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'The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Development: The importance of holistic interventions'
CAMBODIA TO HOST ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

SIEM REAP, Cambodia – 1 MARCH 2017

The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN will open a large scale regional conference focused on Early Childhood Development in Siem Reap today with delegates from 36 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The conference, titled *'The Transformative Power of Early Childhood Development: The importance of holistic interventions'*, will be attended by 530 national and international professionals including 12 Ministers and high-level policy makers who will look to share and learn about approaches to improving child wellbeing at the early stages of life.

Prime Minister HUN SEN says: "Since the end of the Khmer regime in 1979, learning opportunities have been available for all kindergarten children. Kindergartens have contributed to building children's characters, attitudes and prior knowledge for preparing them both for primary school" "Cambodia loves children and perceives them as future leaders and human capital".

Events in the first few years of a child's life are formative and play a vital role in shaping social, emotional, learning and health outcomes. The [2016 Lancet Early Childhood Development Series](#) highlights that young children's healthy development depends on nurturing care which ensures health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, and early learning. The widely-respected Series emphasises the need to deliver interventions across many different sectors, especially to the most disadvantaged children. These include investments in nutrition, education and social protection, among others.

As said by Dr. Sheldon Shaeffer, ARNEC's Chair of the Board of the Directors: "The ARNEC Vision 2020 states, "One of the key region-specific challenges is improving equitable access to early childhood development. There is inadequate attention to equity, particularly access for young children from disadvantaged groups on account of location, language/ethnicity, gender, disability, income and/or economic status. "

"There is clear scientific evidence that the first thousand days of life, from conception to a child's second birthday, have a significant impact on that child's wellbeing and development," said Karin Hulshof, UNICEF Regional Director for East Asia and the Pacific. "Quality care during pregnancy, proper breastfeeding, adequate nutrition, nurturing care, and early education all play a role in building healthy children who can maximize their potential as they grow. The future of a nation's children, and the sustainability of its economic growth, depend more than ever on investing in children, building health and cognitive capital in their early years. Investing in children is the right thing to do and it's the smart thing to do."

Working Together for Early Childhood

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The conference will also highlight the importance of investing in early childhood development for the sustainable development of nations. Investments in the first 1000 days of life contribute to building human capital, thereby promoting economic productivity later in life. To this end, the event will focus on the importance of ensuring every child has access to the basic services needed to thrive later in life.

The Conference will provide an opportunity for countries to share and learn from strategies aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.2: “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. Delegates will discuss different strategies such as the need to put in place integrated and inclusive early childhood and care policies and programmes supported by effective coordination among different partners responsible for health, nutrition, social and child protection, water and sanitation, and education.

About ARNEC:

The **Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)** is a professional network established in 2008 to build strong partnerships across sectors and different disciplines, organisations, agencies and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region to advance the agenda on and investment in early childhood. It is one of the most extensive and fast growing networks for early childhood development in the Asia-Pacific region, covering 47 countries and includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific sub-regions, as well as Central Asia to a small extent. ARNEC is making efforts to create a stronger and more dynamic ECD community in the Asia-Pacific, by equipping ARNEC members with updated knowledge to help them become effective advocates for holistic and inclusive ECD. ARNEC is supported by UNICEF, UNESCO, Plan International, Open Society Foundations, Save the Children and ChildFund International. www.arnec.net

About Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, National Committee For Early Childhood Care and Development, Cambodia:

The National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development or in short NC-ECCD acts as a mechanism for implementing the Law on Education and the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development. The vision of the national ECCD policy is *“All Cambodian children, from conception to aged under six, especially disadvantaged, vulnerable and poor children, shall be provided with care and development services, in line with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia”*.

The NC-ECCD is led by Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN Prime Minister as the Honourable Chair, and H.E Dr. HANG CHUON NARON Minister of Education, Youth and Sport as the Executive Chair.

The NC-ECCD, implements programmes to provide integrated support to pre-school children involving nutritious food supplements, health screening, referrals and deworming. There are community based components on parenting education targeting parents of children below 6 years old.

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About the organisers: The conference is organised by **Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, National Committee For Early Childhood Care and Development, Cambodia** and the **Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)** www.arnec.net including its core partners **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific <http://www.unicef.org/eapro/> and Regional Office for South Asia and <http://www.unicef.org/rosa/>; **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** www.unescobkk.org; **Plan International** www.plan-international.org/; **Open Society Foundations** <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/>; **Save the Children** www.savethechildren.org and **ChildFund International** <https://www.childfund.org/>.

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