

## Keynote Address

**His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister PRAK Sokhonn,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International  
Cooperation,**

**at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute's Special Discussion  
on**

**the "Update on ASEAN's Efforts in Myanmar"**

21 July 2022, 09:00-10:30 (Cambodia Time)

Via Videoconference

\*\*\*\*\*

- **Mr. Choi Shing Kwok**, Director and CEO of the Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) Yusof Ishak Institute,
- **Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,**
- **Warmest greetings from Phnom Penh,**

1. First of all, I would like to thank the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute for organizing this special discussion on the **"Update of ASEAN Efforts in Myanmar"**. I recall that just three days after Cambodia assumes its ASEAN Chairmanship, I talked in one lecture organized by the Institute about our key priorities as Chair of ASEAN, including our commitment to improving the situation in Myanmar.
2. Since day one, alarmed by the scale of the protests and the ensuing violence following the change of regime by the military and the predictable consequences on the stability and security of the region, ASEAN pledged to act in favor of the return to normalcy in Myanmar. The 10 leaders met in Jakarta on 24 April last year and adopt the 5PC in order to end the violence, provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to those most in need

and create an environment conducive for dialogue between concerned parties in order to find a solution to the political and security crisis. We had no doubt that the road ahead will be long and full of pitfalls, given the complexities of the situation and the historical, political culture and ethnic plurality. This mission impossible was given to the Special Envoy of the Chair of ASEAN on Myanmar. And here, I salute the great efforts of my predecessor and good friend, Minister Erywan for helping to make way on this uncertain journey.

3. Halfway into Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship, so much has happened in the region and beyond. My Prime Minister has made an ice-breaking trip to Myanmar and held two additional bilateral meetings with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in a virtual format. As for me, I paid my first visit to Myanmar as the Special Envoy, in March. As one of the results of that visit, we managed to convene the Consultative Meeting on the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance to Myanmar last May in Phnom Penh. I made the 2<sup>nd</sup> visit to Myanmar earlier this month. Of course, we have communicated on the progress of the 5PC implementation at various events and through press releases and press conferences, but today's special discussion will allow me to give you more information and dispel some misperceptions.
4. Without a doubt, Cambodia's approaches to resolving the Myanmar crisis have had mixed reactions from both ASEAN pundits and the international community.

Some have praised Cambodia for trying its best to deliver on its mandate. Others, more cynical and with higher expectations, have viewed our efforts as yielding too little progress.

5. Either way, and regardless of both external and internal pressures, Cambodia went ahead with a clear appreciation that the crisis is deeply-rooted in complex historical and political issues. Our approach was therefore driven by a certain pragmatism and we chose a step-by-step approach to tackle these issues.

*Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,*

6. For those who want to see quick solutions, I am afraid there are none. Patience is the operative word here. There are no shortcuts. There is no magic wand nor special elixir.
7. If Cambodia's case can be of any reference, peace-talk needs time, patience, and concessions from all parties concerned. Due to the inherent divergence of interests, a peace talk is a lengthy bargaining process. Cambodia needed 20 years to achieve full peace. From the day the country was liberated from the KR regime to the peace talks to the signing of the PPA and realizing the full peace and unity through the Win-Win policy of our PM, Samdech Techo Hun Sen, it was a long journey.
8. That said, my second mission has had encouraging results. The facts speak for themselves.

9. While my first working visit to Myanmar in March 2022 has enabled me to grab a better understanding of the situation on the ground and address many operational challenges with regards to the delivery of Humanitarian assistance, my second mission enabled me to take appropriate steps to bring progress on our three immediate priorities for the implementation of the 5PC, namely: (1) cessation or reduction of violence; (2) Delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people in need in a non-discriminatory manner; and (3) Creation of a conducive environment for inclusive dialogue and political trust among all parties concerned.
  
10. I shall start with the second priority. We have found more common grounds to push forward **the delivery of humanitarian assistance**. This is an area where I see the most visible progress. It is probably because this humanitarian assistance work is by nature not a political issue and have no or little political implications.
  
11. Following the success of the hosting of the Consultative Meeting, which kick starts the implementation of the Joint MoH-Partner Vaccines Administration Framework, an initiative of Cambodia, I received, on behalf of ASEAN, 2 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from China. During the handover ceremony, I stressed that “humanitarian assistance should bear no color” and all sides should put their political differences aside so that we can deliver this humanitarian assistance to the people that are in most need.

12. The UN specialized agencies and International NGOs have also made requests for the Myanmar Task Force to facilitate and simplify procedures for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and I am pleased to note that we were able to address those issues during the Consultative meeting in PNP. On the other hand, in order to facilitate the delivery of HA on the ground, the Myanmar side has called for more cooperation with the local authorities.
13. I conveyed the willingness of **Samdech Techo Prime Minister** to dispatch Cambodia's voluntary health personnel to help administer vaccines in Myanmar. This gesture was strongly welcomed by Myanmar's Task Force. The details of this initiative will be worked out between relevant stakeholders in due course.
14. For our part, Cambodia has contributed USD 100,000 through the AHA Centre and donated USD 200,000 in cash and a significant amount of medical supplies directly to Myanmar. In addition, the Cambodian Red Cross has also donated USD 100,000 to the Myanmar Red Cross Society. Overall, the progress related to the delivery of humanitarian assistance is very promising, and it is our hope that, despite the time needed to start the implementation of the agreed arrangements made in PNP, the humanitarian situation in Myanmar will continue to improve.
15. On the **cessation of violence**, I reiterated the call from my Prime Minister to the SAC to exercise utmost restraint and not to use disproportionate response. I also

urged all the EAOs and political parties to adhere to the non-violence principle. I have to recall that there are two aspects of the violence. The first one is caused by the long-standing fights between the SAC and the EAOs. The second aspect of violence is the frequent and severe armed clashes between the Tatmadaw and the People's Defence Forces (PDF) that emerged after February 2021.

16. From the two hours long discussion I had with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and a separate conversation with Lt. General Yar Pye, it is fair to say that other armed groups have also their share of responsibility on the violence. However, the EAOs and political parties we met assured us that they were against violence in any form and manifestations. They even call for stopping the killings of civilians and to include all armed forces in the National Ceasefire Agreement. Of course, parties that have the capacity and capability to inflict harm have to go beyond mere promise. They need to prove themselves with real deeds, and they must stop fighting for the sake of stability and peace. By experience, we know that people only value peace when it is lost.
17. I welcomed the designation by the SAC of the year 2022 as the year of peace. **Senior General Min Aung Hlaing** shared with us his efforts to achieve the NCA by meeting personally with 9 EAOs at the time of our discussion with more to come.
18. On the issue of executions and release of political prisoners, I conveyed our position very consistently and

clearly at every engagement I had with my interlocutors in Nay Pyi Taw and through ASEAN Foreign Ministers' statements. My Prime Minister even took an unprecedented step to send a letter to Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to express his serious concerns on the matters.

19. On my third priority which is to enable a conducive environment for peaceful and inclusive dialogue, I must admit that this is by far the most difficult issue to tackle. As I have said earlier, conflict in Myanmar is deeply rooted in history for over seven decades. There are many aspects to the conflict arising from politics, power-sharing, to history, to culture and identities.
20. This time, we have met 7 EAOs and 7 political parties that won seats in the 2020 election. When meeting with the EAOs and the political parties, most of them called for help from me, as the Special Envoy, to seek political solution to the long-term crisis. While I am truly touched by these heartfelt requests, I have to admit that it would be an over-expectation on the mandate of the Special Envoy. I informed them that the SE is just a facilitator, mediator and not a direct participant of the Myanmar's conflicts. What we can do is to help put the brake on violence and urge all stakeholders not to push the country into full-blown civil war that may trigger region-wide instability and insecurity and bring further tragedy to people of Myanmar.

21. We have been able to open new **space for political dialogue**, when, and I stress, previously there was no possibility at all for any negotiation with persons or groups that the SAC considers as terrorist. For the first time in over a year, I managed to open the door for a **possible talk between the SAC and those designated as terrorist**. It is true that this door open came with some conditions: those who are classified as terrorists can negotiate, provided they have no intention to destroy the government nor do they want to replace the government. The 2008 Constitution should serve as the basis for any negotiations. This means that I have managed to unblock the wheel of peace talks. Whether these conditions can be met by the relevant parties in Myanmar, time will tell but at least the door is now open for them to enter into peace negotiation. This peace talk is a process that must be Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led.
  
22. This time again, we have asked to meet with DASSK. We view that **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi** is one of the most important actors in advancing inclusive dialogue and promoting the principle of non-violence. Despite our consistent request to the SAC, we were not able to meet with her, nor with her lawyer, nor with **Daw Su Su Lwin**, the spouse of Myanmar's former president.
  
23. We have also heard calls to engage with the NUG. One point of my mandate is to meet all parties concerned to enable the start of a political dialogue and since my 1st visit to Myanmar, I have searched for ways



and means to advance toward that goal. But in doing so, we don't need to shout from the rooftop on whom, on how, on when or on where we engage with those actors deemed important for the political dialogue. Negotiations are most of the time done in a discreet, if not secret, manner.

24. We met a group of ambassadors, namely Australia, European Union, France and US, and exchanged our views on a wide range of issues related to the situation in Myanmar. The discussion was not at all intended to interfere into the internal affairs of Myanmar but simply to understand the situation on the ground as viewed by those missions and to share the main outcomes of my visit.
25. I have also urged the SAC to explore ways to work with the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy, **Dr. Noeleen Heyzer**, so that we can further enhance synergy between ASEAN and the UN as agreed by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers during the AMM Retreat last February in Phnom Penh.
26. On the issue of the **general election**, I have tried to listen to all voices from inside and outside of Myanmar. Some have acknowledged that the general election is the only way out of the current political crisis. However, others have objected to this idea and underscored that the proposed general election is just a tool that the SAC can use to gain legitimacy.

27. I would like to emphasize that according to the 5 PC, I have no mandate related to election. It has to be decided by all concerned parties in Myanmar. As an outsider, I can only share views, suggestions, and recommendations.

**Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

28. Let me be quite frank here. I have less than six months to go as SE. As I have said earlier, I do not have a magic wand to solve the Myanmar's crisis. As mandated, I will do everything at my disposal to facilitate a constructive dialogue, to promote trust and confidence, and to alleviate the suffering of the innocent people through the provision of humanitarian assistance and vaccines. We can only act as a neutral bridge for all conflicting parties to rely on. But all these things require time, understanding and foremost strategic patience.

29. I shall conclude with this: I ask everyone to be fair and respectful for all those who have spent so much time and energy, braved so many difficulties and criticism, and here I refer to my PM, Samdech Techo Hun Sen, to ASG Dato LJH and his team, the AHA Center, to my team which form the Office of the SE, to all other stakeholders including my colleagues FMs who provide me with great advices and guidance, who did not spare efforts in this endeavour, to help Myanmar and the people of Myanmar. But whatever we do and will do to help Myanmar, our efforts, actions and dedication

shall never put at risk, in any way, our unity, the ASEAN unity.

**Thank you.**

\*\*\*\*\*