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Chairman's response to claims that 'Aussie Do-Gooders (Are) Tearing Families Apart'

Australia Cambodia Foundation Chairman Kevin Tutt has called on Australians to do their research and make informed decisions when supporting Cambodian orphanages following claims that some aid organisations operating from South East Asia were exploiting children for commercial gain and tearing families apart.

Mr Tutt's comments follow the launch of Friends International's global campaign 'Don't Create More Orphans' which is aimed at educating people about the consequences of misguided generosity.

Since its formation in 1993, Sunrise Children's Villages, which operates under the auspices of the Australia Cambodia Foundation, has provided residential care, education, medical assistance and counselling to hundreds of disadvantaged, disabled, at-risk and orphaned Cambodian children and residents from neighbouring communities.

While a surge in the number of orphanages in Cambodia is estimated to have increased to more than 600 over the past decade, Sunrise Children's Villages has maintained its commitment to working with local authorities, its Cambodian partners, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and local communities to deliver programs and operational practices that strengthen economic community development.

"Sunrise respects the values, beliefs, culture and livelihoods of the Cambodian communities in which we work," Mr Tutt said.

"We do not influence religion. We make a priority to employ Khmer people to lead and manage our operations in Cambodia."

While Sunrise does not have an active volunteer program, nor does it endorse 'voluntourism', the increasing and often widespread tendency to lump all not-for-profit organisations that operate within the care and education sector in to the same 'unethical' category is misleading.

Claims that 'donations don't help orphans, they create them' could not be further from the truth.

While Sunrise still provides family-based residential care for children who have been abandoned or trafficked, as well as those who are disabled or from severely impoverished environments, it is a priority to reintegrate them with their families or communities where possible.

Having worked with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Sunrise has a team of qualified Cambodian case workers and social workers who conduct thorough

assessments to fully understand the history, current circumstances and challenges faced by each child and family that is referred to Sunrise.

Once Sunrise commits to supporting a child, family or community through either residential care or its Community Outreach Program, every effort is made to ensure the recipients receive adequate counselling and support. Sunrise is committed to working with residents and community groups to ensure they can transition from receiving short term support to leading a self-sufficient and independent lifestyle in the long term.

While some orphanages and care-based organisations have been accused of leaving the children in their care vulnerable to neglect, allowing their childhood to be traumatic, full of strangers and eventually growing up to lack direction and struggling to build meaningful relationships, Sunrise ensures its programs and projects create a positive and caring family environment, based on unconditional support and love that doesn't end at a specific age.

Sunrise currently provides financial support, access to tertiary level education, medical care, counselling and career guidance to 47 young adults that are living in Outreach Houses across Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

Over the past four years Sunrise has worked to develop its Community Outreach Program which covers the key areas of education, health, community development, housing and microfinance. These projects seek to help break the cycle of poverty and empower families and individuals from some of Cambodia's most impoverished communities – equipping residents with the personal and professional skills they need to increase their quality of life in a sustainable manner.

Mr Tutt said Sunrise will continue to strengthen the capacity of its community partners to ensure the sustainability of Sunrise programs and projects.

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