

Dear donor,
 Today, leprosy is 100% curable with a medical treatment. But even when they are healed, those who were affected often continue to suffer severe disabilities. Together with their families, they are excluded from society, lose their jobs and houses, are rejected by hospitals, or are unable to send their children to school. These multiple forms of exclusion represent serious violations of their fundamental rights.

CIOMAL works not only to eliminate leprosy from the world but also to put an end to the discrimination against those that were affected and their families. It is crucial that people carrying the marks of leprosy be perceived as “disabled persons” and not as “lepers” anymore.

Your generous support helps them regain dignity and find their place in society. We thank you most sincerely for supporting us in our fight against this often neglected disease.

CIOMAL



CAMPAGNE INTERNATIONALE DE L'ORDRE DE MALTE CONTRE LA LÈPRE

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the newlyweds at the center

Newlyweds Standing Up To Prejudice

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the newlyweds with the CIOMAL staff



welcoming the guests



Soknim at the Kien Khleang center



with little Srei Pich

Soknim and Vanthi both bear the scars of leprosy and decided to hold a beautiful wedding in order to be fully accepted by their community.

On a beautiful but sweltering day in April, Soknim and Vanthi arrived at the Kien Khleang Rehabilitation Center in Phnom Penh. They came to invite the CIOMAL staff to their wedding scheduled for Saturday May 4th, at the home of the bride's family in a village in Kompong Cham. "Please come out in numbers. It will help us earn our place in the village and protect us from the community's judgment." Their call was heard. More than half of CIOMAL's staff made time to join the event.

Soknim and Vanthi met each other at the Kien Khleang Center, where they were patients. Soknim, whose legs, hands and face were affected by leprosy, had rejected several other marriage proposals, partly out of filial piety but also because she lacked confidence and self-esteem. "The first signs of the disease appeared when I was 15," she said. "But I was in denial because I was so terrified. When I turned 20, my feet and my hands started distorting. I was sent to Kien Khleang to receive treatment. Once the tri-therapy was over, no matter how much the doctors

told me I was healed, the damage was done in my mind. The scars were visible and I was so ashamed of my appearance that I no longer left the house."

To protect her from any possible mistreatment, her parents had convinced her to reject all beaux. Despite her disabilities, as a strong, hard-working and resourceful woman, Soknim had many qualities highly valued by Cambodian suitors. She actually took out a loan from CIOMAL to purchase the equipment necessary to shell rice and start a business allowing her to earn a living. Now over 40, Soknim has given up on motherhood. But she had adopted a sweet little girl, her niece Srei Pich, who is now 12.

Vanthi, who is also disabled in the legs and hands, was also turned down by Soknim several times. He then found another spouse and had children who are now adults. After his divorce, he again tried his luck at the beginning of the year. This time, Soknim said yes despite the reluctance of her relatives. "My family was afraid that he might hurt me, especially since he had already been married," she explained. "But I love him and I know that he loves me." As a matter of fact, while he is known to be authoritarian and formidable, Vanthi appears to be as docile as a lamb with his wife, a detail that hasn't escaped their families.

A Prey Veng native, Vanthi is preparing to move to Kompong Cham to live with his wife and little Srei Pich, as is traditional. Today, the whole family is happy about their union and especially grateful to CIOMAL for attending the wedding. It was a ceremony that contributed to break the stigma towards the persons affected by leprosy in a concrete way.



CIOMAL is certified by ZEWO



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