



*for a living planet*®

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**Press Release**

**For immediate release**

## Rangers are the guardian of healthy forests that help prevent risks of future zoonotic diseases

Rangers are currently on the frontline of the COVID-19 emergency, and are the key to safeguard the ways of life of people whose lives and cultures are inseparable from nature. Rangers are the backbone of Cambodia's protected areas in both landscape and riverscape.

In Cambodia's Eastern Plains and Mekong Flooded Forest Landscapes where the Royal Government and WWF cooperate on protected areas management, a total of 200 rangers and river guards are working day and night to preserve the biological diversity and ecosystem services that provide the critical life including food, water, energy, air and create jobs and incomes for local communities. Their efforts are also complemented by the participation of 660 community patrolling teams who support activities within the community forest areas.

However, they are exposed to difficult and hazardous environmental conditions such as floods, fires, dangerous animals, illnesses such as malaria, dengue fever, COVID-19, while also running the risk of being targeted because they stand up to incidents involving illegal hunting, logging, fishing and land encroachment.

"While many people remain working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, rangers continue their daily duties on the frontline of conservation," said **Mr. Keo Sopheak, Director of Monduliri's Provincial Department of Environment**.

From removing snares, prevent wildlife poaching and habitats destruction such as illegal logging and land encroachment from the forest landscapes, to combating the illegal wildlife trade at source, these rangers work tirelessly to reinforce the Cambodia's laws, while stopping direct contacts between human and high risk wildlife trade.

"Not only do they prevent wildlife crimes, protect forest habitats, but they also prevent risks of zoonotic spillovers from happening," **Mr. Sopheak** added.

As a result of the crackdown on illegal wildlife trafficking during the first half of this year in Monduliri, 60 kilograms of bush meat were confiscated and destroyed. Over the past five years, 3,319 kilograms of wild meat of barking deer, elongated tortoise, wild pig, water monitor lizard, porcupine as well as banteng, gaur and green peafowl were confiscated, along with a total of 176 dead animals destined for meat or medicine.

On the occasion of this year World Ranger Day, WWF commends the commitment and sacrifice of all rangers for safeguarding of wildlife, their natural habitats, and the forest and river ecosystems.

"WWF honours all of the dedicated rangers who every day risk their lives at the forefront to protect our treasure trove, especially during the crisis of COVID-19 pandemic," said **Mr. Seng Teak, WWF-Cambodia Country Director**.

A recent study by WWF showed many of the animals targeted by poaching and snaring, including wild boar, palm civets, and pangolins carry the highest risk of zoonotic disease transmission.



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“As WWF continues to work closely with the Royal Government of Cambodia and its relevant Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and provincial authorities, on managing protected areas and fisheries conservation zones in the two landscapes, with the provision of necessary support in law enforcement activities, I urge to take appropriate measures to end the trade in wild animals – especially mammals, birds and reptiles which are at high risk of potential transmitting diseases to humans,” **Mr. Teak** added.

To ensure that Cambodian people remain safe and healthy and that the next zoonotic outbreak doesn't start here, WWF is advocating a 'One Health' approach linking the health of people, animals and our shared environment and urges this to be included in decision making on wildlife, land use change and development decisions.

Law enforcement is a key component for protected areas in the Eastern Plains and Mekong Flooded Forests Landscapes under the management of Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. WWF Cambodia has over the past two decades been providing active support in the implementation and enforcement of the protected area, forestry and fishery laws, complementing other WWF initiatives on community engagement and biodiversity research, thanks to the continuous support from USAID, THE EUROPEAN UNION, DGD, SDC, BMZ, Sida, GEF/UNEP/MOE, WWF-BELGIUM, WWF-US, WWF-SWEDEN, WWF-SWITZERLAND, WWF-NETHERLANDS, WWF-SINGAPORE, WWF-GERMANY, WWF-INTERNATIONAL, THE KING BAUDOIN FOUNDATION, ZOO NUREMBERG, TELOS IMPACT.

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**Note to editors:**

Images and summaries of law enforcement results are available [here](#), or copy/paste this in a browser: <https://bit.ly/3BNjejo>

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**About WWF**

WWF is an independent conservation organisation, with over 35 million supporters and a global network active in nearly 100 countries. Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. Visit <https://www.panda.org> for more information about WWF.