



# មូលនិធិខ្មែរសម្រាប់ការសិក្សា Cambodian Education Excellence Foundation

ផ្តល់ឱកាសសិក្សាស្មើគ្នាស្រាប់គ្នា Equal Education Opportunity for All.

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## Speech by Mrs. Chenda Smead

Vice-President for Program

Scholarship Award Ceremony at Institute of Technology of Cambodia

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

31 December 2007

28 years ago, I fled Cambodia running barefoot across the jungle. I was the same age as some of you now. My body was brittle from four long years of hunger and illness, my heart was broken from losing loved ones. But my mind moved my body across the jungle in the middle of the night to get to freedom. Like many other Cambodians who had to flee the country, my family and I did what we had to do to make a life outside of our homeland. I started out my new life in the U.S. with great difficulties, but now I have made a comfortable life for myself and my family. And I am standing here today by choice. I made a choice to be here today in Cambodia because my heart brought me back to my birth place where I know my help is needed. I have discovered, although it took me all these years, my true calling in life. My true calling is not in my strong career in the U.S., it is in my work I do to help make a difference in the lives of those in my birth country as well as those in my adopted country. And I am very honored and grateful that I have the opportunity to be here to share with you my joy of giving back.

That is my story. All of you have your stories too. Some of your personal stories are unbearable for any of us to hear. Some are heartwarming and some are heart breaking. But it is not about what happened to us, it is about how we get ourselves out of the hardships in our lives. You can rise above most of any difficulties you have. You can make the best with what you have. And you can make a difference right here in your homeland, even though, like me, you didn't have a choice of where you were born, and like me, you don't have a choice of where to live. And although you might not have many material things, you have a personal power from within; your dignity, your integrity and most of all your wisdom. You can use these qualities even before you finish your education to make the place of your birth a place that you can be proud of. Cambodia is a country with rich heritage and culture, which has suffered the misfortunes of war, poverty and corruption. With strong determination from your generation, the government, and the people of Cambodia, with the help from Cambodians who live abroad as well as those from different organizations from all around the world, Cambodia will one day be at its best again. The world has a dream for a prosperous and peaceful Cambodia. You must participate in this dream and have faith in yourself, in your people and in your country.

Beauty is everywhere in Cambodia. Authentic beauty is all around you. Cambodia is still one of the world's purest beauties. Try everyday to help restore and preserve this beauty. And look for the beauty in the human souls and in your own soul. In your daily life, look not to those who have more than you, but instead look for those who have less than you and who desperately need your help. The beauty of education is not in how much money you will make when you finish school; the beauty is in your ability to make a difference in the lives of those around you. Study hard to sharpen your skills and

your mind each and every day. Have a dream plan to make Cambodia a place free of human cruelties, corruption and injustice. Make Cambodia a safe haven for all. This is where your ancestors, and your people created beautiful temples hundreds of years ago that are still unparalleled in the world. This is where your great grand children will reside and your spirit will roam.

A philosopher said "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." You can start by asking yourself each and every day, "Did I do something today that I feel proud of?" Think about things like, "Did I pick up some litter I saw in the street?" "Did I tell a child to go to the help center rather than begging for money in the street?" "Did I help a person who was being beaten on the side walk?" "Did I do anything to help stop a sexual predator?" Tell yourself the minute you wake up in the morning, "Today will be a good day because I am going to look for things that I can do to help others." Learn how to be giving. Follow your heart. You can start now with small things. Do what you can inside the framework of your daily lives. Take pride in your home, your neighborhood, your city, and your country. Protect and teach the children you see in the street to stand up for themselves against wrong doers. Share your wisdom with those who appear heartless and selfish. Be a role model, a hero, and show other people how they can be giving and helpful. Do not yield to malicious bullies who think only of today and only for themselves. You might say to yourself that you are not so perfect yourself; none of us are. Sometimes being the representative of hope is hard work. Many leaders have flaws and have failed, but they never gave up. Until life is good for all Cambodians, no matter how successful you are, or how much power you hold, you must not be content. Remember we are all one and the same even though we are born to different families or in different countries. Cambodians must think of themselves as one. When one of us is harmed, we all hurt, whether or not it is immediate or direct. Eventually the harm will reach us. So have compassion for your fellow countrymen. Instead of competing with each other, work together for a better future for all.

I want to end my speech today with this last message: Create a dream of how you can best help your people and your country and stay close to that dream while you are continuing your studies. Live your life with integrity, with self respect, and respect for others. Nurture and protect those around you and return the kindness you receive. I wish you great success in your studies, but most of all I wish you equal success in voicing and living your wisdom, and in your journey to help rebuild Cambodia. And I want to add the most important message from all the members of the CEE Foundation who work day and night, and from those who contribute their hard earned money to support this cause. We believe in you. We count on you. We depend on you. We place our hopes in you. We saw it in your writing, and I can see it now in your eyes; the great ambition, dedication and commitment, and your loyalty to your country and your people. You were chosen with great care and consideration, so make us proud.

Thank you.