

**Lecture by H.E. Deputy Prime Minister Prak Sokhonn at
the 23rd ASEAN Lecture on Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEAN 2022**

Organized by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

10:00-11:00 (Cambodia Time), 03 January 2022, via videoconference

- **Mr. Choi Shing Kwok, Director and CEO of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute;**
- **Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

Warmest greetings from Phnom Penh.

1. First of all, I would like to thank **Director Choi Shing Kwok** and the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute for organizing this lecture and for inviting me to talk on the **theme and key priorities of Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022**. This series of lectures that the Institute has traditionally hosted so far deserves high appreciation and recognition as they intend to raise more public awareness on ASEAN, to foster more in-depth public engagements, and to further contribute positively toward people-centred and people-oriented ASEAN as a whole.
2. Today's event is timely as it comes just three days after Cambodia started to function as ASEAN Chair for the third time; and in the coming two weeks we will host the first major ministerial meeting, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat on 18-19 January) to deliberate on carrying forward the decisions and plans agreed on last year and on new initiatives to further advance ASEAN Community building. We have communicated on the priorities for Cambodia Chairmanship at various meetings and events last year, but today's lecture is the most important outreach in the academic circle.

Dear Participants,

3. Let me go back in time a little bit. **Being admitted into ASEAN** on 30 April 1999 was a **big achievement** of our foreign policy goal for **regional integration**. ASEAN membership was a topping on Cambodia's historic success in ending the country's protracted civil war. The **Win-Win policy** boldly launched by our Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen brought about enduring peace and national reconciliation throughout the country as the

year 1998 was ending; it has enabled Cambodia's socio-economic progress as seen today.

4. **ASEAN has always been an integral part of Cambodia's foreign policy**, and the country has proven to be a proactive and constructive supporter of the ASEAN Community Building process.
5. On ASEAN Chairmanship, I would like to start with the theme that we have chosen for this year "**ASEAN A.C.T.: Addressing Challenges Together**". The idea is to highlight the **importance of ASEAN's spirit as a united family of ten**, with a strong **sense of togetherness** in jointly acting for results to achieve common goals. In "**Togetherness**" we want to emphasize **ASEAN centrality, unity and solidarity** in addressing regional challenges and enhancing ASEAN's contribution to regional and global **peace, stability, security and sustainable development**.
6. I also wish to emphasize that we **stand by unity for cooperation and mutual interest** and **not unity for confrontation**. We will strive to focus on issues that bind us all together, not those dividing us. In this spirit, we aspire to steer ASEAN process through the numerous challenges facing our region.
7. Here, I perceive **four clusters of challenges** with strategic implications far beyond our region.
 - a. **Firstly, Covid-19 pandemic and recovery from its impacts**. As we speak, the newly emerged Omicron variant is causing concerns and the return of the much despised lockdown and restrictions throughout the world; The whole region has to carefully weigh between the risk to public health and the need to safely open up and resume cross-border travel and businesses to recover. Nobody can give any accurate assessment when this trend will end.
 - b. **Secondly, the immense pressure deriving from the geopolitical rivalries between and among the superpowers as well as major powers**. No AMS wants to choose side. We all hope that the two greatest powers could build relation btw them that is stable, predictable and healthy. In addition, the **emerging trend toward bifurcation of the world order** in every dimension from politics to economy, trade, technology and cyberspace **is a matter of growing concern**.
 - c. **Thirdly, the existing traditional and non-traditional security challenges**. The issues include the situation in Myanmar, the **South China Sea** and territorial disputes, the **Korean peninsula, climate**

change and transboundary issues, transnational crimes, international terrorism, etc. These are long-term issues, some with century-old root causes that cannot be resolved overnight or in one year chairmanship term.

d. Fourthly, the ASEAN internal and institutional challenges. The pressure on ASEAN centrality, unity and resilience amidst the growing power competition requires us to strive for a future whereby ASEAN has even **stronger capacity to manage a healthy growth of partnerships** and constructive discourses among all the prevailing dynamics. The coming years would be even more challenging for ASEAN to maintain our **unity, cohesiveness, our ASEAN 10, to solve emerging institutional problems, pursue our community building process and ASEAN integration** etc...

8. These are, from our point of views, **the major challenges facing our region, our community. ASEAN priorities in 2022 are and will be defined to address those challenges.** Of course, **Cambodia's priorities are not entirely new.** They are **built on past achievements and initiatives** during the previous ASEAN chairmanships. **Ensuring their continuity** is key to the **success of the ASEAN Community Building** which is a long and continued process. ASEAN's advancement belongs to all member states.

As you all know, ASEAN Community building dwells on three pillars, namely political-security, economic, and socio-cultural pillars.

9. **For the Political Security Pillar:**

a. In addressing the mounting geopolitical and strategic rivalries, Cambodia will seek to **strengthen ASEAN Centrality in ASEAN-led architecture to maintain peace, security, and prosperity.** We will focus on the **reinforcement of multilateralism** and multilateral processes through ASEAN-led mechanisms and concerted actions that shall remain open, transparent, inclusive, and rules-based. We also aim to encourage external partners to support the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and engage with ASEAN in four cooperation areas under the Outlook, (namely Maritime cooperation, Connectivity, UN SDG 2030, Economic cooperation).

b. **Development of ASEAN Community's Post 2025 Vision and the achievements of sustainable development** is another focus. In 2022,

Cambodia will co-chair the meetings of the **High-Level Task Force to formulate elements of this Vision** with Malaysia, who is the permanent shepherd.

- c.** Next priority is to promote **regional contribution to global peace**. Cambodia will work to sustain a positive momentum of ASEAN's proactive contribution to UN peacekeeping operations, and the incorporation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda within ASEAN's frameworks. We will also seek to further promote ASEAN's visibility through ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC), in addressing the humanitarian aspects of the issues of landmines and the explosive remnants of war (ERW) within and beyond the region.
- d.** Our attention will be on **Timor-Leste membership in ASEAN** as well. We hope the necessary process can be completed soon to allow Timor-Leste inclusion in the ASEAN family.
- e.** We see merit in **reenergizing and expanding partnerships with external partners**, in order to maintain regional peace, stability and enhance the ASEAN Community building efforts. We would like to see relations between ASEAN and external partners continue to grow on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interest. ASEAN welcomed the UK as the 11th Dialogue Partner last August; and we look forward to the first productive ASEAN-UK Foreign Ministers' Meeting in August during Cambodia's ASEAN chairmanship. ASEAN-China and ASEAN-Australia relations are starting a new chapter with the recently announced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership; we also look forward to a fruitful year of cooperation in this context. Cambodia is the Country Coordinator for ASEAN-Russia relations from this year until 2024; we are committed to achieve fruitful outcomes during our Chairmanship and beyond.
- f.** **Rising tension in the South China Sea** reflects the urgent need to conclude a substantive and effective COC. Meanwhile, on the 20th anniversary of the DOC which was signed in Phnom Penh in 2002, we will conduct commemorative activities which serve to promote confidence and trust.
- g.** **Our immediate attention is on improving the situation in Myanmar**. ASEAN 5-Point Consensus (5PC) and the ASEAN Charter should serve as our guiding principles in addressing the crisis. To pave the way for progress on the 5PC, my Prime Minister will visit Myanmar on 7-8 January. Creating conducive environment for inclusive dialogue and

political trust among all parties concerned, achieving common ground on a process towards ending violence and obtaining concurrence among relevant stakeholders on expediting humanitarian relief to reach those most in need are on top of our agenda.

10. For the Economic Community Pillar:

- a. The first attention is to **accelerate and further harmonize our COVID-19 recovery efforts**. We will focus on implementing ASEAN's key initiatives, especially those outlined in the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement.
- b. Secondly, we aim to **strengthen ASEAN's competitiveness and regional integration** by optimizing the utilization of the existing regional free trade agreements and ensuring effective implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP). *I am pleased to note that RCEP's negotiation was launched in 2012 during Cambodia's chairmanship, and its implementation is launched also during Cambodian chairmanship this year.* I am confident that the RCEP will be another effective tool for boosting regional economic recovery and growth. We also aspire to encourage effort on **ASEAN Single Window** to help lower transaction cost, smoothen the movement of goods and eliminate various barriers to market access.
- c. Another priority is to sustain long-term **growth and prosperity**; we will try to advance actions on areas such as regional connectivity, people-to-people exchange, digital economy and e-commerce, science and technology, digitalization, innovation and industrial transformation, MSMEs and women entrepreneurship, integration into the global supply chains and further narrowing the development gap.

11. For Socio Cultural Community Pillar:

- a. First, we aim to further **enhance ASEAN values, awareness and identity** amongst the peoples of ASEAN through education, youth, sport and cultural and tourism exchanges.
- b. Second, Cambodia will **advance sustainable development by fostering the growth of human capital within ASEAN and promoting cooperation and empowerment of ASEAN's youth and women**. We will host **ASEAN Women Summit on Women Entrepreneurship**, in the fourth quarter of

2022 in order to promote the roles of women in ASEAN's post-Covid 19 economic recovery efforts.

- c. Cambodia will also strive to **enhance health, well-being, and social protection for the peoples of ASEAN**, particularly the vulnerable including migrant workers. We will also promote efforts to further strengthen ASEAN's capacity and capability to effectively respond to non-traditional security challenges - such as natural disasters, pandemics and climate change.
- d. Lastly, Cambodia will endeavour to **strengthen the institutional capacity and human resources development of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community** through the adoption and use of digital technology and innovation.
- e. During Quarter 4 of this year, we plan to hold the **2nd ASEAN Global Dialogue** on Post-Covid 19 Recovery focusing on four topics, (1) Promoting ASEAN as a Post-Pandemic Climate-Resilient Community, (2) Universal Health Coverage, (3) MSMEs' Digitalisation for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth and (4) Investing in Human Capital Development for inclusive and sustainable growth.

Dear Participants,

- 12. I am of the view that to successfully achieve these priorities, we need to **adopt an inclusive approach at both domestic and regional levels**, taking into account perspectives from all relevant stakeholders, including academia, researchers and think tanks.
- 13. Cambodia hopes that all benefits from ASEAN Community Building efforts are equitably shared at all levels and sectors in our region, especially in the interest of the people that ASEAN is mandated to serve since its inception 55 years ago.
- 14. Before I conclude my lecture, I wish to reiterate once again my sincere appreciation to the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute for the invite and to all participants for their attention.

Thank you!
