



# TABITHA FOUNDATION CANADA

Patron:  
The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, C.C., C.M.M., C.O.M., C.D.  
27th Governor General and Commander in Chief of Canada (2005-2010)

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## **Tabitha Foundation founder Janne Ritskes awarded the Royal Order of Sahametrei by Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen**

**Ottawa, ON** (April 22, 2013) – Ottawa native Janne Ritskes received a prestigious award in Cambodia recently: the Royal Order of Sahametrei. The award, “conferred primarily on foreigners who have rendered distinguished services to the King and to the Nation” recognizes Ritskes’ tireless humanitarian efforts through the [Tabitha Foundation](#), the sustainable non-profit organization she founded in 1994 to help the poorest people in Cambodia through programs that focus on personal and financial development.

Appropriately, His Excellency Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Cambodia, presented the award to Ms. Ritskes in a rural village where the organization has recently built a school and well, among other work, on a day that also happened to be her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

“I’m honoured and humbled to be awarded the Royal Order of Sahametrei amongst 6,000 villagers who we serve,” said Ms. Ritskes. “I thank the government of Cambodia for its continued support, allowing us the privilege to carry out our work to help those most in need.” In 2012, Ms. Ritskes was also presented with the Veuve Clicquot Initiative for Economic Development Award that recognizes women of influence.

Ms. Ritskes was born in Holland, and immigrated to Canada with her family in 1951. She moved to Cambodia in 1992 after serving as a missionary in Kenya and the Philippines, with some 20 years of international experience in integrated community development programs. Frustrated by the lack of long-term commitment to help Cambodians, she sold much of her own belongings to start Tabitha Cambodia, along with seed funding from the Australian and Canadian consulates in Cambodia.

Since then, the Tabitha Foundation has reached more than a 2.5 million people, working directly with over 329,000 families, through its high impact community development programs. The Tabitha Foundation in Canada and around the world along with support groups focus efforts support Ms. Ritskes’ work through fundraising, awareness campaigns and the sale of cottage industry products, such as handmade crafts.

The Tabitha Foundation’s integrated development initiatives include work in health care, education, sanitation (water, sewage), housing, small business and co-operatives. These efforts

enable the poorest of the poor to improve their health status, rebuild shanties into homes, have their own toilets, clean water, and drainage systems, reconstruct roads, develop their own small businesses or become workers in cottage industry programs and learn to work together as a community.

At the Foundation's core is a Savings Program that allows people to take control of their own lives and graduate to complete financial independence. Tabitha staff members make weekly visits to families in the program to offer support and collect savings. After 10 weeks, families are paid 10 per cent interest on their savings – money they use to buy items they need, achieving their initial goals. They then start the process again. On average, Tabitha's relationship with a family on the Savings Program will last for seven years, long enough to allow people to break the cycle of poverty. Tabitha places no stress or risk on a family by accepting any amount for saving, no matter how small, allowing even the poorest to participate in the program.

Tabitha Cambodia operates with minimal overhead and running costs. All members on the Board of the Tabitha Foundation in Canada are volunteers and receive no remuneration, ensuring that all donations and a high percentage of the sales from the cottage industry go directly to Cambodia.

**Tabitha Foundation achievements:**

- More than 2,600,000 people have graduated from poverty through the Tabitha Savings Program
- 9,355 wells, 439 ponds and 8 reservoirs developed
- 6,878 houses built by volunteer teams
- 13,111 houses built by owners
- 35 schools completed

**For more information, please contact:**

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