

3RD GLOBAL ALUMNI CONVENTION
OPENING ADDRESS

H.E. Mr. PRAK Sokhonn

Senior Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

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Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Let me start by offering my sincere congratulations to the organizers of the 3rd Global Alumni Convention for their innovative initiative to bring together such diverse communities of global intellects and professionals to meet and exchange their views and perspectives. I am indeed pleased and honoured to have the opportunity to address this Convention.

From my macro perspective of where our country, Cambodia, is heading, it is quite obvious that we have entered into a new phase of socio-economic transformation, which necessitates by default a more sophisticated pool of actors, capable of responding to new intellectual challenges. With its recent status as a Lower Middle Income, our nation's challenges are quite different than what we had to deal with in the past two decades. From "The Killing fields" to becoming an "Olympian of Growth", Cambodia is the new rising star in the region and we have shown to the world that together we can, and yes, together we must overcome our difficult past.

Nation building requires a collective effort from every stakeholder in our society, from the government, the private sector, the civil society, the youth, the intellectuals that all of you are here to represent. Since we have restored peace to our war-torn country, the Royal Government has persevered in its efforts to reclaim our rightful place in the community of nations. We have committed to reintegrate into the regional and global economy. We have even devoted our scarce resources, and believe me we

don't have a lot of resources in the first place, to give back to the world in terms of our contribution to the UN peacekeeping operations.

As a weak country emerging from the ash of wars and years of internal conflict, Cambodia has also proven that opening up and maintaining good relations with the world community is fundamental to its success and future. It is the policy and strategy of our leader Samdech Techo HUN SEN, Prime Minister that Cambodia must engage and be omnipresent on regional and international stages. Being a small economy, Cambodia cannot afford to be isolated and it is our foreign policy to make friend and not foe of any civilized nation.

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation have been our essential arsenals for national defence and protection of national interests. They allow Cambodia to enjoy some level-playing field as well as opportunity to advance our development agenda, and become the master of our own destiny. But like roses, they have thorns that we must tackle with care and consciousness. Absent our ownership and leadership of the process, we could fall prey to the ideals which are only selectively preached and applied to the detriment of our people's interests and at times with irreversible consequences.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

Despite setbacks in globalization and multilateralism, countries including Cambodia have no better choice than constructive dialogue and partnership in order to withstand the force and influence of protectionism, and to deal with uncertainties arising from emerging geopolitical rivalries. As dominant powers compete for supremacy, the balancing act for small countries will get more difficult and complex. Walking the middle path is no easy task, but we should be consciously mindful to strike a good balance or a sense of equilibrium, so that we will never swing to extreme edges and end up paying incredulous price.

While 21st century is considered the most peaceful time during the entire human history by various measures, peace and stability must be defended and preserved at all cost. They are indispensable for the survival and prosperity of mankind.

Whereas geopolitics used to be a zero-sum game and the two geopolitical schools of thoughts, namely the liberal-internationalists and the realists, continue to be debated, I would argue that a better world cannot dispense “Cooperation” for the sake of “Competition”. Nation-states could instead choose **COOPETITION**, a win-win approach, and strive to promote greater synergy, connectivity and sense of community while knowing full well that we could never achieve perfection or the so-called “Pareto optimal outcome”.

Enhanced international relations will surely triumph autarchy ideology. From terrorism, to cybercrimes, to communicable diseases, to climate change, to global financial crisis, the world virtually has no boundaries. We now live in a very inter-connected “Global Village.” The effect on one country can quickly spread to all countries. Only when the global community engages and reciprocates each other’s goodwill to address these formidable challenges can we enjoy and share the abundance that planet Earth has to offer.

To a good extent, Cambodia has capitalized on our clear foreign policy and bold spirit of international cooperation to garner our friends’ support and contribution to our development success. From ending civil war, to winning court battle on border dispute, to alleviating extreme poverty, to transforming our economic landscape, this is no simple coincidence.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

I am proud to acknowledge the important role that our fellow Cambodian alumni have made in terms of their various contributions in our nation building process. Together they have collectively turned a new chapter in

our history. From across the globe, they have brought home their hard-earned knowledge and work experiences. Their precious networks have created multiplier effects and made positive changes to the lives of our people. The Royal Government is pleased and gratified to have many of them at the frontline marching to the same tune, all for the noble goal of transforming their homeland into a place where they can be proud to raise their own children.

Early this month, we have just celebrated our Water Festival and the boats racing. I am sure that you would agree with me that when we all row together, we can rev up our boat. What we all saw was the sheer power of collective and resolute action. Whether you work in government, private sector, non-governmental organizations, or your own businesses, never wait to contribute your fair share and to strike only big deals when small ones matter no less. Cambodia can stand the test of time and grow sustainably, only when it can harness all of its human power, not only from this current generation, but as well from the next. This Global Alumni Convention is in fact supporting the Royal Government in this generation's nurturing and grooming process. On this note, I am delighted that Cambodian students and their parents will have a chance to expose to world class education opportunities, where around 40 education institutions from Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and the UK will exhibit at the GAC Global Education and Career Expo.

We are among the most fortunate and privileged to be able to go to different corners of the world and gain international exposures and experiences. We thus owe our country the moral obligation to give back in whatever legitimate ways we can.

To my Cambodian fellows:

At home, you are the symbol of hope and the key that would unlock our country's potentials. To the outside world, you are our nation's ambassadors in your own humble ways and interestingly enough you need

not report to me. You are our face, our fame, and our brand. You are the spokesman and salesman that the world would get to know Cambodia and her people through your lens. I trust these roles, whether you care to assume them or not, will remind and reignite you to always be the best you can be.

As our country grows more prosperous and society gets more complex, I urge all of you to harness your respective values and identities and convert them into strengths to serve your nation. It needs each of us to invest in the future of our country. Your investment in time, your care and compassion, your common sense, your words and wisdom, and your spirit of patriotism will go a long way to contribute to the long-lasting peace, stability and prosperity that our nation so passionately aspires to have.

On this high note, let me bring my address to closure and I wish you all a rewarding discussion and for this 3rd Global Alumni Convention an overwhelming success. Once again, I applaud the organizers, especially IDP and ACE, for the excellent arrangements, and congratulations on your 25th anniversary in Cambodia this year.

I now declare the 3rd Global Alumni Convention officially open!

Thank You for Your Kind Attention!