

Address
of His Excellency Mr. Prak Sokhonn,
Senior Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation

2017 CCIFC Gala Dinner
Sofitel, Thursday, 16 November 2017

- Royal Highnesses,
- Your Excellencies, Lokchumteav, Members of the Royal Government of Cambodia and Members of Parliament
- Your Excellency Eva Nguyen Binh, Ambassador of France to Cambodia,
- Mr. Guillaume Massin, President of the France-Cambodia Chamber of Commerce and Industry,
- Ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I join you this evening on the occasion of the CCIFC Annual Gala Dinner. This allows me to see once again the particularity of the relations between our two countries.

Cambodia and France have had unique relations for more than one hundred and fifty years. This century and a half of proximity

has, indeed, allowed a close connection without any other similarity of cultural identities of either country.

"France-Cambodia, shared heritages". The theme of this dinner orchestrated masterfully by the French community is quite significant in terms of relations between our two countries. Also, I am delighted to see the enthusiasm of so many companies and economic actors, French, Cambodian, and international, around this celebration of our rich heritage.

Thank you all! By your presence, you show the consideration and importance you bring to Franco-Cambodian friendship. In addition to bringing your resources and your know-how to serve both countries, you demonstrate that we can all engage in a reasoned economy based on innovation. The award ceremony of the Corporate Social Responsibility contest, which will take place later this evening, is undoubtedly the perfect example of the long-term, responsible and strategic will implemented by the French community, but also of Cambodia's ability to open up to the most relevant investments.

This perpetual search for social innovation that we find in many exchanges with the French community is quite revealing of a direction chosen by the economy of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Since the Paris Agreements in 1991, the Government and people of France have not ceased to provide remarkable support to the people and Government of Cambodia, thus contributing to the rehabilitation and development of the country. Which other country, better than France, could understand our shared aspirations to rise as a nation and look to the future, while relying on a glorious past that so many French people have helped to resurrect?

In terms of openness and hospitality, Cambodia is striving to pursue an innovative and dynamic economic policy, of which His Excellency Sok Chenda Sophea, here present, is one of the main promoters.

No one can deny that this has allowed us to make remarkable progress in many areas. We are now working to ensure that the benefits from economic growth are distributed to the entire population. The country has equipped itself with new and important infrastructures that facilitate investment, but also all

kinds of exchanges and access to employment. A gradual and controlled improvement of incomes in both the private and the public sectors not only helps to reduce poverty, but also raises the standard of living of the population. Improving the quality of training and access to health care are our constant concerns. These goals are, before any other consideration, I want to emphasize, our national priority.

By strengthening the existing relations built with its closest and most important business partners, especially in Europe, by demonstrating vigour and energy to open the dialogue with all players in the global economic network, Cambodia proves once again that it fully assumes its place on the regional and international scene. The Royal Government of Cambodia can indeed boast about powerful regional and continental relations. Through this international prestige, we can only be delighted that, in a context of increasing openness of the Cambodian economy to the rest of the world, France remains one of the first partners of the Kingdom.

In this regard, I warmly welcome our French friends, businessmen and women, representatives of the economic world who, through their dynamism and initiatives, reinforce and renew

the relationship between France and Cambodia, and I would like to thank you for helping to both the development of Cambodia and the stability of its trade relations with the outside world. All these activities not only contribute to the country's economic growth, but also help to strengthen the historical relations between our two countries.

In the perspective of Cambodia by 2030, the Royal Government has designed and launched a series of development policies that constitute roadmaps for the implementation of socio-economic progress. These policies will contribute to maintaining strong, sustainable and inclusive economic growth through economic diversification, enhanced competitiveness and improved productivity.

With regard to foreign direct investment, these policies aim above all at attracting new activities that will bring a high added value, especially in the field of processing, thus exploiting all the potentialities of Cambodia. The strengths of our country are known. We intend to take advantage of our comparative advantages: an open and politically stable country, a young and dynamic population that represents about 60% of the total population, a reasonable cost of labour, real potentialities in

natural resources. We hope that these favourable aspects attract many foreign investors and in particular French.

In this context, it goes without saying that economic diplomacy is one of the priorities of the foreign policy that I am trying to implement under the leadership of Samdech Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister.

An economic diplomacy is expressed both in favour of the exports of our national productions, but also in view of favouring the ever increasing presence of foreign investors. However, there is no serious and sustainable investment in a country of political instability, where some groups practice a strange conception of democracy that consists of defaming, calling for racial hatred and xenophobia, to exacerbate relations with our neighbours, to use money and expertise from abroad to change the regime. No Western democracy tolerates this intolerable way of practicing political opposition. Cambodia does not either.

Since the Paris Accords ended the embargo on my country, all our efforts have been directed towards what we were prevented from during the twelve years following the liberation from the Pol Pot regime: rebuilding and developing Cambodia.

For us, human rights are first of all, putting an end to hunger, it is to offer an education, a job, health care. What is meant for Cambodia, as a priority, pacify the country, rebuild and rehabilitate infrastructure, rebuild human resources, rebuild a society. This is only possible through development in stability. Not with people who constantly maintain a climate of civil war.

What we do today is nothing different from what was justified, in 1966, the praises of *General de Gaulle* when he delivered his famous speech in Phnom Penh. I quote: *"In total, we see Cambodia, although it remains faithful to its ancient traditions, open deliberately to modern civilization and, thanks to a rare domestic stability, accomplish step by step, for the benefit of all its children, a remarkable transformation."*

Also, I would like to affirm with force that, as far as the Royal Government of Cambodia is concerned, the result of three decades of fruitful partnerships with our foreign friends and, in particular, with public and private actors from France, cannot be affected by the upcoming elections deadlines. We give priority to development, which demands that we give priority to political stability.

Only this political stability will enable us to move, at our own pace, towards the rule of law that we know is essential to ensure the legal certainty, transparency and predictability that every investor needs. It is the commitment we make to those who trust us by bringing jobs and added value.

It is now time for me to raise my glass in a toast to the friendship between Cambodia and France and to the fraternity that binds our two peoples and wish you all a beautiful Gala evening, as well as an excellent appetite.

Long live France and long live Cambodia!