

Speech

**By H.E. Prak Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

On the Celebration of the ASEM Day

10 March 2020, Botum Pagoda Park, Phnom Penh

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Excellencies,

Distinguished national and international guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is a real pleasure to witness such a big gathering to celebrate the ASEM Day today. Why do I say so? It is because this is a time in which the world is gripped with the spread of the Corona virus, now officially labelled as COVID-19. Many official events and conferences planned for many months in advance in different parts of the world are being cancelled or postponed, out of fear of the spread of this virus. Of relevance to Cambodia, I can mention that the ASEAN-US Special Summit in Las Vegas on 14 March 2020 had to be postponed. Cambodia too had to postpone the ASEM SOM Retreat due to the virus crisis in Europe. I will elaborate it later in my speech.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

2. Our country is almost spared for the moment but our Government is taking all precautionary measures to combat this disease and we are collaborating with world class health organisations. Your massive participation today is in a way your trust in the government's efforts as much as your contribution to maintaining a sense of normalcy in the country.

3. Why the COVID-19 global crisis is so relevant and meaningful to Cambodia organizing today's ASEM Day? Why ASEM is so important not just for Cambodia, but for Asia and Europe, and in this case for the world as a whole. Like virus, so many other transnational

issues and challenges can't be tackled by one single country, no matter how big and resourceful it is. Climate change, natural disasters, pollution, irregular migration, non-traditional threats, terrorism and violent extremism are but the major regional and global issues that we know of.

4. That is why Cambodia has attached great importance to this ASEM forum. Since 2004, the year we became its partner, we have actively contributed on all pillars to make this forum for cooperation between Asia and Europe more dynamic. As a small but nonetheless sovereign state, we value foremost its core principles of informality, flexibility, and mutual respect in the spirit of consensus and equal partnership.

5. Being part of ASEM is so important for Cambodia, be it for its political, economic, or cultural dimensions. Nowadays, ASEM is comprised of 53 partners, encompassing of 21 Asian countries, 30 European countries, the ASEAN Secretariat, and the European Union (EU). Collectively, ASEM partners represent 65% of the global economy, 60% of the world's population, 55% of the world trade and 75% of the world tourism. ASEM has played a crucial role in promoting Asia-Europe partnership and cooperation for enhanced peace, economic prosperity and social progress. Moreover, it is without any doubt that ASEM has become one of the cornerstones of the multilateral system and global governance.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies, and Gentlemen

6. The celebration of the ASEM Day this year is particularly special and auspicious for Cambodia for the obvious reason that the Kingdom will be hosting the 13th ASEM Summit (ASEM13) in Phnom Penh on 16-17 November. **Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN Sen**, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, stated during the Official Launch of Cambodia's Hosting of the ASEM13 Summit on 31 January 2020 that "the ASEM13 will be the biggest and historic diplomatic event in Cambodia's history. The hosting of the Summit is the greatest opportunity for Cambodia to affirm, at the highest level, our commitment to strengthen the multilateral system, our contribution to the

promotion of collective efforts to address global challenges, and our participation in exploring opportunities to revitalize the global economy.”

7. To this end, Cambodia has proposed “Strengthening Multilateralism for Shared Growth” as the theme of the Summit. This theme focuses on the interaction of four main ideas, namely: Multilateralism, Growth, Sustainable Development and Prosperity. Altogether they can contribute formidably to the strengthening of the Asia-Europe partnership to ensure that multilateralism brings sustainable and inclusive growth and shared prosperity.

8. We picked this theme because of its timely relevance. Up until COVID-19 hits the news, we are assailed daily by news of multilateralism under mounting pressure due to rising unilateralism, protectionism and political populism, which have posed significant threats and unpredictability to the global economy. We have also witnessed the weakening of some countries’ commitment to multilateralism and other countries turning away from the multilateral solutions.

9. That is why, Cambodia hopes that the ASEM13 will magnify the common aspiration and interest of all ASEM partners to stay true to their mission of building a strong, vibrant and comprehensive Asia-Europe partnership. In my view, it is only through our unified and shared purpose can we hope to revitalize multilateralism and energize our collective efforts to tackle current and emerging global challenges of our time.

10. The hosting of the ASEM13 is not merely about this single historic event. In fact, Cambodia will organize a series of other ASEM events throughout this year, including eight side events, namely: the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting, the Asia-Europe Economic and Business Forum, the ASEF Young Leaders Summit, the ASEF Editor’s Roundtable, the Asia-Europe Labor Forum, the Asia-Europe People’s Forum, the ASEM Cultural Festival and a Forum on Women in Peace and Security.

11. As I have mentioned early, Cambodia had to postpone the hosting of the ASEM SOM Retreat planned to be held on 5-6 March 2020 in Siem Reap, due to the request from the

EU and some of its member states who were prohibited to travel given the recent outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe. We hope to resume it at an appropriate time in the future when the circumstances become more conducive.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

12. The celebration of the ASEM Day today is another manifestation of Cambodia's readiness and strong commitment to the ASEM13 Summit. Aside from raising awareness among the public on the importance of ASEM and all ASEM events that will be organized in Cambodia throughout this year, it is particularly relevant to the youth. Youth is our future: the sooner they can grasp the opportunities of this Asia-Europe partnership, the better prepared they are to secure their future beyond the geographical confines of Cambodia. In fact, I have mentioned earlier that Cambodia will host also a Young Leaders Summit that will provide good opportunities for youth to interact with political leaders from Asia and Europe at the highest level.

13. Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the organizers and all stakeholders for making this event a reality, and of course a success! Your personal dedication to this event, which is extensively covered by the mainstream and social media, has galvanized the passion of our whole-nation, which in turn will promote Cambodia's prestige on the world stage and enhance her role in ASEM in re-energizing multilateralism.

14. On this upbeat note, let me officially declare the ASEM Day open.

Thank you!