

**Intervention by H.E. Mr. Prak Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of  
Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation at the  
27<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum**

12 September 2020

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*Excellency Chairman, Dear Colleagues,*

1. Our meeting today takes place in the background of the convergence of two major forces. First, the COVID-19 pandemic, as a force of nature, that has raged across the globe since the beginning of this year, bringing staggering death toll on its path and triggering a myriad of health and socio-economic fallouts. Second, as a man-made force, the big powers rivalries and a regrettable unilateral disengagement from international commitments, at a time the world is expecting greater responsibilities to galvanize efforts to deal with this global crisis.
2. Against this backdrop, ASEAN issued, last month, the Foreign Ministers Statement on the Importance of Maintaining Peace and Stability in Southeast Asia, expressing our strong desire to maintain regional peace, security, stability and neutrality as well as to strengthen peace-oriented values and norms in order to ensure prosperity and sustainable development in the region.
3. Cambodia wholeheartedly subscribes to this call. Our ultimate aspiration and earnest determination are to avoid taking side in great power competition and being trapped in this rivalry. Our tragic past has been a constant reminder of this premise of which we had learnt in the hardest and most miserable way. For that matter, permanent neutrality and non-alignment are enshrined in the Cambodian Constitution as the fundamental principles of our foreign policy which does not allow us to host any foreign military base on our territory or join in any military alliance and treaty. We remain steadfast to these principles.
4. The full respect of these above principles explains well our position vis a vis the complex issues facing our region.

5. The current global crisis and the geopolitical tensions have deflected all the attention, resources and political energy away from the Korean Peninsula. The inter-Korean peace process has reached also an impasse.
6. Cambodia remains, as always, supportive of any international efforts to achieve a peaceful, complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization in the peninsula, in particular through this ASEAN-led mechanism, the ARF. Maintaining good inter-Korean relations is also of crucial importance to the above efforts.
7. At these times of high tension, wisdom dictates that we throw water and not oil to the fire. As a non-claimant state, Cambodia align itself with the common aspiration many in this meeting share that the South China Sea remains a sea of peace, stability and prosperity. To that end, Cambodia encourages all parties, especially the parties directly concerned, to fully and effectively implement the DOC in its entirety as a way to reinforce trust and confidence, emphasizes the importance of continued dialogue between parties directly concerned and the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS 1982.
8. This is also the moment to increase our activities on preventive diplomacy, while we continue to strengthen existing confidence-building measures. We should decouple the issues between the '*stable management of the SCS*', which the ARF can do in terms of its mandate as the most important multilateral security dialogue and cooperation platform, and the '*territorial issues*', which DO NOT fall under the purview of the ARF.
9. In this spirit, Cambodia encourage the resumption of negotiations towards the early conclusion of the COC that is effective and substantive, consistent with international laws and catch up the lost time due to COVID-19 disruptions. It goes without saying that other practical measures that could reduce tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings and miscalculation should be welcome.

*Excellency Chairman, Dear Colleagues,*

10. Despite in a virtual setting, this meeting is a good testimony of our commitment to multilateral diplomacy, ASEAN-led regional mechanism, and above all the ARF framework. In looking back and reviewing our ARF Chairman Statement last year, we note that the progress the ARF has made so far to advance the political-security dialogue and cooperation is noteworthy. Its works in promoting confidence building measures and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region are as praiseful.
11. At the same time, due to the unprecedented challenges that are testing the relevance and resilience of this ASEAN-led mechanism, the ARF needs to revisit the envisaged '*ARF Ha Noi Plan of Action II (2020-2025)*' and the '*Vision of ARF 2025 and beyond*'.

I thank you.

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