



\*\*\*\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\*\*\*\*



**A Feature Story on  
Phnom Penh's Water Champion**

**1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit**

This is the second feature story to be released in the lead up to the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia-Pacific Water Summit, a series produced by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) in Singapore and released by the Asia-Pacific Water Forum.

This week, Puy Kea recounts the formidable accomplishment of Mr. Ek Sonn Chan, director of Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority (PPWSA), who turned this decrepit and war-torn water supply system into a stellar public sector water utility that provides 24-hour, safe drinking water to Phnom Penh.

"It was bureaucratic and it was full of incompetent staffers," when he took it over in 1993 recalls Ek Sonn Chan. "I fired many staff and my friends told me that I would be assassinated".

The 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit (1st APWS) will be held in Beppu, Oita prefecture, on December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007, with top-level decision-makers' participation from 49 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Exchanging on the central theme of "Water Security: Leadership and Commitment," top level dignitaries will make keynote speeches, while a series of thematic panel sessions are scheduled to discuss in further depth some of the issues of concern, such as:

- Leadership and Capacity Development for Ensuring Water Security in the Asia-Pacific Region: Led by donor organizations in the Asia-Pacific region, such as ADB, JBIC and JICA, and one of the well known United Nations' organizations, UNESCO, will collaboratively hold a mega session on water financing and . It is probable that various heads of governments will participate in the session. Speeches from the heads of UNESCO, ADB and JBIC are planned to be keynote speeches.
- Monitoring of Investment and Results: The importance of monitoring the investment impact for enforcing water resources management will be discussed. To strengthen the enforcement, the session aims to propose the establishment of a Water Ministers Council for the Asia-Pacific (WaMCAP).

The conclusions from the 1<sup>st</sup> APWS will be conveyed to upcoming political events in Japan, namely TICAD IV and the G8 Summit in 2008.

※The 1<sup>st</sup> APWS is sponsored by Coca-Cola Company, Limited (Japan), Canon Inc., with support from The Asian Development Bank and the Government of Japan, among others.

※The Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF) is working to increase the region's access to improved water supplies and sanitation, protect and restore river basins, and reduce people's vulnerability to water disasters. The APWF champions efforts aimed at boosting investments, building capacity, increasing public outreach and enhancing cooperation in the water sector at the regional level.

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The press is required to pre-register for the Summit to obtain press accreditation: "Instructions for Pre-registration" document, to be downloaded at [www.apwf.org](http://www.apwf.org) or [www.watersummit.jp](http://www.watersummit.jp).

For questions or detailed information on the Summit (participants list, steering committee members, programme, etc.), please contact:

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## Assassination Threats Couldn't Stop Cambodian Official Providing Safe Drinking Water To The Poor

By Puy Kea

**Phnom Penh**, 10 Oct: A Cambodian public official has weathered assassination threats and a slow moving bureaucracy in a war-torn country - where most of its infrastructures were destroyed - to create one of the most trusted and safest water supplies in the region, particularly, the service provided to the poor in an overwhelming crowded capital.

“It was bureaucratic and it was full of incompetence staffers,” recalled Ek Sonn Chan, director of Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority (PPWSA), who has been working with the public utility since October 1993. “I fired many staff and my friends told me that I would be assassinated”.

Today, not only he has survived, but he has transformed PPWSA into a model public water utility in Asia, for which he has been awarded the 2006 Ramon Magsaysay Award – the Asian equivalent of the Nobel prize – and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has hailed him as a “water champion”.

PPWSA is different because it has achieved efficiency, greater water productivity and increasing consumer base by radically transforming a decrepit and war-torn water supply system with missing water and missing customers into a model public sector water utility that provides 24-hour safe drinking water to Phnom Penh.

Under Ek Sonn Chan's leadership, the PPWSA now provides 90 percent of water coverage to some 1.4 million Phnom Penh residents and people living in the outskirts of the city.

“My dream in the government service is that I want to produce water for people across the country to receive enough water with high quality,” the 57 year-old Chan said in an interview given at his modest government office.



Ek Sonn Chan in his office

During the Khmer Rouge regime, from 1975 to 1979, the water supply was out of operation and many of its production, distribution facilities and equipment were destroyed, while many of its qualified personals were also killed.

When Chan joined PPWSA in 1993, they were supplying water to 40 percent of the city area and serving merely 20 percent of the total population. At best, water supply was intermittent and only available for 10 hours a day.

As Phnom Penh resident in Chamkarmon District, Ly Korm, remembers: “Now I have sufficient water to use. In 1993 I didn't have 24 hours water supply and, at the time, when the electricity was cut the water was also cut.”

“Some powerful people who had high positions within the authority did not pay the bills. Some people made illegal connections,” recalled Chan, adding that at that time 72 percent of the water was lost.

Now, the situation is different with consumers paying the full bills, and both soft and hard infrastructures in full place. Chan says PPWSA collects almost all the bills. “We have lost only seven percent, it is very minor. If we compare to other countries they have lost about 20 percent,” he noted.

Chan said PPWSA can produce 235,000 cubic meters daily that serve about 1.4 million people from 20,000 families in the city. He added that there are 160,000 connections across Phnom Penh and outskirts of the city, with the installed 1,500 kilometers water tubes within Phnom Penh.



A Cambodian man drinks tap water made available just in front of Cambodia's National Assembly in Phnom Penh

Chan Samnang, one of the water consumers in Russei Keo district in Phnom Penh said PPWSA has given her a new life with an extreme change from 10 years ago during which she said her home had no running water.

"The situation has much improved from no running water to the tapped one with an affordable price," Chan Samnang said. But, she added that despite PPWSA's assurance to inform the public that the water is safe to drink, she is still not confident to drink water from the tap yet.

Ly Korm is also not confident to drink the tap water yet. But, Chan likes to assure his people that the water is safe to drink without boiling. "Any place you turn the tap, you can drink it right away," he said, adding "I am drinking the tap water without boiling for already six years. I am safe."

He issued a challenge to the citizens here: "If you get stomachache after drinking the tap water, I will pay you compensation" he said.

Chan believes that it is an economical imperative that drinkable water be available on taps to the poor. "Now, the poor communities drink water from the taps and they can save \$5 per month from not buying fire wood," he argues.



A Cambodian boy drinks tap water

He said his authority had conducted experiments by testing water in 30 different places, and that the results filed by the authority's laboratory, found no virus in the water.

Chan who is passionate about his work, says he was taken by surprise with the 2006 Ramon Magsaysay Award. "I did not know about the award until I checked it online. It makes me happy because my effort has been recognized," he said.

Not only PPWSA is providing safe drinking water to a majority of the city's poor, untypical for a public utility, it is even making a modest profit. Chan said last year the authority had made a profit of about \$3.5 millions and this year it is expected to be \$4 million.

"My business is growing. I am making higher and higher profits for the government," boasted Chan, expressing confidence that with his plan by 2020, his authority can provide 100 percent of water coverage within the country's capital of Phnom Penh and the suburbs.

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