Remarks by Kristin Parco, Chief of Mission, International Organization for Migration on behalf of the United Nations group on

Health and Protection support for returning migrants.

22 April 2020

Ministry of Interior

Samdech Krolahom Sar Kheng, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

Thank you, excellency Chou Bun Eang for your brief information related to the situation of the returning migrants from Thailand and for your leadership in ensuring the protection and rights of migrants are in the forefront of the response to the return of migrants.

Migrants and host communities are incredibly vulnerable and are being disproportionally impacted by COVID-19 for several reasons: they are vulnerable to transmission because of their living and working conditions. Concepts such as physical and social distancing, enhanced hygiene, and isolation are simply not feasible for many migrant and families who may live in cramped and crowded living conditions, are not being sufficiently protected in the workplace, and may not have the resources or possibility to reduce contact with others.

Migrants can also be at risk of transmission during transit and when they are on the move, having contact with many people. In many contexts migrants may be excluded from health systems or have additional barriers such as cost of health care, lack of insurance, language and cultural barriers. So those migrants that do need testing and treatment may not be getting it, leading to worse outcomes than local populations. The socio-economic impacts for migrants may be particularly severe, because of the types of industries they work in are likely significantly affected by lockdowns; and they are not being considered in economic mitigation measures; and there are no social protection mechanisms they can access. This is actually driving more migration as migrant workers are having to leave destination countries and areas due to job losses and having to return back home which Cambodia has experienced over the past weeks of more than 70,000 Cambodian migrants working in Thailand returned home and will impact on migrants’ s families and home communities because of reduced remittances. We are also seeing impacts across borders an increase in stigma and discrimination of these populations not only in destination areas, but also during travel/transit and even upon return home, due to fears of spread of COVID-19 transmission.

If this is not done, countries will fail in their efforts to control transmission and illness and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

Due to these, and other factors, WHO, IOM, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UN Women , UNOPS and OHCHR recognize that is it is critically essential that not only are migrants, refugees, and displaced populations considered by national response efforts, but this needs to go beyond which includes marginalized and vulnerable population of Cambodia such women, pregnant women, children, youth, elderly, people living with HIV and TB and persons with disabilities. Therefore, consideration and active measures must be taken to reach out to and include these populations for preparedness, response and mitigation.

Under the guidance of WHO and Ministry of Health and in line with the Cambodia Master Plan; the UN is committed to support in prevention of transmission and minimize serious disease and associated deaths, ensure availability and readiness of essential services and minimize impact through multi-sectoral response to support public health and broader social and economic measure. These priorities will be through:

1. **Enabling equitable access to health services and non-discriminatory to marginalized and vulnerable populations** by bridging the continuity of health and social services and mainstreaming GBV risk mitigation, child protection and Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS), community engagement and strengthening the impacts of COVID-19 on the health and social services at provincial, district and commune level to facilitate access to and delivery of integrated and coordinated health and social services and response to COVID-19.
2. **Support on the whole- of- government and whole-- of society approach and partnership on preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 outbreaks in migrants and host population is considered in the context of a broader government policy and coordination** between national and sub-national including non- health and health actors including civil society and achieving towards Universal Health Coverage wherein migrants and vulnerable populations ( pregnant women, children, elderly, those with underlying medical conditions such as TB and HIV and persons with disabilities are integrated into existing mechanism such as prevention, access to screening, information, treatment and strengthened referral mechanism.

Excellencies allow me to express our sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Interior’s leadership and Ministry of Health including all other Ministries and its departments in managing the mass return of migrants and COVID-19 through its national, provincial level authorities and honored for the trust in the United Nations to work with you to support the people of Cambodia during this critical time.

The virus does not discriminate or make any distinction between migrant and non-migrants, and therefore our response must not either. We are all in this together and it is essential that no-one is left behind and that all possible barriers for migrants and host populations are removed in collective efforts to fight COVID-19.

Excellencies, Thank you