

# Adoption of a National Living Human Treasures (LHT) System in Cambodia



Neay Kong, the famous guitar player © MDG-F C&D Cambodia

The National Living Human Treasures system is a significant step towards promoting cultural creativity and safeguarding Cambodia's identity.

## BACKGROUND

In the time of the Khmer Rouge, artists, performers, musicians, dancers, intellectuals, writers and scientists were targeted, along with political opposition, and from 1975 to 1979, there was a systematic deletion of centuries of Cambodian culture that has yet to be fully restored. Even prior to the JP, UNESCO was closely collaborating with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MoCFA) on a concept called "Living Human Treasures", to promote the identification and documentation of the many intangible cultural heritage elements that have existed for generations throughout Cambodia's rich cultural life. The title of Living Human Treasure is awarded to individuals or groups who possess a high degree of knowledge and skills linked to specific elements of intangible cultural heritage, that they can transmit to younger generations. Therefore, when the JP was envisaged, all parties agreed that one of its goals should be to push the LHT agenda forward.

## PROCESS

In order to secure maximum support from all stakeholders, the JP and the MoCFA agreed to collaboratively organize, along with all relevant government entities and many non-government actors, a National Consultation for the elaboration of a decree on LHT. This inclusionary process would not only give legitimacy to the decree but was also designed to ensure internal support within the government.

All documents were translated into Khmer, including the LHT Guidelines. The MoCFA upgraded the text to a draft-royal decree, which implies stronger legal value, as it is signed by the King. The Royal Decree was signed by His Majesty the King in February 2010, and was disseminated to provinces after its approval.

## Outcomes

Social dialogue and sustainable development in Cambodia have been fostered by the adoption of a Royal Decree on LHT in February 2010, in the framework of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. The Decree was elaborated following a highly inclusive national consultation, resulting in increased social dialogue amongst government and non government actors, to the point where the MoCFA is now willing to replicate the process for the drafting of other legal texts, such as a national cultural policy.

The Government's legal commitment to establish a national LHT system is therefore a significant step towards promoting cultural creativity and safeguarding the country's identity in order to guarantee sustainable development.