

Keynote Address

By His Excellency PRAK Sokhonn

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and  
International Cooperation

At the Workshop on Cambodia's Contributions to  
ASEAN since Assuming Membership in 1999

31 May 2022

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Phnom Penh

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- *H.E. Dr. KAO Kim Hourn, Minister Delegate Attached to the Prime Minister*
- *H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace;*
- *Cambodia's Representatives for ASEAN Economic Community and Socio-Cultural Community;*
- *Excellencies Ambassadors;*
- *Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen,*

*A very good morning!*

1. I am pleased to address today's workshop on "**Cambodia's Contributions to ASEAN since Assuming Membership in 1999**". Let me thank the Asian Vision Institute (AVI) for co-organizing this event with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. I do appreciate the contributions of all stakeholders to make this event a reality.

2. As Cambodia takes on the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN this year, for the third time since joining the regional family 23 years ago, I believe that today's workshop is timely and indeed very relevant. Our intention is, of course, to foster greater public awareness about ASEAN, but we want to especially highlight Cambodia's contributions to ASEAN integration and community building and, in the process, their relevance and their value addition to this regional grouping, the benefits to its peoples, and to the stability and peace in the region.
  
3. As ASEAN is celebrating its 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Cambodia is motivated and inspired to work harder to advance the ASEAN Community building. Under the theme "**ASEAN A.C.T.: Addressing Challenges Together**", we are of the view that the current regional and international context necessitates the strengthening of our shared commitment to ASEAN centrality, unity, and solidarity. It is furthermore crucial for ASEAN to consolidate its spirit of "Togetherness" if we are to be effective in tackling our common pressing challenges to ensure regional and global peace, security, and sustainable development.

**Distinguished speakers and participants,**

4. Over the course of the last five and a half decades, ASEAN as a regional bloc has stood the test of time, grown from strength to strength and expanded both in size and vitality, in the face of changing geopolitical landscapes. Remarkably, this family of 10 nations with diverse political systems, economies, geographies, histories, cultures and religions, have embarked together over time on a long yet fulfilling journey with a common and collective endeavour to promote political, economic, and social integration within the region and with external partners.
  
5. Cambodia became the 10<sup>th</sup> and last member to join the ASEAN family way back in 1999, marking one of its extraordinary foreign policy achievements in terms of regional integration and multilateralism. Since, Cambodia's political will and commitment toward ASEAN Community-building efforts have been consistent and relentless.
  
6. The establishment of a dedicated Cambodian Permanent Mission to ASEAN in 2017, underpinned Cambodia's steadfast commitment to ASEAN and its Community-building process. Cambodia's sustained high economic growth has helped narrow intra-

ASEAN development gaps and accelerated the region's sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

7. Cambodia has also provided a robust contribution to ASEAN's efforts to maintain global peace through the UN peacekeeping operations, and addressing the issue of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). The operationalization of ARMAC is such a vivid testimony to that effect.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

8. Cambodia's decision to join ASEAN was guided by the grouping's core principles of mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality and non-interference from external pressures. ASEAN's consensus-based approach was also a determining factor that allows Cambodia to have an equal voice in regional and international fora, regardless of its small size or economic strength.
9. Speaking of economics, ASEAN also provides platforms and opportunities for us to cultivate friendly ties and cooperation with countries in and outside the region, in addition to ASEAN's own economic integration activities and initiatives, including the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), and the various free trade agreements.

**10.** When Cambodia took on the role of ASEAN Chair in 2002, just three years after joining the Association, we managed to demonstrate our ability and capacity to discharge our mandate. Allow me to cite a few examples:

⇒ *First*, we have contributed to the easing of tensions in the South China Sea (SCS) with the successful conclusion of the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), which is a milestone document embodying the collective commitment of ASEAN and China to promote peace, stability, mutual trust and confidence in the region.

⇒ *Second*, Cambodia convened the first Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Summit to enhance cooperation in GMS

⇒ and *Third*, we hosted the first ASEAN-India Summit to strengthen ASEAN-India cooperation.

**11.** During our second Chairmanship in 2012, Cambodia successfully hosted the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Summits in Phnom Penh. This time, we have delivered quite a number of achievements, namely:

⇒ *First*, the accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) by the UK,

the EU, and Brazil (the first country in Latin America, for that matter).

⇒ *Second*, we have launched the negotiation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest trade pact, which happened to enter into force also this year.

⇒ *Third*, we facilitated the adoption of the Joint Statement on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the DOC, which reaffirms the joint commitment between ASEAN and China to promoting peace, stability, and mutual trust and confidence through the further implementation of the DOC. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers also adopted the ASEAN's Six-Point Principles on the SCS, paving the way for ASEAN and China to start the negotiation of a Code of Conduct (COC).

⇒ *Fourth*, we tabled a proposal for the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC) which came to see the light later when its headquarters was established in Phnom Penh in 2016. Since, ARMAC has become a Centre of Excellence in knowledge sharing and raising awareness on the effects of explosive remnants of war (ERW).

⇒ *Fifth*, we initiated the First ASEAN Global Dialogue where we brought together the heads of International Financial and Multilateral

Institutions to exchange views with our ASEAN Leaders.

⇒ *Lastly*, the ASEAN Leaders has officially launched the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) which focuses on strengthening research activities on peace, conflict management, and conflict resolution.

**12.** More generally, Cambodia was actively involved in key ASEAN-led platforms, namely: the ASEAN+1, the ASEAN+3, the East Asia Summit, the ADMM-Plus, and the ARF. Through these mechanisms, Cambodia has constructively contributed to dialogues and practical cooperation to promote the ASEAN Centrality.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

**13.** As for this year's chairmanship, braving the risk of COVID-19, we successfully convened several ASEAN-related meetings and activities either physically or in a hybrid format, under all the three ASEAN Community pillars. Among them is the AMM Retreat held last February in Phnom Penh to discuss plans, directions and approaches to further promote ASEAN community building.

- 14.** In the context of an increasing rivalries between great powers and the crisis in Myanmar, our chairmanship was kick-started with **Samdech Prime Minister**'s visit to Myanmar on 7-8 January to pave the way for the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) reached earlier by the ASEAN Leaders. This ice-breaking mission paved the way for my first visit to Myanmar as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair in March and the subsequent convening of the Consultative Meeting on ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance to Myanmar earlier this month.
- 15.** A few weeks ago, as the ASEAN Chair, Samdech Techo Prime Minister co-chaired with President Joe Biden the ASEAN-U.S. Special Summit in Washington D.C. This is a milestone event to mark 45 years of ASEAN-U.S. Dialogue Relations and to chart the future direction of ASEAN-U.S. partnership, which includes the upgrade of the relations into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership at the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-U.S. Summit to be held in November 2022 on the margin of the upcoming ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Cambodia.
- 16.** Cambodia took on another priority task with the successful co-chairing with Malaysia of the first High-level Task Force Meeting to formulate ASEAN Community Post-2025 Vision. Last week, we



successfully hosted the ASEAN-China COC negotiations in Siem Reap, in physical format for the first time since the outbreak of COVID-19. ASEAN and China have reaffirmed their commitment to working toward the early conclusion of the COC that is effective and substantive and in accordance with international laws, including the 1982 UNCLOS..

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

17. I am also pleased to highlight our plan to hold two major side events:

- *First*, the **2<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Global Dialogue on Post-Covid 19 Recovery** which will focus on four topics, (1) Promoting ASEAN as a Post-Pandemic Climate-Resilient Community, (2) Universal Health Coverage, (3) MSMEs' Digitalization for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, and (4) Investing in Human Capital Development for inclusive and sustainable growth.
- *Second*, the **2<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit** under the theme **"Building a More Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN"** to promote women's roles in ASEAN's post-COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

18. With seven more months for us to steer ASEAN during this extraordinary time, Cambodia will continue to draw on the ASEAN's spirit of "Togetherness" to consolidate our efforts, internally within ASEAN as well as with ASEAN Partners, to achieve our goals of building a resilient ASEAN Community, in line with the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

19. I am confident that we can prove once again that we have the determination and capability to further strengthen and promote peace, stability, security, and prosperity in the region for the well-being of our peoples. That's the true spirit of "Let's act together".

20. Let me conclude my remarks by encouraging all participants present here today to actively engage in our discussions, and I trust that the outcomes of this workshop will significantly contribute to a better understanding of Cambodia's relevance in ASEAN.

Thank you.

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