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MEDIA RELEASE: Caritas Australia's Cambodia Country Representative retires after an extraordinary 30 years

After a remarkable career of 30 years, Caritas Australia is saying farewell to Sothy Lay, Caritas Australia's Country Representative in Cambodia.

Beginning his career as a driver, Sothy worked his way through the organisation to become the Country Representative. According to Sothy, although Caritas Australia comes second to his beloved family, his tenure at Caritas Australia is the longest commitment he's made in his life.

"I started off as a driver, because I could only speak a little bit of English then. It was difficult for me to learn English because during the Khmer Rouge we weren't allowed to study English or French. I used to go to classes secretly with my friends, and instead of paying with money, I would pay with food – usually rice. There weren't many organisations doing development in Cambodia after the genocide – Caritas Australia was actually one of the first to return to the country."

"I went from a very low position to the Country Representative of Caritas Australia in Cambodia. This is our highest position – so I really went right from the bottom to the top. I'm so proud of this, and how Caritas Australia gives local staff the opportunity to develop themselves and lead the programs ourselves. This is a really good way to do things and it empowers us to make changes."

"Over this time, I've had the opportunity to change the lives of thousands of people in Cambodia. We've been able to give people opportunities to help themselves, especially for some very poor communities. We've constructed toilets, built water wells, improved agricultural practices, helped educate farmers to increase their production, and worked with women, children and people living with HIV/AIDS. We've really helped the communities improve their lives."

Kirsty Robertson, CEO of Caritas Australia, said, "It is not often that you farewell a staff member who worked their way up from motor taxi driver to Country Representative. Sothy is a testament to hiring and supporting local talent, and he will be dearly missed."

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