TAKEO : The opening of a new building in a Church-run pediatric facility now allows poor patients greater access to surgery and medical treatment for heart disease. On June 23, Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio, Apostolic Nuncio to Cambodia, inaugurated the new building at Bambino Gesù (infant Jesus) Pediatric Hospital within Dankeo Referral Hospital in Takeo.

The Bangkok-based nuncio said he is pleased with the collaboration between the Church-run facility for children and the government hospital. The new building is equipped for surgery and treatment of heart disease. At the launch Doctor Lorenzo Borghese, coordinator of Bambino Gesù Pediatric Hospital, said it has treated 3,141 patients from across the country, all for free,



Hip-Hop dancing is a new style for young Cambodia. Thess Orphan Children are acting the Hip-Hop dancing style in a Been Garden at night in Phnom Penh for collecting money to support their studies and lives.

## Cambodia Church-run Pediatric Facility Expands

since it opened in 2006. Of those young patients, 267 have had surgery, he added. The hospital also provides training for local doctors and nurses, he noted.

Doctor Tae Vanntha told CSC News that until now children could undergo surgery only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, when the Dankeo hospital's operating theater was available to the children's hospital. With the opening of the new building, he says Bambino Gesu could perform surgery on five or six children every day.

According to Vanntha, most of the child patients are brought by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and NGOs. Some come after hearing about the facility from neighbors, the doctor added.

Among the most common surgeries it has performed are correction of congenital malformations like cleft palate and scarring from wounds caused by land mines.

The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul manage the facility in cooperation with and sponsorship from L'Ospedale Bambino Gesu, a pediatric hospital the Holy See owns in Rome.

"We have sent nine children with life-threatening heart problems for surgery at L'Ospedale Bambino Gesu," Sister Myrna Porto told CSC News. She said her congregation also supported family members to accompany the children for

three months. These services have cost US\$260,000, all funded from Italy, and five of the children have returned, the Filipina nun revealed.

Soun Channy, 25, told CSC News she had been at the pediatric hospital in Takeo seven days with both of her children, who have a congenital skin disease. "The doctor tried to research our family background, but could not find anything, because my husband's family was killed

during the Khmer Rouge regime" recounted the woman from Sihanoukville. She confirmed she does not need to pay treatment here.

Bambino Gesu Pediatric Hospital has beds for 24 regular and 8 intensive-care patients under the age of 18 years. It has three doctors, one a foreigner 12 nurses and two office workers. The Cambodian government pays the salaries of all staff, while all equipment comes from Italy.

## WYD Delegates Meet Government Official

Young Cambodian Catholics met a high government official the day before they departed for the 2008 World Youth Day (WYD) celebration in Sydney, Australia.

On July 2 about 30 youths and Father Leo Ochoa, leader of the Cambodia WYD delegation, visited Mr. Uch Borith, a secretary of state under the foreign affairs minister, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Father Ochoa told Mr. Borith the delegates to the July 15-20 international WYD celebration are representing millions of Cambodian youths. The youth delegates, the Salesian priest added, will be "ambassadors of peace" who will forge cooperative links with other youths from around the world. The missionary added that the delegation wanted to visit Mr. Borith to seek his advice and words of wisdom from his experience in promoting peace and international cooperation.

The official advised the youth delegates to understand other cultures, build good relations and promote Khmer culture at the WYD events. He also suggested they invite youths of other countries to come to Cambodia for exchange programs to promote peace and intercultural understanding. He pointed out that Cambodians of different religions live in peace as brothers and sisters, and said the country has never had interreligious conflict.

## Pictures of the month



Photos: L.Sovanna



Thousands of Cambodians celebrated in the streets of Phnom Penh and main Cambodian cities the recognition from the UNESCO of Preah Vihear Temple as a world heritage site, on July 7, 2008.

However, the Thai government, in protest to this decision, sent military troops into Cambodian territory in the area of Keo Sikha Kiri Svava Pagoda, also called Preah Vihear pagoda. By July 25 there were about 1000 soldiers from each side facing each other.



Drawing: Y. Soksan

*On July 3 the Koh Santapheap Daily news reported the case of an 11 year-old girl who raped by her father , a 47 year-old man, in the village of Koh Sampov, Kompong Thom Province. This sexual abuse happened on June 26 this year. After a funeral ceremony in the village, the father of the girl went back home, already drunk, and given that the mother's girl was absent, he proceeded to tied his daughter's hands and legs with a rope and raped her.*

**Feature**

# Why does Sexual Abuse Happen?

**By: Khan Phirom**

This question has been raised up in a number of daily newspapers in Cambodia recently. For example, the Raksmei Kampuchea Daily, the Koh Santepheap Daily and the Kampuchea Thmei Daily the issue of sexual abuse has been published nearly every day during the past weeks, which shows to what extent this subject is of a major concern in the Cambodian society today. Serious cases of sexual abuse against children, inside their own families and perpetrated by close relatives, has come to light. Social experts have expressed their concern about this, affirming that the morality of our society is falling down very badly.

From the July 1-10, Khmer daily newspapers issued 9 articles on sexual abuse to children: 5 reports from Koh Santapheap Daily 4 from Raksmei Kampuchea Daily and Kampuchea Thmei Daily. According to a release of a local NGO that monitors reports about sexual abuse of the leading newspapers in Cambodia, during the first semester of 2008 there were 131 sexual abuse cases with 142 victims; among them 79 were under 18 year-old, being 61 of them under the age of 15. They found out about 181 perpetrators or suspects. The report also said that among the given cases there are 7 children who were raped by their own biological father or a step-father, 3 by their cousins and 32 by a close neighbor.

Ms. Chea Vannath, former director of Center for Social Development, said that

“sexual abuse of children is a crime that we cannot accept; it is a cruel action that does not respect the moral traditions of the Cambodian people.” Nowadays the number of reported cases of child sex abuse is increasing, especially within the family. This is a strong indication of the erosion of the traditional Cambodian morality and values. Dr. Y. Rattana, a Khmer Sociologist talking to CSC reporter, said that “the sexual abuse in general, and mostly the abuse of innocent children done at home by close relatives, is a serious social illness that should be resolved as soon as possible.”

**Data of sexual abuse in Cambodia**

Ms. Nop Sarinsreyroth, Secretary General of the Cambodian Women s’ Crisis Center said that from 2006 to 2007, figures showed an increase, however, the current figures in 2008 show some stability. In 2006 there were 202 cases and 2007 that number increased to 221. The CWCC has found cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by a

**Punishment**  
 Ms. Meiy Usaphear, lawyer of the Cambodian Women’s Crisis Center, CWCC, said to CSC reporter that for the present Cambodian justice system the sexual abuse of minors under 18, can lead to a punishment of 10 to 15 years of prison . However, if the victim is under 14, the perpatrator can be imprisoned between 15 to 20 years, plus up to 10 million riels compensation.

family member, a grandfather, a father, a step-father or a brother, she added. Mr. Pek Vannak , high level supervisor of cases of violation of children’s rights for LICADHO NGOs, said that this organization considers the sexual abuse of children as a cruel action and he recognizes that this is a common practice in the present Cambodian society. During the first six months of this year there have been 54 cases, 3 of them perpetrated by the victim’s father, a case by the step-father and 1 case by a cousin. In addition, there were 5 cases of sexual abuse to 6 victims performed by a group of 33 men, among them several teenagers under 16, he said. “It is sad to realize how the moral values of our society are decreasing so fast, not only among the younger generation, but among elders, as well”, Vannak said.

**What to do ?**

A group of experts on this issue of sexual abuse has considered that several factors contribute to the increase of this phenomenon in Cambodia, such as the lack of laws of prevention and punishment of these cases. Other factor is the lack of access to education of the general population and particularly to sexual education. Some other important factors are related to the strong influence of foreign cultures, the increase of drug diction and the permissiveness of society in gambling vices and alcoholism without preventing the bad influence on children. The influence of pornographic movies coming from abraod is also a main factor to analyze. Though it is forbidden by the law in Cambodia, many coffee shops openly show pornographic movies as a way to attract clients. When some of them are closed down by the police, the next day two more open doors.



Photo :DR

Young people meeting Pope Benedict XVI in Sydney, on July 15-20, 2008 at the WYD celebrations. Another WYDs took places in Rome, Italy: 1984 and 1985. Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1987. Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 1989. Czestochowa, Poland in 1991. Denver,U.S in 1993. Manila, Philippine in 1995. Paris, France in 1997. Rome, Italy in 2000. Toroto, Canada in 2002. Cologne, Germany in 2005. The next WYD will take place in Madrid, Spain, in the year 2011.

## **Pope Benedict XVI at WYD 2008: “Unity of Faith in a divided world”**

Thousands of peoples, mostly teenagers, from all over the world, including 50 delegates from Cambodia, gathered in Sydney, Australia to celebrate the Catholic Church's 23rd World Youth Day 2008 with Pope Benedict XVI from July 15- 20, 2008.

The theme of this WYD was “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses*” (Acts 1:8). The Pontiff reminded the youth to be witnesses of “Christ”, since there are still so many people who have not yet heard the Good News of Jesus Christ, while many others have not recognized in this Good News the saving truth that alone can satisfy the deepest longing of their hearts”, said the Holy Father.

On the arrival day of Pope Benedict XVI at the Royal Randwick Racecourse in the eastern side of Sydney city, about 200,000 peoples were waiting for him for a prayer session.

The Holy Father made a call to the “unity

of faith in a divided world and in the middle of a growing secularism”. Unity is of the “essence of the Church”, emphasized the Pope while urging the young people to “resist any temptation to walk away” from it.

“You are already well aware the our Christian witnessing is offered to a world which in many ways is fragile”, the Pope said gave thanks to God for the “great gift” of the Catholic Youth faith.

On Thursday July 17, the Holy Father recommended to believers of all faiths to be concerned about the environmental problem of our planet, urging the young to reject this consumer society. “There are scars which mark the surface of the earth such as erosion, deforestation and squandering of the world's mineral and ocean resources” the Pope said.

The 81 year-old pontif also have dubbed violence, sexual exploitation and consumerism as “false idols”. He spoke out against

the human exploitation and violence produced by the ponographic material made for amusement in movies and on the internet.

The Holy Father met privately at St. Mary's Cathedral in central Sydney, four victims of sexual abuse by some members of the clergy in Australia, as sign of healing and forgiveness, before leaving Australia. The Pontiff listened to their stories and consoled them. He assured them of his spiritual proximity and proposed to continue to pray for them. He spoke individually with each victim in an atmosphere of “respect, spirituality and of intense emotions”. Pope Benedict XVI said with sorrow in his last homily at St. Mary's Cathedral “I would like to pause to acknowledge the shame which we have all felt of the sexual abuse of minors by some clergy and religious in this country”. These sincere words of the Pope gave great encouragement to the thousands of youngsters gathered for this final celebration.



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### **Monthly Planning**

- July 28 - August 15 : A group of Spain students is visiting Sounsovann Orphan center in Battambang
- July 30 - August 1 : Workshop on introduction Radio Program in Siem Reap lead by Mr. E. Samson and the CSC
- August 11 - 13 : Meeting of youth leaders in Kompong Thom to talk about “helping the youth in their spiritual formation”.
- August 22 - 24 : Youth synode in Kompong Cham on theme “Witnesses of the Holy Spirit”.
- August 11 - 15 : Workshop in Battambang about “Printed Media and Communications ”, lead by the CSC.