



# អ្នកនាំពន្យា

The Messenger

## Editorial

**M**ekong is the name of the main river of Cambodia. This name means Mother Ganga, the sacred river of India. MePhoom is the title of a village chief here. It means the mother of the village. Yes, Cambodian tradition has a lot of tenderness to the motherly aspect of people. It is a matriarchal society. But this has been affected by different trends of the recent centuries and today the image of Women is not evoking equal respect and dignity as that of Men.

The hundreds of thousands of ladies working in garment factories are witnesses to their efforts to build their families. It is the honor of the Cambodian Society to appreciate and thank these tireless workers. It is also the task of all to look for a just salary and a good working condition for all these daughters of this country. God created Man and Woman as His children. They will complete each other and together they will love and build their families and societies. They have different functions as men and women and yet in dignity they are equal to each other.

Last 8th of March was the day that recalled us the rights and dignity of Women. The International Women's day reminds each of us to thank God for the gift of one's mother, wife,

sisters and daughters as the loving members of one's family. It reminds ourselves that the situation of ladies in crisis is not a pretext to look down on them but to love them and help them to come up in lives. It is a day of thanking all women for their presence amidst us as people fully involved in building our lives. It is also a day of recognizing that women have equal rights to public functions and other jobs that were considered till now as to be fulfilled by men. However this healthier equality of women will also take care of their special need to work closer to their homes to assure their maternal and family role given to them by nature.

**L**ate Pope John Paul II says in his letter "on the Family" that "these roles and professions of women should be harmoniously combined if we wish the evolution of society and culture to be truly and fully human."(#22) In this time of rapid changes within the Cambodia society, it is the responsibility of all of us not to lose sight of the high esteem of the Cambodian culture towards women in the upbringing and education of children at home.

Msgr. Antonyamy Susairaj, MEP



## New Catholics share their faith experience

**T**he Catholic Church in Cambodia is rejoicing this Easter season with a group of 147 new Baptized among the three Church jurisdictions of the country, who have followed a three-year program of preparation in their own parishes. Bishop Emile Destombes, Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh told CSC reporter that "faith is a gift we receive from God" and explain how the Catechumens go through a process of discernment, without forcing them. "When we realize that Catechumens are confident in their faith experience of Jesus Christ as the human revelation of God our Father we accept them for Baptism", said Msgr. Emile Destombes. Miss. Oem sokhorn, 22, member of the group of Catechumens of St. Joseph Church in Phnom Penh told CSC reporter that for her the changing of religious belief has not been so easy. "Some of my friends of my native village do not agree that I change religion". Sokhorn was born in a traditional Buddhist family. New Christians always experiment a great change in their lives. Though they do not have any problem from part of the government since Cambodia enjoys freedom of religious faith, This Easter season we all should be united in prayer with the new brothers and sisters sharing our Christian faith.



Photo : S.Philong

"HE IS NOT HEAVY ! HE IS MY BROTHER".

In Cambodia there are about 500,000 persons, of age 65 year-old plus, most of them living in great poverty. We still do not have any center for elders in Cambodia.

## Queen Sofia from Spain visited the Church of Battambang



**Battambang:** A huge crowd, mostly young students, welcomed Queen Sofia from Spain last February 14, at the headquarters of the Catholic Church in Battambang saying in loud voices: "VIVA LA REINA SOFÍA", which in Spanish language means "long live the Queen Sofia". It was the first visit of her Majesty Queen Sofia who made a humanitarian visit to Cambodia and particularly to the Arrupe Centre for Handicapped, a program led by the Catholic Church in Battambang at Pet Yiey Chee, located in Phum Rumchek 1, Khum Rattanak, Srok Svay Por. Queen Sofia has very deep in her heart to all of the children and people victims of landmines and polio in Cambodia. She came to confirm her solidarity to them. Msgr. Kike Figaredo, Apostolic Prefect of Battambang, said to

CSC reporter that "Queen Sofia comes to express her sincere solidarity with the Cambodian people and to encourage us in our commitment to accompany Cambodian people in their search for peace and a better life". Msgr. Figaredo, 48, explained how for Queen Sofia it is very important to empower people rather than to create dependence. "She comes to understand us better", Said Msgr. Kike.

The Catholic Church in Battambang has been serving the Cambodian society during the last 218 years and is working in cooperation with the Cambodian government and Buddhist monks.

The Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang has 23 parishes that serve as local centers for programs of education, agriculture, rural development, health programs, supporting people with disabilities and promotion of the Cambodian culture

## Building Houses for poor families in Kdlo Leu Village

**Kompong Cham:** A group of 13 young people from France spent two weeks in Kdol leur village, Kampong Cham Prefecture, helping to build houses for the poor. Mr. Mathieu Bovet, 31, a French national who worked as a volunteer in Kompong Cham a year ago, led this group, following a project with "Coup de Pouce Humanitaire", a French organization that leads programs of solidarity with the poor all over the world. "They decided to support the construction of some houses for poor families of Kompong Cham area with a budget of €3,000 Euros", said Mathieu. The french volunteers who study and work in difference countries came by their own to spent a period of vocation living in the village of Kdol Leu and helping in the construction of the houses, under the guidance of Fr. Ivan Campaña. Christine Hazard, a volunteer who works in Frankfurt said: "I am here to give a little bit of my energy, my time, and my smile and to learn from people". Mrs. Phal Mach, 41, with tears in her eyes said: "I am very excited to see these young people from other countries working very hard to build my house". In the name of the Church of Kdol Leu Fr. Campaña extends the thanksgiving to all.

## Pictures of the month



Photos: L. Sovanna



**Chrismal Mass :** Every year before the Holy week all Catholic priests come together to celebrate the traditional CHRISMAL MASS and to renew the priestly vows. In Cambodia the celebration took in St. Joseph Parish on March 12<sup>th</sup> with the participation of over 60 priests, the bishops and many faithful. The Chrism oil, the oil of catechumens and the oil of the sick were blessed at this Mass.



Photo: D.R

## Feature

# New challenging role of Women In the Cambodian Society

By Mom Kunthea

Women, traditionally considered in Cambodia the weak gender, have not had enough opportunities of access to public functions in equal position with men, most of them having as common jobs to cook or to be a housewife. However, there has been a qualitative change during the past two decades, due to the upcoming of several women's organizations that promote the high value of women in all fields of human work and become a great contribution to the Cambodian society.

In our days we can find in Cambodia women working in different fields, not only in garment factories, restaurants and fulfilling duties in NGOs, but also in other professional posts such as education, literature, journalism, medicine and politics, among others. The very fact of having women present in these fields of human work, reserved for men before, is a clear sign of the important change the Cambodian culture and society is experiencing nowadays.

According to Mrs. Chan Somnang, a leader of the Commune of Roseykeo, in Phnom Penh city, there has been a "macho" perspective in Cambodian society considering the role of women. "We can easily hear some men saying: 'It is obvious that women cannot work like men... if so, go and carry a heavy sac of rice on your shoulder or do a heavy physical work!',"

said Mrs. Chan to a CSC reporter.

She added: "This perspective is certainly changing because now many Cambodian women understand that they do not have to be assimilated to the style of physical work done by men, but still can enter into other fields of human work that men used to believe only they can do, such as to lead the country or to lead any important social entity".

In a dialogue with miss Kong Karona, the webmaster of Java Art Association she said to CSC reporter that "I am now doing a job that started in Cambodia as a task only done by men. But I have discovered that we, women, have also capacities to understand and work in the new field of informatics, such as creating websites. It is the challenge I am facing now and I feel comfortable doing it".

Miss Ny Chenda, a professor at Paul Dubrulle School of Hotel and tourism, in

**Mr. Sopha, a businessman, shared his ideas about influencing his daughter's future: "My deep desire is for my daughter to become a medical doctor; however, I realize that she doesn't like that profession at all. Instead, she likes to study financial accounting. It made me feel a little sad", said Mr. Sopha. "however, now I understand better her own wishes. I can not change my daughter's mind, goals and feelings"**

**It is now generally accepted in today's Cambodian society that women have the right and equal capacities as men to have access to education and can promote themselves following their own will, more easily than in previous decades.**

Seam Riep, said to CSC reporter that she feels very proud of herself for being a professor: "I didn't have this idea in my childhood or early youth. To become a professor at this school started as way to put in practicing what I learned at the university."

### FOLLOWING THE PARENTS' WILL?

Meng Somania, a librarian at SIPAR NGO, in dialogue with CSC reporter said that "When I was a child and a teenager I didn't have any idea that I would become a librarian, however, I really enjoyed books since I was a child." In fact, when Somania was younger she wanted to become a diplomat, however, her parents used to encourage her to become a medical doctor. Since follow this career was not possible, she became a school teacher, so her former dreams were already gone. "My parents didn't reject my will to be a teacher, though they were a little upset," said Ms. Somania.

In the Cambodian society parents usually try to look for a good future for their children and try to influence them about the kind of job suitable for each one. The question in today's Cambodian society is if parents can really succeed in their wishes and plans for their children. Miss. Ung Chansophear, a journalist of Cambodge Soir, a weekly newspaper, told CSC reporter that she could not succeed in her studies to become a lawyer as was the will of her parents: "I became a journalist instead, because I like to write articles and reports." Chansophear realized that there were not many women working as journalists and decided to challenge herself in this field.

The qualitative changes going on now in Cambodia, concerning the full integration of women in the construction of a new society, encourage all of us to continue working in this direction.



Photo : L. Sovanna

## First National Inter-religions Meeting

By Ly Sovanna

**PHNOM PENH:** Around 600 leaders and other delegates representing 42 religions, sects or religious communities residing and working in Cambodia came together for the country's first-ever national interfaith meeting. The government's Cult and Religious Ministry organized the Feb. 20th meeting at Chakto Mok Conference Hall in Phnom Penh to urge the religious leaders to work together in a spirit of cooperation and unity.

Prime Minister Hun Sen, who presided this meeting, praised the leaders for contributing to the country and encouraged them to continue their work. Religious organizations and individuals in Cambodia "have actively joined forces in the fields of

development, peace and safety," he said. In order to effectively promote and practice religious harmony, he advised, religious organizations "to avoid any religious conflict."

H.E. Khun Hang, an official of the religion ministry, stressed the importance of living together in harmony in Cambodian society. H.E. Khun Hang, in his report on the state of Religions in Cambodia, said that there are 20 different religious groups and 22 religious Associations and NGOs that officially perform activities.

In a nine-point statement the religious leaders expressed their thanks to the Prime Minister "for his sympathy, generosity and support that allows the strengthening of religious freedom in

**T**heravada Buddhism, is the state religion. Its two sects: Mohanikay and Thammayut have 55,583 monks and 4,307 pagodas,

The 320,167 Islamic believers have 277 mosques and 333 suravs,

Christianity has many branches, The Catholic Church has 25 churches and 52 other prayer venues with 18,584 members. Other Christian Churches have 193 churches and 1,434 other places of prayer with about 155,207 believers.

Mahayana Buddhism has 90 pagodas and 22 smaller prayer places;

Baha'i Faith has 7 prayer venues with 6,300 members. and Cao Dai sect has two places for prayer with 2,959 ethnic Vietnamese followers.

Cambodian". At the same time, they declared their respect and support for Buddhism as the State Religion, their respect for Khmer traditions, culture and morality and their adherence to the laws, and government regulations and policies for the sake of peace, safety and the rule of law.

**T**hey also pledged for cooperation and solidarity among religions, so that each one can practice their own religion with compassion and charity, without interfering with each other. They also emphasized their respect for the individual's religious freedom and made the commitment to improve people's standard of living without pressuring them to change their religious believes.



Catholic Social Communications

# 25 street 242, Boeung Prolet,  
7 Makara, Phnom Penh  
Tel/Fax:(855) 23 22 41 20  
Mail: cscCambodia@gmail.com  
Web: www.catholiccambodia.org  
Commission for The MESSENGER  
Msgr. Emile Destombes, MEP  
Fr. Omer Giraldo, MXY

គ្រូបង្ការសម្រាប់ក្រសួងព័ត៌មានលេខ ១៨៣  
ព្រះប្រឹក្សា ចុងផ្ទៃទី ២៥ នា ផ្លូវ ២០០៧

## Monthly Planning

- March 22 : On Easter nighth 147 catechumens of the three Church jurisdictions in Cambodia were Baptized.
- March 24 : "Ground Breaking Ceremony of the new Superior Technical Institute Saint François" located in Ang Porpel village, Taphem commune, Tram Kak district, Takeo Province, presided by Bishop Emile DESTOMBES, Apostolic Vicar of Phnom Penh and H.E. Oknha Chan SARUN, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.
- March, 30 : Eclesial encounter of parishioners of the Apostolic Vicariate of Phnom Penh at Don Bosco School, Phnom Penh Thmey.
- April 5- 8 : Training for Catechist at Chamcar Teang Parish
- April 9 : Offering of donation of goods to 100 families at St. Joseph Parish.