

Speech of H.E. Kenya Akiba,
the Vice-Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications of the Government of Japan,
at the Inauguration Ceremony of the New Building of the National Institute of Statistics,
Ministry of Planning of the Royal Government of Cambodia
14 January 2008

Venerable Monks

H.E. Sar Kheng,

H.E. Chhay Than,

H.E. Ouk Chay,

H.E. San Sy Than,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Kenya Akiba, the Vice-Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications of the Government of Japan. I would like to express my honor at being invited to this ceremony.

Congratulations on today's inauguration of the new building of the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), the Ministry of Planning of Cambodia (MOP Cambodia). It is a great pleasure for me not only as the Vice-Minister of Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan (MIC Japan) but also as a member of the Japanese parliament to witness this inauguration ceremony today.

The MIC Japan, to which I belong, holds a number of responsibilities indispensable to the governing of the nation. Specially, MIC Japan is in charge of producing official statistics essential to government, such as the population census and economic census. Statistics have technical universality, that is, they act as a common language throughout the world. This allows the accumulated knowledge and experience of MIC Japan to be utilized in neighboring countries as well. To this end, MIC Japan has been cooperating as a counterpart of MOP Cambodia with the 2008 General Population Census of Cambodia (the 2008 Census) of which field survey is to be conducted in forthcoming March. MIC Japan has also cooperated in the construction of this new building as an important project related to the 2008 Census.

I also have a close relationship with Cambodia as a Japanese parliament member. For example, I visited last August as a member of a legislative mission. At that time Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, the Prime Minister, honored me with the opportunity to pay a courtesy call, and this project also arose in our conversation. Then last September H.E. Pou Sothirak, Cambodian Ambassador to Japan, kindly honored me with an excellent dinner. Thus I have been building a close relationship with Cambodia.

Next, allow me to take this opportunity to introduce the sequence of events leading up to today's inauguration ceremony. In 2003, H.E. San Sy Than, the Director-General of NIS, visited Japan and attended "The Tenth Meeting of the Heads of National Statistical Offices of East Asian Countries" presided over by MIC Japan. At that time, H.E. made two requests for assistance to the Director-General of the Statistics Bureau, MIC Japan: in the 2008 Census, and in the construction of this new building. Responding to these requests, MIC Japan dispatched officers to MOP Cambodia to launch two projects under Japan's program of official development assistance. To date MIC Japan has dispatched officers 16 times to MOP Cambodia to facilitate these two projects, and as a result, we are able to hold today's inauguration ceremony.

This new building will initially be used mainly for data processing of the 2008 Census, scheduled to commence this coming April. It is indeed a great achievement to have this new building inaugurated before data processing begins, and I should like to express my deep respect and appreciation to everyone who helped to make this possible.

The population census is one of the most important official projects currently being engaged in by Cambodia. The population census will allow an official complete count of the population of Cambodia and produce detailed statistics. Demographic statistics obtained from the population census will be essential to governmental policy-making, planning and administration for the further development of Cambodia. The population census can also provide a sampling frame for producing other statistics. Various sorts of statistics are called for more than ever before for the purpose of social and economic developments of Cambodia. Official statistics have critical influence on a broad spectrum of government policy-making and planning. In this sense, the population census plays a very important role in the self-sustaining development of Cambodia, and this is why Japan provides technical cooperation to improve the quality of official statistics.

Here, I would like to introduce the technical cooperation project in which MIC Japan has been playing a primary role. The official name is "the Project on Improving Official Statistics in Cambodia". The Project phase I was completed last year and the Project phase II is now underway. There are four major project activities as follows:

Firstly, the dispatch of statistical experts from Japan, commencing with officers of MIC Japan, to MOP Cambodia to provide technical cooperation on statistics with a central focus on the population census;

Secondly, the dispatch of NIS officers to Japan as trainees to receive statistical training with a central focus on the population census at several statistical organizations, commencing with MIC Japan;

Thirdly, the dispatch of officers of MOP Cambodia to Statistics Indonesia to receive statistical training with a central focus on an economic census, i.e. to promote South-South Cooperation as well;

Fourthly, provision of the necessary equipment for the project to MOP Cambodia;

In addition, with a view to implementing this upcoming 2008 Census, integrated and intensive statistical training courses were conducted for more than 650 officials of NIS, line ministries, and provincial departments at project phase I in order to improve the statistical capacity of statistical staff of the Royal Government of Cambodia. Several excellent Japanese statistical experts were dispatched as lecturers for these training courses.

Thus Japan has been working to help improve official statistics in Cambodia, focusing especially on the forthcoming 2008 Census.

Next, the Royal Government of Cambodia approved the construction of this new building as one of the uses of Japan's Non-Project Grant Aid Counterpart Fund in order to sustain the transferred techniques more effectively in the long term. I believe this decision will be conducive to promoting autonomous development of statistical techniques in Cambodia.

Japan is also sincerely looking forward to further cementing the relationship with Cambodia in future, and at the same time hopes to help further improvement in official statistics in Cambodia. The plan at present is to run this project until 2010. I understand that the economic census is planned after the completion of the 2008 Census. Japan is also cooperating in the preparation of the economic census, for example in compiling the list of establishments as part of the current phase II project. Further requests from the Royal Government of Cambodia to Japan for cooperation in the economic census will be given serious consideration.

Finally, people-to-people exchange serves as a basis for country-to-country exchange. In this sense, it is indeed fortunate that we have plenty of opportunities for people-to-people exchange between Cambodia and Japan through this project. As H.E. Katsuhiko Shinohara, Japanese Ambassador to Cambodia, mentioned, the diplomatic relationship between Cambodia and Japan has now entered its 55th year. I understand that several events are planned in Cambodia throughout this year as the Friendship Year 2008. It is a great honor for me that I am the one who paid the first visit to Cambodia as a member of the Japanese parliament in this memorable year. Thus it would be utmost success for Japan's official development assistance if the people-to-people exchange as well as the technical cooperation leads to a long friendship between Cambodia and Japan.

~~Finally,~~ I would like to express my hope that this new building will be utilized continuously for the foreseeable future as a token of friendship not only between Cambodia and Japan, but also between MOP Cambodia and MIC Japan, as inscribed on the commemorative plaque. I am confident that the 2008 Census will be completed successfully, and that this new building will contribute to improving official statistics in Cambodia.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.