

**Press Release on the
Meeting between H.E. Mr Prak Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and
H.E. Mr John Sullivan, Deputy Secretary of State of the United States of America**

On November 15, 2018, H.E. Prak Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia, met with H.E. John Sullivan, Deputy Secretary of State of the United States of America, on the sideline of the 33rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Singapore.

At the meeting, H.E. Prak Sokhonn conveyed to H.E. John Sullivan his appreciation for the congratulatory message extended to the Cambodian people by H.E. Michael Pompeo, Secretary of State of the United States of America, on the occasion of the 65th Anniversary of Cambodia's Independence Day on 9 November. He expressed also Cambodia's sincere intention to enhance bilateral relations and bolster further cooperation between the two countries.

H.E. Sullivan responded that the enhancement of bilateral relations has been a priority of the United States and welcomed the Royal Government of Cambodia's resumption of the program related to Prisoners Of War and Missing In Action (POW/MIA) as well as the progress on various issues, including the transfer of Kem Sokha under the court's supervision. He reiterated that the United States is still concerned about other issues related to political rights and freedom of the civil societies and the press. Foremost, he expressed that his current most serious concern is about some rumor related to the possible opening of a foreign military base in Cambodia. He added that, in the event of such eventuality, the bilateral relations with the United States would be significantly affected.

On the development and humanitarian side, H.E. Sullivan stated that the United States has been contributing to the development of Cambodia's economy through the provision of GSP, and assistance in mine actions with the aim of eliminating all landmines in Cambodia by 2025. He recognized that there is great potential in the bilateral relations and wished to see them nourished further.

H.E. Prak Sokhonn, for his part, shared similar sentiment and stated that in his encounters with many senior U.S. officials, there is a consensus on the need to maintain dialogue between the two countries and to continue cooperation in various areas of shared interests, i.e. in the area of trade, which thanks to the new tariff preferences for travel goods to the United States, their export volume continues to grow and could reach up to \$ 500 million this year. He stressed that the resumption of the POW/MIA program by the Royal Government of Cambodia took place following a request of the United States Senator Doug Eriksen and other stakeholders despite the United States' continued imposition of the visa restriction on some Cambodian senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. That fact notwithstanding, the Royal Government of Cambodia has continued to cooperate in the repatriation program beyond the scope of the initial Memorandum of Understanding, i.e. by willing to accept the return of Cambodian citizens who went to the United States after 1994.

On political issues, H.E. Prak Sokhonn noted that, despite the divergence of views and understanding by the two countries, we should persevere in our efforts to cooperate in areas that are not affected by political differences and we should always seek ways to mitigate them. Despite conflicting narratives on the process and the results of this year national elections, he affirmed that facts and realities are not disputable. The election was more peaceful than previous elections and took place without any single incidence of violence, in a free and transparent manner with the participation of some ten of thousands of Cambodian and foreign observers. Some 83% of eligible voters turned out to vote, which reflected that the Cambodian people have decided to use their political rights and rejected the boycott calls by illegal opposition leaders. The fact that almost 78% of voters casted their ballots in support of the Cambodian People's Party demonstrated their desire for peace, stability and continued path of development.

H.E. Prak Sokhonn reassured H.E. Sullivan that with regards to the relations with civil societies, the Ministry of Interior will organize fora with NGOs twice a year to exchange information and views. In the same vein, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is also planning to hold similar fora with international NGOs. Moreover, he brought to the fore the recent signing of an MOU with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as represented by H.E. Mrs Michelle Bachelet, to extend the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Phnom Penh for another 2 years. This mandate extension reflected the sincere intent of the Royal Government of Cambodia to continue its cooperation to promote human rights in the country.

Regarding the alleged information on the opening of a naval base in Cambodia's coastal area, H.E. Prak Sokhonn categorically dismissed this as a rumor more than likely spun out of a significant increase of Chinese investment in the area. He reaffirmed that the Royal Government of Cambodia is strictly complying with the Cambodian Constitution, which neither allow a foreign military base on its territory nor likewise allow its military to operate abroad except within the framework of the United Nations, i.e. dispatching troops as part of UN peacekeeping missions.

At the end, H.E. Prak Sokhonn expressed his sincere appreciation to the United States for its assistance on mine actions and extended a warm welcome to H.E. Mr Patrick Murphy, in anticipation of his future appointment as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia.
