

Briefing Note

**By H.E. Deputy Prime Minister PRAK Sokhonn,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation,
on the Outcomes of the First Visit of the Special Envoy of
the ASEAN Chair 2022 to Myanmar**

Phnom Penh, 23 March 2022

- *Members of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I just concluded my two days working visit to Myanmar in my capacity as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair. This is the first visit of the Special Envoy and it was fully packed with meetings with various stakeholders that are deemed important for the implementation of the ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus.
2. My trip was to follow-up on the progress in implementation of the outcome of the **visit of Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen on 7-8 January 2022** and his phone communication, on 26 January, with His Excellency Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Chairman of the State Administration Council (SAC), and also the **ASEAN Ministerial Meeting's Retreat** on 17 February.
3. **His Excellency Kitti Settha Pandita Cham Prasidh**, Senior Minister, Minister of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation, and **His Excellency Dato Lim Jock Hoi**, Secretary-General of ASEAN also joined me in this mission.
4. For this briefing, I will focus on three points, (1) firstly, on the activities and results of the meetings in Myanmar, (2) secondly, on my assessment of the visit, and (3) ways forward.

(1) Activities and Results of the Meetings

Day One: 21 March 2022

5. On the first day, I called on His **Excellency Senior General Min Aung Hlaing**, Chairman of the State Administration Council (SAC). This was followed by my meetings with senior officials of the SAC on how to achieve further progress on the implementation of the 5PC. In fact, I discussed with Foreign Minister Wunna on the political aspects, coordinating work and the general duties of the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair (SE). I discussed on the humanitarian assistance with H.E.

Ko Ko Hlaing, Minister of International Cooperation and Chairman of the Task Force on Humanitarian Assistance. I talked with Lt. Gen Yar Pyae, Chairman of the National Solidarity and Peace-making Committee on the consolidation of ceasefire and peace negotiation with Ethnic Armed Groups (EAOs).

6. In these meetings, I recalled the “ice-breaking” visit of Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen on 7-8 January, which had paved the way for my visit as the SE. I re-affirmed my commitment to carry out my mandate as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair (SE), strictly based on impartiality and the principles of the ASEAN Charter, especially non-interference and respect for Myanmar’s sovereignty.
7. I explained the urgency to achieve the immediate objectives of the ASEAN’s Five-Point Consensus, focusing on three main points, namely the **cessation of violence, delivery of humanitarian assistance and the engendering of an inclusive political solution that is Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led through a process of dialogue among all parties.**
8. **On the cessation of violence,** I welcomed the recent announcement of the State Administration Council to extend the ceasefire until the end of 2022, and stressed that effective ending of violence **requires participation from all sides including Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and anti-SAC groups,** the groups which were just established after the 1 February incident last year.
9. In conveying the serious concerns expressed by members of the regional and international communities over the continued violence and deepening humanitarian situation in Myanmar, **I sought utmost restraint on the use of military forces,** in order to de-escalate hostile atmosphere, encourage renunciation of violent activities and build enabling environment for a constructive political dialogue to resolve the crisis.
10. I requested cooperation and support from SAC for the successful organization of a **Consultative Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance delivery,** to be held at the end of April or early May. I shared the Concept Note on the objectives of this Meeting and also highlighted the urgent need to facilitate safe unhindered and non-discriminatory delivery of humanitarian relief, including Covid-19 vaccination where possible, to all those in most need. This is about the combination of the distribution of humanitarian assistance with the vaccination campaign wherever possible because the delivery of humanitarian assistance must reach those most in need. Some areas are difficult to access due to on-

going conflict and armed fighting between various groups, and such areas are where the humanitarian assistance is highly needed. Therefore, if we can create any safety corridor, we should also link the vaccination program in that place. This idea is also welcomed by professional groups working on humanitarian assistance.

11. I also raised about the initiative to establish the **“Friends of Myanmar”** group, which initially proposed by Brunei, that focuses only on humanitarian assistance. There will be no other political agenda involved. We believe that such a mechanism will help enlarge the capacity and resources of ASEAN to assist Myanmar in the long term. We have agreed that ASEAN alone cannot respond to the full extent of the needs of the people in Myanmar; and there are many countries who are ready, willing and wish to assist Myanmar. This mechanism will facilitate mobilization of assistance to the people of Myanmar. I also underscored the necessity of creating humanitarian corridor arrangement, so that humanitarian assistance can be delivered to those living in areas that are currently inaccessible due to ongoing fighting in the most effective and safest manner. On safety issues, people who deliver and work on humanitarian assistance also need to ensure their own safety and security, and therefore I urged the Myanmar authorities to pay close attention to this matter to the maximum extent.
12. On political dialogue, I raised the importance for the **Special Envoy to meet with all parties concerned**. Although the State Administration Council (SAC) has labelled some groups as terrorist groups, we still hold that all parties must be included in political dialogue that is supportive for national reconciliation and peace-making. Such understanding is being commonly shared among ASEAN member states too. I also raised about the possibility of the Special Envoy serving as a **“bridge of communication”** between all parties. This is stated in the 5PC which was agreed by 10 ASEAN Leaders. Besides, based on Cambodia’s experiences in ending wars and violence through the **Win-Win Policy**, **Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen** opened negotiation with the Khmer Rouge, even though they had been implicated with genocide.
13. To ensure **continuity of ASEAN’s engagement**, I also reiterated the proposal raised by Samdech Techo Prime Minister on the **utilization of the ASEAN Troika mechanism** (comprising the previous, the current and the incoming chairs of ASEAN) to provide stewardship to ASEAN in implementing the 5PC which primarily aims to help Myanmar’s return to normalcy. This is because we believe that Myanmar issues are complex

and required long-termed solutions, and that they are not simply a task that can be completed by one-year term of the Special Envoy or one single chairmanship. As a matter of fact, the decision to convene the Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in Jakarta which resulted in the 5PC confirmed that ASEAN had understood the complexity and agreed on setting an objective to assist Myanmar.

14. I also recalled the request for the release of more political prisoners, including **the case of the Australian national, Professor Sean Turnell** that was raised directly by Samdech Techo Prime Minister to the Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.
15. I also conveyed the wish expressed by many of my counterparts, during our recent meetings, to see **the issue of the displaced people and refugees from Rakhine state** being solved as soon as possible.
16. In response, His Excellency Senior General Min Aung Hlaing took note of all the issues and proposals raised, and tasked his union ministers to continue discussion with the Special Envoy, considering the prevailing situation in Myanmar. Please also be noted that while we call for the utmost restraint and an end to violence, General Min Aung Hlaing expressed concern about the continued violence from Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and the People's Defense Force (PDF), as well as arm smuggling, which has exacerbated violence. This point also manifests the complexity of the whole issues, and while we have gained more understanding of the complex situation from day to day, such complexity keeps increase its magnitude.
17. He was also optimistic that this first visit will pave the way for the Special Envoy to meet key actors for the peace process in subsequent visits, and the SAC is committed to provide full support to the Special Envoy in this endeavour. He also reiterated his strong position that, **nothing is more important than people's life**, and urged that all sides must condemn violence without discrimination.
18. On the repatriation of refugees from Rakhine State, His Excellency Senior General Min Aung Hlaing informed that a list of applications has been approved and awaits the return of the refugees. Moreover, Myanmar's Task Force on ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance requested support from ASEAN for the maintenance of the transit centre for the refugees' temporary stay.

19. After the courtesy call with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, I met with His Excellency **Wunna Maung Lwin**, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, Members of the Task Force on Humanitarian Assistance led by **H.E. U Ko Ko Hlaing**, Union Minister for International Cooperation and **Lt. Gen. Yar Pyae**, Chairman of the National Solidarity and, Peace-making Negotiation Committee (NSPNC).
20. In these meetings, I reiterated that **concrete, tangible and visible progress of the implementation of the ASEAN's Five Point Consensus** is critical to bring Myanmar back to engage fully with the ASEAN family of ten. We discussed about how ASEAN can assist Myanmar in their inclusive political dialogues, non-discriminatory delivery of humanitarian assistance, and listened to the presentation from the National Solidarity and Peace-making Committee on present situation of the peace negotiation with various EAOs and stakeholders in Myanmar.
21. As stated in the Joint Press Release during the **visit of Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen** on 7-8 January that the Special Envoy is welcome to participate in ceasefire talks, Lt. Gen Yar Pyae reaffirmed Myanmar's commitment to facilitate the meeting between the Special Envoy and relevant EAOs in the next visit. I welcome this positive gesture, and stand ready to contribute to building trust and confidence among conflicting parties.

Day Two: 22 March 2022

22. On the second day, we flew from Nay Pyi Taw to Yangon to meet with Ambassadors of ASEAN Member States, other countries' Heads of Missions, the United Nations Specialized Agencies, and Mr. Ko Ko Gyi, Chairman of the People's Party. We also visited the warehouse of the Myanmar Red Cross Society, where the assistance from the AHA Center is being stored.
23. On meeting with different parties, in fact beside meeting with Mr. Ko Ko Gyi, a prominent democracy activist and chairman of the People's Party of Myanmar, our delegation also had plan to meet with Daw Su Su Lwin, Former First Lady and Spouse of Former President Htin Kyaw but we were informed that the meeting could not be arranged due to health safety issue. In fact, she got infected with COVID-19.
24. In Yangon, I had a chance to hear first-hand the views and assessments by diplomats who have in-depth knowledge on the ground, views from another political party, and professionals who involve in delivery of

humanitarian assistance. The meeting with UN agencies in the morning of 22 March was very important as they gave a brief and precise presentation, based on each of their respective expertise, about the ground situation of the humanitarian issues in Myanmar, including food shortage, medical care, lack of vaccination, impacts on women and children, impacts on education, and serious impacts on economy. Such information is much needed by the team of the Special Envoy when we are trying to prepare in detail for the convening of a successful Consultative Meeting slated for late April or early May. Their inputs are important to shape direction and formulate substance of the Consultative Meeting that we plan to organize next month, as well as way forward in engendering inclusive dialogue.

(2) Assessment of the Visit

25. This is a joint assessment by the delegation in the mission and the team of the ASEAN Secretariat headed by H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, who also joined me in the trip.
26. I understand that there are varying levels of expectation from this visit from different communities, actors and interest groups. I understand the desire to see an end to violence immediately, the need to meet with all parties, and the need to return to normalcy and democratic transition. It is normal to have such expectation. Outsiders always expect that each visit must deliver immediate results, especially in terms of cessation of violence. However, I would like to inform that the fighting did not take place just last year or a few years ago. Resistance and fighting between the military group and the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) have been going on since Myanmar's independence in 1948, meaning more than 70 years already. Thus, if the fighting has been there for more than 70 years, would it be possible to end conflicts by just inviting conflicting parties to sit and talk, negotiate and shake hands in one day, one month or one year? Obviously, it is not possible.
27. While I also shared these aspirations, the step-by-step approaches based on pragmatism is necessary to deal with Myanmar situation which is complex and deep-rooted within the societies of this nation.
28. I understand the rationale or perception behind the criticism that my visit is lending legitimacy to SAC. On this point, I wish to emphasize that this is the first visit of the SE which has been generally welcomed and considered as a positive and important step in implementing the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus. In the dialogue with the various parties, they all

expressed the same opinion, not just only from the side of the State Administration Council. During the two-day mission, we have gained a lot of knowledge that is very relevant for our way forward in ending violence, closing the divide in views and positions among the concerned parties, as well as addressing obstacles in delivering humanitarian assistance to those who are most in need. Humanitarian assistance is now available, fully stored in the warehouses, awaiting the next batches of deliveries in the near future. But how do we deliver to those in most need is still a challenging issue. There are many aspects of difficulties, specifically difficulties caused by the on-going conflicts, security situation and the complicated administrative procedures that have hindered and slowed down delivery operations. This is the reason why Cambodia proposed to convene a Consultation Meeting to address all these challenges. Nonetheless, I wish to clarify that my desire to meet with different parties still stand, and I will continue to persist on such requests with Myanmar.

29. What I can clearly say for now, **which is also being shared by diplomats and experts**, is that different political actors of Myanmar are not ready for talk. To get conflicting parties to the table when none of them are willing to reconcile, that is an uphill battle. Through the discussion and exchange of views in the last two days, we can see that they are still strongly determined to continue their struggles in all manifestations, especially armed struggle, meaning they still have desire and aim to eliminate one another.
30. There is no quick fix to the issue. We understand that one visit does not solve everything but we are trying to connect the dots, move things piece by piece, and with patience. Connecting the dots: the dots for democracy transition, the dots of early return to normalcy and the dots to bring Myanmar back fully to ASEAN.
31. This visit is of great relevance in that it serves to reaffirm the expectations of ASEAN, the people of Myanmar and the international community. Furthermore, we got a lot of knowledge that will help us in preparing our future plan and visits of the Special Envoy.

(3) Ways Forward

32. For the next immediate action, we plan to conduct a Consultative Meeting at the end of April to listen to views from different stakeholders and exchange views on effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to those most in need without discrimination. In this Consultation Meeting,

we will discuss and seek solution to facilitate unimpeded distribution of humanitarian assistance going forward.

33. We will intensify our discussion with the SAC and relevant stakeholders on the three proposals I raised above, namely (1) the Troika, (2) the Friends of Myanmar and (3) the Humanitarian Corridor Arrangement as well as other issues that I raised earlier. I would like to reaffirm that these proposals have one and only purpose, which is to help Myanmar to expedite the implementation of the 5PC and reengage fully with ASEAN family.
34. In tandem, we will try to determine the schedule, substance and possible outcomes of the next visit of the Special Envoy, after we briefed the result of this visit to key stakeholders and listen to their feedbacks and recommendations for the ways forward. This infers that I will report to my colleagues, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, about the outcomes of this visit, consulting with one another and listening to any recommendations or suggestions on how to make the next visit fruitful in terms of progresses in the implementation of the 5PC.
35. Again, I wish to reiterate that this is not about Cambodia's mission. This is ASEAN's mission. The word "Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair" comprises of the key word ASEAN. Next year, the chair of ASEAN will be Indonesia, and the next Special Envoy can be the Foreign Minister of Indonesia. Nevertheless, activities, positions, and approaches to the issues of Myanmar will still need to be supported by ASEAN, and in the interest of ASEAN. There is a need for me to clear a misunderstanding that Cambodia is lending legitimacy to specific parties or pay attention only to one side, ignoring the others. This is not true. Cambodia has no interest in our efforts in engaging in Myanmar issue. We only want to help the people of Myanmar. We want to help the people of Myanmar to avoid the tragedy that Cambodia had experienced through wars, armed conflicts, and genocide for nearly 30 years. Again, Cambodia has no political, economic or strategic interest in our dealing with Myanmar's issues. We are sincere in extending our hands, we are sincere in fulfilling our mandate. The mandate of Cambodia as the ASEAN Chair and my mandate as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair. We need to carry out our responsibilities within our mandate.
36. To that end, I deeply appreciate all the inputs and wisdoms that have been shared with me through extensive and lengthy consultation.

37. I have strong hope that with collective wisdom, strong desire for peace, and perseverance, there will be ways for ASEAN to connect the dots for peace and return Myanmar to normalcy and democratic path.
38. Let me quote **Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen**, “we cannot end a war with a war, and win-win cooperation is the only solution to this crisis”. I also raised this quote with leaders in Myanmar. Therefore, all sides must work hard to expand their areas of commonality and narrow areas of difference. Long lasting peace can be achieved through inclusion, meaning the engagement with all parties concerned, not exclusion, which has been the current trend in Myanmar.
