



A Light in the Darkness

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.
Isaiah 9:2*

THE JOURNEY HOME – There’s usually a sense of anticipation before my return to Cambodia – a mix of excitement and expectation to see what God would have us work on and accomplish. But inevitably, amidst all the work, I miss home and family. Christmas reminds me that being home for holidays is an opportunity that many Cambodians will not have this year.

Many young Cambodian women agree to travel far away from their small villages with dreams of working in big cities. Their hearts are hopeful that they can finally pull their families out of poverty. They have no idea they are being trafficked. Brokers promise them high salaries and good jobs, spreading rumours of success to neighbours and family members. But the reality can be horrifyingly bleak. Often sold as foreign brides, some of these women are starved, tortured and raped.

The numbers are staggering. It’s estimated that by 2020, China will have 30 million bachelor men without any prospects of marriage. Desperate for wives and cheap domestic labour, a growing number are turning to traffickers who are trading in the lives of Cambodian women for profit. And we have the privilege of demonstrating love to these young women who have experienced only betrayal, deception and abuse since leaving home.

The journey home for each young woman is challenging in itself. Take, for example, a young woman who has escaped a

forced marriage in rural China. Program staff members must collaborate with the Embassy, government officials and local authorities to re-establish her identity and start the necessary legal process for her to return to Cambodia. This is a difficult undertaking when her passport and papers have been confiscated and destroyed by traffickers. Often without such identity papers she is subjected to further fines, fees and extortion.

After an arduous legal process, she can finally



The Journey Home..... 1
25 Years of Representing You...3
News in Brief..... 4

This Christmas
DOUBLE
YOUR IMPACT
(See Back for Details)

return home. The first faces she will see upon arriving in Cambodia are those of our staff members, welcoming her with loving compassion. What an opportunity to be a blessing! We provide her with the opportunity to receive a range of services, from counselling and care packages to support through medical check-ups. But our initial care for her is designed to be short before we facilitate her return to the people she misses most – her family. We pray that in these encounters, ranging from just hours to a few days, each young woman would experience God's deep love through our care and concern for her.

Often it's hard to know if our compassion is reaching through the trauma. But sometimes it's obvious, and it brings joy to our staff members when they see the difference they've made! Recently, when one of the young women left the RAP Community Home to return to see her family, she wept tears of gratitude because of the comfort and care she had received from Ratanak.



Our staff members, as part of a delegation, present at introductory discussions between Chinese and Cambodian government officials in China.

You might think that after such a difficult ordeal, her return to her family would be easy. Unfortunately that's not always the case. When we escort a young woman back to her parents we expect excitement and relief as she runs into their arms. But sadly, instead of joy, frequently she is met with anger. Why is she home? Where is her salary? Where was the money she had promised to bring back?

It's a crushing homecoming and another hurdle she must overcome in the long journey of reintegration. Often without an understanding of the trauma endured – which can include sexual abuse, domestic violence, or even torture – she is stigmatized and pushed to the margins of her community. But our

social workers maintain contact with each young woman to ensure she has support. Our hope is that they will return to us, not for short-term financial rescue, but to develop skills that can equip them to support their families in the future. Over the past year, we have provided a range of repatriation services to 42 trafficked young women. Over half were sex-trafficking survivors and victims of forced marriage in other countries. This was possible because of people like you, who stand with these young women through the challenges they face, praying and advocating for them.

It astounds me how God has positioned us, through your support, to have impact on both a grassroots and government level. Many years ago we prayed that we would be allowed to assist in the process of rebuilding the shattered country of Cambodia. As we look back now we realize how much these prayers have been answered. We expected to be doing the 'hands-on' work with individual lives. We did not, however, expect to participate in the building of vital legal and governmental structures required for a country to protect its own vulnerable population from sex trafficking. Ratanak is active in this process of transformation in Cambodia and by doing so is affecting change in other countries too!

Our staff members have been working hard to prevent future trafficking by working with UN-ACT (United Nations Action for Cooperation Against Trafficking in Persons) and other NGOs. These discussions culminated recently with Ratanak staff being included in a Cambodian government delegation to China. We are thrilled to see the proactive position taken by both the Cambodian and Chinese governments. It was an amazing opportunity to advocate on behalf of Cambodian survivors, and to support policies that bless, safeguard and return trafficking victims to Cambodia...back home, to a place where we can start the healing journey with them. So often decisions are made in these fairly abstract policy meetings that, to put it simply, save lives. It can be much less emotionally satisfying than helping victims face to face, but in the long run the results are just as dramatic.



Our Cambodian Country Director, Lisa Cheong, working on minutes from the China-Cambodia bilateral agreement meetings.

One of my favourite Bible passages is from Zephaniah: *“I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honour in every land where they have suffered shame. At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home.”*

We seek to live out the truth of this passage – to gather and bring home the displaced. This Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, I’m reminded of His love – a love that is strong enough to break every chain, a love that calls out for us to come home to Him. He offers all of us, and all the Cambodians we serve, eternal joy and hope. As we seek to bring Cambodian trafficking victims back to their own country, we ask that you keep us in your prayers. Please pray for wisdom and strength for our staff members as they face the huge challenges of repatriating survivors and continue showing them the love of Christ.

25 YEARS OF REPRESENTING YOU By Brian McConaghy, Founder and Executive Director

As we approach the end of Ratanak’s 25th anniversary year I find myself looking back on much activity and travel, but not just in this year. I marvel at how many of you, in person or by mail, have expressed your consistent support and blessing on us and the work we do through Ratanak.

For some of you, your support reaches back to the days of post-genocide, despair and civil war. The whole country was in shambles and I think we were all overwhelmed by what we encountered. Despite the magnitude of suffering, we dared to dream that, with God’s help, we could bring some relief to the suffering – even if only to a few. Your prayers kept us going when, so often, we could not see a way forward.

They have been answered in ways we could never have imagined. Thousands have been helped, physically and psychologically through many programs. Thousands have also had the opportunity to hear, often for the first time, that they are of great value before God. This is truly “revolutionary” stuff and has been communicated by caring staff living out their own faith before those they serve. So often it is in a context of compassionate service and friendship that Cambodians come to realize that they are precious and even worth dying for!

Through the last 25 years we’ve worked hard to represent you, our supporters, in the hard places on the ground in Cambodia, tackling difficult issues such as Human Trafficking and working directly with the victims we know are dear to your hearts. Recently we’ve been astounded by the ways God is opening doors to effect change that we didn’t think were possible – change that could affect the way international governments handle the trafficking of Cambodians within their own borders.

Besides the important meetings in China that Ratanak was a part of, God has recently been using my experience in the RCMP to open up some exciting opportunities. Even though they are not all related to Cambodia they are centered on the heart of what Ratanak cares most about – protecting the vulnerable from exploitation.

- In November, G7 Law Enforcement officials met in Berlin where my preliminary research and recommendations regarding international child protection were presented.



Brian connects with Christian refugee returnees on the Thai-Cambodian border in Battambang.



The first orphanage that Ratanak assisted in Phnom Penh.

- Just a few weeks ago I was served a subpoena to appear as an expert witness in an international pedophile trial involving Cambodian victims.

The opportunities (and workload) can at times be a little overwhelming! However, looking at this past month – Phnom Penh, Vancouver, Berlin, Beijing – Ratanak is where it should be – fully engaged in serving exploited Cambodians.

As we look to the future I would ask that your consistent prayers and encouragement continue so we too can continue to take on the challenges of a country re-emerging from darkness into the community of nations. May we continue to see Gods hand at work bringing hope, dignity and a future of promise to this wonderful nation. Thank you for all your encouragement – it means so much.



Delivering supplies to an orphanage built by Ratanak in Kampong Speu.



With Thankfulness,

Brian McConaghy

News in Brief

INTERNATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE – We had our first ever “International Steering Committee” meeting in September, which brought together all the Ratanak directors from Canada, USA, UK, Australia and Cambodia. They devoted much time and energy to strategizing plans for the future so that even more Cambodians trapped in exploitation and poverty can find restoration. Most importantly, they committed to prayer all of our programs and initiatives. We would appreciate your continued prayers as they discern the best ways to come alongside all that God is doing in Cambodia.

TAX RECEIPTS – We are so grateful for your generosity and commitment to renewing hope and freedom in Cambodia! Please note that donation receipts for 2015 will be issued before the end of February in 2016. Thank you for your support! If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to e-mail us at info@ratanak.org.

EXCITING NEWS – We’ve been working hard on a brand-new project! It will provide enormous opportunities to support survivors of exploitation on their journey towards healing and empower communities to prevent trafficking. Look forward to news about this project in 2016 – we can’t wait to share it with you!

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT! – A group of generous donors are matching all donations received until December 31, 2015, up to a total of \$45,000! Your year-end gift could have double the impact and help even more Cambodians in need! Donate online at www.ratanak.org/donate, by phone at 1-604-325-9300, or by mail to our address below.

Renew hope. Restore Cambodia.