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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Cambodia among first countries to receive COVID-19 vaccines from COVAX Facility

On 2 March, 324,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine licensed to Serum Institute of India (SII) will arrive at Phnom Penh International Airport and will be transferred to Central Medical Stores of the Ministry of Health before being given to priority groups, including those at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 and those who are most vulnerable to developing severe illness from COVID-19. These additional COVID-19 vaccines will provide the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) with another powerful tool in its ongoing efforts to combat COVID-19.

However, vaccines alone will not end the pandemic. Ongoing public health measures to prevent transmission will still be needed alongside vaccination, including adhering to testing and quarantine measures, mask wearing, hand hygiene and physical distancing.

These 324,000 doses are the first of a total of 1.1 million doses are expected to be provided in batches by the COVAX Facility by the end of May. Cambodia is expected to receive doses for 20% of the total population (an estimated 7 million doses) from COVAX, with further batches continuing to arrive throughout the year. The COVAX Facility is an unprecedented global effort to provide every country in the world with equitable access to safe COVID-19 vaccines as rapidly as possible. COVAX is led by Gavi, CEPI and the World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with UNICEF. Cambodia is among the first countries in the Western Pacific Region to receive vaccines from COVAX.

Given the limited global supply of vaccines, the RGC is in the process of procuring, through numerous means, vaccines which have met its regulatory safety standards as quickly as possible to protect its citizens. Vaccines were first administered on 10 February, and to date more than 65,000 people have been vaccinated. The arrival of these additional vaccine doses will be a significant further step towards achieving the RGC's goal of vaccinating 10 million people.

His Excellency Professor Mam Bunheng, Minister of Health, representing the Royal Government of Cambodia, said "The Cambodian government's priority in the early stages of this vaccination roll-out is to save lives by protecting frontline health workers, those at high risk of COVID-19 exposure or those who are likely to develop serious illness due to COVID-19. This is the best approach to maximising the impact of the limited supply of vaccines available in the initial phase. Not only will vaccines help save lives, they will help to drive the country's economic recovery."

His Excellency the Minister of Health also said, "I urge everyone to continue to follow **Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen**, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia's guidance on the 3 dos and don'ts. The 3 dos are to wear a mask, wash hands regularly, and maintain physical distancing of 1.5 metres. The 3 don'ts are to avoid confined and enclosed spaces, avoid crowded spaces,

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and avoid touching each other. Stay home if you have a fever or suspect COVID-19 and immediately seek medical assistance or call the 115 hotline."

As per Cambodia's National Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP), priority groups include health workers, and essential workers involved in the vaccination roll-out effort, elderly populations and adults with co-morbidities. As supply of vaccines will be limited due to high global demand, vaccination of these priority groups will happen in a gradual and phased manner. The RGC will communicate to the population to keep them updated so that priority groups have the latest information about how, when and where they can access vaccines when it is their turn.

The development of effective and safe vaccines in less than a year after the emergence of a new virus is one of modern medicine's greatest success stories. The vaccines that will be used in Cambodia have gone through rigorous development and safety testing procedures, where the RGC has assessed the evidence, benefits and risks. The AstraZeneca vaccine licensed to SII provided through COVAX was authorised for emergency use by the Ministry of Health on 22 February, after being listed for emergency use by WHO on 15 February.

"WHO is working closely with Gavi, CEPI and UNICEF to ensure fair and equitable access to vaccines. We're proud to play our part in this milestone moment," said Dr Li Ailan, WHO Representative to Cambodia. "In addition to public health measures, COVID-19 vaccines are a critical new tool to protect people from serious disease, to prevent the health system from being overwhelmed, and to save lives."

In addition to collaborating on the delivery of the vaccines through COVAX, the RGC has worked closely with WHO and UNICEF on its broader COVID-19 vaccination readiness and roll-out.

Forough Foyouzat, UNICEF's Representative in Cambodia, said, "UNICEF is proud of our long history of collaborating with the Ministry of Health and WHO on immunisation in Cambodia. This new vaccine is a pivotal moment in turning the tide on this pandemic. As health workers and other front-line staff receive vaccines, we will be able to gradually see a return to the new normal life, including better access to health, education and protection services. In the spirit of universal health coverage, let's leave no one behind."

Based on the current evidence, we know that COVID-19 vaccines can protect individuals from severe disease and reduce hospitalizations. Even once people have been vaccinated, they should continue to follow proven preventive measures. We must all do our part to use all the tools available to us to overcome this pandemic.

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