

ACHR e-news

News from groups around Asia about what's happening in the region . . .

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

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- Cambodia's housing minister visits Bangkok on ACHR-supported learning tour
- The ACCA Program comes to the end of its second phase
- ACHR regional meeting scheduled for January 23-25, 2015
- Tom's Farewell

CAMBODIA'S HOUSING MINISTER TO BANGKOK

ACHR continues to collaborate with the Cambodian government as it sets up its first Housing Department, under the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction. The draft policy which is guiding the urban poor housing parts of the new department, follows very closely the kind of citywide, community-driven and partnership-based concepts we have been implementing in the ACCA Program, with the added element of community development funds to be set up or strengthened in each city, and the new national housing department supporting this housing development around the country. In the draft policy, which builds on the strength of the community processes and the community-city partnerships which already exist in many Cambodian cities, the role of the central government is small, and a big space is opened for municipal governments to work with the urban poor communities in their cities to work out citywide solutions to their problems of land, housing and basic infrastructure.

Over the past year, ACHR and the team from the National Community Development Fund Foundation (NCDF - formerly UPDF) and the Cambodia branch of UN-Habitat have been meeting with Mr. Im Chhun Lim, the Minister of Land Management, to discuss this.

It was agreed that ACHR would continue to assist in the capacity building of the Ministry and staff in several ways, including facilitating ministerial and staff study visits to community upgrading projects in Thailand, organizing training workshops in people-driven citywide slum upgrading for government officers, supporting the Ministry to develop a five-year housing plan and developing some pilot projects in collaboration with all four organizations. To seal the deal, an MOU will be signed between the Ministry, the NCDF Foundation and ACHR in late December 2014.

In November, as part of this collaboration, ACHR organized a high-level study visit in which Cambodia's Minister of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (all under one ministry!) spent two days in Bangkok, where he and other Cambodian officials met their Thai counterparts (including a conference with Thailand's Minister of Social Development and Human Security, and meetings with the Director and staff of CODI), and visited community upgrading projects being implemented by communities themselves (including Bang Bua), with support from the Baan Mankong Program - which is one model for how a national government can support a citywide and people-driven slum upgrading process that happens on a national scale. This important intervention and study tour, which was managed in close collaboration with CODI and the NCDF Foundation, is a good example of the strategic role ACHR can play to help make change in the right direction, as a regional support organization.

For more information on the process of setting up the new Housing Department in Cambodia, please contact ACHR.



TOM'S FAREWELL

Here's some news from the ACHR secretariat in Bangkok, which you might already have got wind of. After seventeen years with ACHR in Thailand, and a quarter-century in Asia, I have surprised myself by experiencing some unexpectedly intense pangs of homesickness - for my family, for the four distinct American seasons, for the twang of American English, for being able to understand what everyone is saying, for blackberries and garnet yams, and for all kinds of things I never thought would be so longed-for a few years back. And after giving it a good bit of thought, I have decided it's time to go back to the USA, while I'm still not quite too old to start a new chapter.

I'm not sure what I'll be doing once I get there, or what kind of skills I shall be able to flog on the American job market, in order to pay the rent. But what I do know is that I'll be making Portland, Oregon my landing pad. Portland is a smallish, bookish, rainy city in the Pacific Northwest corner of the country, surrounded by mountains and forests, and filled with coffee houses and vegan bakeries and blessed with a progressive and multi-cultural population and history. A close friend from college days has lived there with her family for decades, and whenever I've been able to visit Victoria, I've been charmed by the place. Portland also has the advantage of being just a few hours train ride away from my sister and her extended clan in Olympia and from my father and a whole bunch of other Kerrs in Seattle, and a short plane-ride from my mother in Boise. Plus, the city is a famously serious bicycle town, and I fully intend to join the ranks of Portlanders who propel themselves around on two wheels - something I've never been brave enough to do in Bangkok! *(the photo on the right isn't me or anybody I know, but it conveys the atmosphere of Portland's streets)*

But before I get on that Korean Airline flight to Seattle (aisle seat, lacto-ovo-vegetarian meals), I want to send a last little thank-you to all of you extraordinary, lovely, talented, energetic, kind-hearted, and big-thinking people who have made this great adventure of the past 25 years in Asia such a fertile one for me, and who have welcomed me and allowed me to come and snoop around your marvelous work and to try to add a little value to it by way of all the newsletters and reports and agitprop I've had so much fun putting together. It has been the adventure of a lifetime, and I'm leaving with a heart brimming with admiration and gratitude and affection. *Thank you everybody! Thank you so much!*

*Little birdie, oh little birdie,
come and sing me your song,
I've a short time to be here with you
and a long time to be gone.*

(from an old American folk song)

