

Opening Remarks by:

H.E. Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi

Minister of Women's Affairs, Royal Government of Cambodia

At the Launch of "Toward Gender Equity: Women and Media in Cambodia" Study Report

World Press Freedom Day 2018

Wednesday 3rd May 2018, Phnom Penh

Dear Excellency Maria Sargren, Ambassador of Sweden to Cambodia,

Excellency Thach Pen, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Information,

Madam Anne Lemaistre, UNESCO Representative in Cambodia,

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning and welcome to you all! I am delighted to participate here today at the launch of the study report "Toward Gender Equity: Women and Media in Cambodia", undertaken by Fojo Media Institute with financial support from Sweden and UNESCO.

I would like to pay a special tribute to all women journalists here today, on the commemoration of the World Press Freedom Day. Female journalists and writers have shaped the course of History and our understanding about human life and people's experiences from all over the world. We stand on the shoulders of giants. Such as the pioneer Flora Tristan, a French-Peruvian reporter who documented the poverty and social exclusion in Europe during the first half of nineteenth century and already advocated for the abolition of human slavery.

Another example is Ida Bell Wells, a famous African-American suffragette, investigative journalist and civil rights activist, who was born into slavery in the second half of the nineteenth century and wrote extensively about the violence suffered by enslaved black people in the United States.

One more remarkable American female journalist who lived from 1864 to 1922 was Nellie Bly, widely known for her record-breaking trip around the world in 72 days, in emulation of Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days*. And guess why she made such accomplishment: Unlike male explores, Bly did not waste her time flirting with locals when traveling! In addition to this achievement, Nellie Bly also became an avant-garde and founder of a new kind of investigative journalism called 'immersive' journalism.

I continue with the list of outstanding journalists with Nawual El Saadawi, described as the 'Simone de Beauvoir of the Arab World', who is a prolific writer born in Egypt in 1931 -and still alive- who suffered female genital mutilation during girlhood. She quickly became an activist for women's rights in the Muslim world and has received numerous international awards.

Another interesting -and younger journalist- is the Swedish Katrine Marçal, who published the book *'Who Cooked Adam Smith's Dinner?'* in 2016. This book is a clever feminist and thought-provoking critique of the myth of the "Homo economicus". According to Marçal, this "economic man" is rational, selfish, profit-seeking, isolated, atomized, and, in conclusion, disconnected from reality. As she points out, people are -after all- vulnerable and dependent on each other while Humanity has made progress based on cooperation, rather than competition.

Other well-known and respected contemporary female journalists are the Chinese Lijia Zhang and the British-Iranian Christiane Amanpour. And I could go on and on but I will need to conclude the long list of brilliant female journalists here.

All these women journalists and writers that I have mentioned -and many others- have something in common: They have brought to light the real stories of people from all walks of life, and especially of the women, men and children living in the margins of societies. Women journalists narrate stories through their unique lens, using their special sensitivity, their language and their own understanding on what it really matters in life. Women reporters and editors have made journalism and media more professional, more human and more meaningful to all of us.

And I sincerely wish that, sooner than later, some intrepid female Cambodian journalists make it to the international media stage too!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Not only it is important to promote an increased number of women in media organizations' boards of directors and as editors and media reporters. We also need to improve a better understanding and gender-responsiveness of media reporting and -in particular- when media focus on topics affecting or related to women. Likewise, we need more media visibility for women's perspectives and for women experts who are referenced as media sources in news articles; and not for depictions of women as passive agents or as sexual commodities. Cambodian women are often making big accomplishments in their communities and society but still remain excluded from the headlines due to prevailing male bias of journalists and editors.

One of the findings of the Study Report we are launching here today is that journalists often have a "lack of skills or understanding to report effectively and ethically on issues particularly affecting women, including use of appropriate terminology." In this regard, I am delighted to announce that the Ministry of Women's Affairs is in process of developing the next Cambodia Gender Assessment, a national report which provides a comprehensive overview on gender in all sectors. This national report will provide key up-to-date information and figures about the status of women in Cambodia and it will also include a booklet on 'Gender Terminology', with new and modern terms about gender equality and a revision of some of the terms used in the previous booklet we published more than 10 years ago with support from JICA (in 2006). Therefore, the upcoming Cambodia Gender Assessment will be an evidence-based tool that can be used by journalists and university students for a factual writing about gender equality and women.

Under the framework of the 'Leading the Way for Gender Equality' program -and with support from Sweden and UNDP- the Ministry of Women's Affairs is working with the ministries of Information; Education, Youth and Sports; and Culture of Fine Arts with the goal of promoting public behavioral change in favour of gender equality. Of course, we continue cooperating with the Ministry of Information and the Club of Journalists for the dissemination and implementation of the 'Code of Conduct for Media Reporting on Gender-Based Violence', which we launched jointly in June 2017.

I would also like to take this opportunity to correct some mistaken information contained on page number 32 of the Study Report that we are releasing today, in which the Ministry of Women's Affairs is criticized for taking "little action" against the TV host who made a joke about a rape and a murder of a Cambodian woman in August 2017. This information published in the report is not true because we took this case very seriously: We released a public statement condemning such unacceptable remarks and also published an Op-Ed in the *The Cambodia Daily* on 22nd August 2017. It has to be noted as well that my Ministry does not have the power or authority to prosecute journalist who breach the Media Code of Conduct, but to train and sensitize media reporters and editors.

And now I would like to conclude my remarks with a quote from the always-in-tune journalist Gloria Steinem: "Don't think about making women fit the world—think about making the world fit women."

Thank you very much!