



# World Interfaith Harmony Week Report

“Harmony among people, Harmony with nature”  
31<sup>st</sup> January 2014

Anchanh Commune, Boribo district, Kampong Chhnang province



Supported by:

**DANMISSION** 

## Background:

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We are a group of individuals and NGOs who are working on Peacebuilding from ACT, CMYCC, Parable Cambodia, CEPA, ICF, PBO, WGP, and YRDP co-operate to organize for World Interfaith Harmony Week compound from Buddhist, Christian and Muslim based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia was gathered in solidarity with people to celebrate the World Interfaith Harmony Week which object to engage the value of interfaith cooperation.

The theme of our event is "Harmony among people, Harmony with nature". This year, the team was decided to celebrate the World Interfaith Harmony Week on 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 2015 which was take place in Ksach Sar, Boribo district, Kampong Chhnang province with 189 participated with 92 ladies from diverse faiths from Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim as they are religious leaders, lay leader, lecturers, students, NGOs worker, villagers, and communities activist people from Kampot, Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Siem Reap, Oddormeanchey, Kratie, Pursat, Kampong Cham, Prey Veng, and Phnom Penh.



## Agendas and processes:

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After a long travelling by buses from Phnom Penh to Anchanh village, we then continued from the village byTale Thorng (Ploughing machine) to the community forest where we celebrated the World Interfaith Harmony Week. The event started from 1:30pm to 2:55pm. It's a short period of time for this event. However, it was a great dialogue between participants and speakers and vice versa. We had a great time listen to the community shared their concern and experience related to forestry issue. Following the agenda, we would like to present below:

We started the event by welcome speech from a representative officer from Vice president of Department of Cults and Religion Mr. Chum Sam Ang had shared his experience in the last few years about planting the trees here which organized by ACT interfaith community network. With a friendly conversation, he encouraged and thank to all participants who join this event and would recommend for all of us support such of this event like this to push the interest of more people to turn to the environment.

The open speech by Mr. Sokha Nop which he proclaimed that World Interfaith Harmony Week under the theme of "Love your neighbor" was recognized by United Nation under the request from religious leaders from different faiths and decided to have World Interfaith Harmony Week on the first week of February. We are the people of Cambodia who love peace had initiative this event to benefit to people from different faith especially people in the community. He continued, "We have different faith but we are the people of Cambodia and we are the same human live in one earth. All religions are taught us to love and connect with nature peacefully and harmoniously."

Mrs. Peng Ath, a representative from forestry community leader in Kampong Chhnang province was invited to share the history of the forestry and suggestion toward the Ministry of Forestry to join hand to protect their forest. She noticed with sadness that this forest was cut down completely and now it just grown better than before<sup>1</sup>, if compare to other previous years you all will be surprise as no tree at all. Our current forest is 1459.59 hector which approved by department of forestry in the province. She requested to the officer of forestry and other relevant people to help and support her community so that their forest will recognize by the government.

With a short conversation, Mr. Keo Narith, a representative of Department of Forestry appreciated so much to people in the community in term of their hardworking to protecting and re-planting this forest. Religion and forest is very important to all people from different faiths if all faiths people love forest please join hand to protect our forest and support this forest communities and hope next few year when you visit us again you will see more tree in this forest communities.

Each religious leader from Buddhist, Islam and Christian shared their practical message related to interfaith for peace and nature was take turn with: Venerable Both Salouth gave a short speak according to his actual work related to Buddhism and forest from Oddormeanchey province. The forest under his protection is 18,261 hector. My forest was recognized by the Ministry of Forestry in 2008. It's hard to make this possible if there is no participation from people and monks. "It is a blessing for the community where it has a forest. Having forest it could protect us from disaster, famine, and other diseases and people can



<sup>1</sup> She mention that because most of the participants was suppressing why the forest has less tall tree and not look like forest it seem like the dessert. And some of ACT network who are from other provinces who had been visit Rukawan forest of Ven. Bun Salouth at Oddormeanchey province also mention the differences of the forest in Kampong Chhnang compare to the forest at Oddormeanchey it totally difference.



make more benefit from the forest to survive people life. To have this forest happy all of us need to devote our strength and life to protect the forest for our community and country. We need to start from today to protect our forest, if we don't have a forest we don't have harmony either.

Pastor Prey Sokun, Christian leader from Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia mentioned about peace and harmony which related to nature and human being. "Eden" garden is a place of hope and peace between God and human being, man and woman, man and nature. God is the actor to reconcile the world with His love and peace. He most focused on peace between people with people in term of not take revenge, and forgives one another. We might think in this way. Why this person treats me in this way? What happened to him? If we could explore the root causes we will understand the problem well. It started from us to bring a peaceful mind to your world.

Toun Ahmad, the present of Islam association from Kampot province shared about his faith and his practical through Quran. There are three main religions in the world. Hence, the number of follower is not count which one is bad or good. Islam doesn't live far away from nature and peace but Quran tells us that Muslim is giving peace to the world. Why the world project Islam as terrorist? We don't count them as followers. Each religious follower has good and bad believer. Those who obey their scripture would do a good deed. Meanwhile, he mentioned that Islam is a peace religion.

Through this panel we discovered that all religious scriptures are the same teaching, but different practical one. Practical is depending on the culture and context of the people. To make their religion alive is depending on their practical. Wording is quite easy to express while hardly to apply in the real world. Imagine if every single people who obey their own religious teaching how beautiful the world we are. In contradiction, people from different seem very boast about their scripture and fight for the best one. Rarely, we see people ignored with what they have learnt from their leaders. Sadly, some people use religion as a tool for violent, oppression, to earn their power and control the world.

Reflection and evaluation: 1) Have you ever joint such interfaith event before?  
2) How religious (interfaith) teachings contribute to protection of natural resources and sustainable community development? Through these questions, they encouraged participants to think critically about their own faith and practical that connected to peace and harmony. We found that people quite interesting in this event. They mentioned it is a good event that organized for them to listen, learn and meet directly



with the people in the community. They experienced of a real adventure in forest. Moreover, they appreciated how to pack our snacks and meals. All food was packed by banana leaves. It really encouraged them to see this environment conservative example. It's a great lesson learnt in the real field, from other participants and religious speakers. This event open a space for all follower connect with each other. We learnt how to build a peaceful mind and act according to our own faith and other religious teaching. We are come from different religion but we can come together as one to protect our nature and bring a harmony among the people. They committed to bring what they have learnt and experienced here to share with their friends, families, colleagues and organization partners.

The reflection evaluation was done among the participants at the end of the activities:

### **Challenges:**

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- Time for celebrate the event short and did a long travel, limited timeframe of the event that need to be skipped some agenda
- Miscommunication among the communities forest that need time to gather as too many people in the event.



### **Successes:**

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- Bring a closeness and good relationship with divers religious, the community, and other participants
- Motivate and encourage local people to strive and protect their forest
- Direct experience in the field
- Appreciation from the participants
- Each NGOs partner was very good in cooperation among each other to make the event happened
- High in responsibilities among the team and enjoy by all

### **Recommendation:**

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- Should organize to promote such activities for more in other forestry areas and more participants.