

## Local NGO with Regional Clout

By seizing the presence of activists from 15 countries in Phnom Penh to collectively lobby the Cambodian stakeholders on migrant workers' rights, CARAM Cambodia has shown that it is a local NGO that can effectively use external pressure to affect change.

CARAM Cambodia successfully co-hosted the "Capacity Building on Human Rights and Migrant Workers in the Asia-Pacific Region" from the 15 to 19 October that brought together 34 participants from the Asia Pacific region. It was organised with the Diplomacy Training Program of The University of New South Wales.

During the workshop, CARAM Cambodia arranged a lobbying exercise for participants to meet with officials from two government ministries and the recruitment agents' association. Despite it being planned just as "a sharing of experience" from international NGO activists and the Cambodian government officials, one of the groups meeting with officials from the Ministry of Labour resulted in a fruitful lobbying exercise.

About 10 activists had a meaningful two way exchange with the Ministry of Labour's Under Secretary, its Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, and their delegation in the Ministry of Labour. Activists from the region raised the plight of migrant workers in the region and urged the Cambodian government to exert pressure on receiving countries to protect migrant workers' rights. As Malaysia is one of the major receiving countries for Cambodian migrant workers, activists brought up issues of Malaysian laws that empowered employers and agents to control migrant workers, and the lack of right to redress when migrant workers' rights are violated in Malaysia. Activists also shared the experiences of migrant workers from other countries whose' governments had demanded for standard contracts.

At the end of the meeting, the Cambodian Ministry of Labour officials expressed their interest in further cooperation with NGOs like CARAM Cambodia to develop a standard contract for migrant workers by 2008. They also assured to have dialogue with the Malaysian government in the forthcoming ASEAN meeting on providing greater protection for Cambodian domestic workers in Malaysia.