

Intervention by

H.E. Prak Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia

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Excellency Chairman, Dear Colleagues,

1. Since our last meeting, the international security landscape, including in the Asia-Pacific, has continued to evolve in an unpredictable and volatile way due to the culmination of two disruptive forces, namely the increasingly sharpened rivalry between great powers and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The increasingly tense relationship among great powers has generated profound changes and immense disorderly effects on the international order. Small states and even middle powers have found themselves harder to navigate in-between, particularly to ensure that they are not upsetting any great powers while securing their core national interest.
3. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic is indeed the most disruptive global event since the end of World War II. The triple crisis it has provoked namely on public health, socio-economy and politics, has shaped and will dominate the international landscape for quite sometimes in the future with probably new waves and more contagious variants.
4. The economic costs are staggering as much of the world has fallen into recession. It is without any doubt that COVID-19 has put more pressure on a myriad of non-traditional security issues that the world is already facing in particular climate change and cybersecurity. The pandemic has also exacerbated poverty, gender inequality, educational and digital gaps, and many other social discrepancies.
5. Based on a common sense, COVID-19 should have galvanised the whole world against this common threat as everyone subscribes to the shared wisdom that “no country is safe unless all countries are safe”. But the pandemic has arrived at a critical time in which the international order has been fraying as many of the norms, institutions and practices that have sustained the global peace and prosperity over the past seven decades have been under enormous stress. Worse, COVID-19 has exacerbated these developments.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ARF participants,

6. We can't afford to turn our back on multilateralism if we are to genuinely address common challenges, be they traditional security issues or non-traditional threats. Over the past 27 years, the ARF has become an important forum for consultative dialogue, confidence building and trust promotion in the entire Asia-Pacific region.

7. We should make use of this regional mechanism to galvanize joint efforts to fight against the COVID-19. Fingers pointing and politicization of the issues are not the answer.

8. Despite tremendous difficulties, we have seen progress in addressing many regional issues. The two Koreas have decided to resume their communication channels, which is a constructive move toward fostering mutual trust and confidence between the two sides. On the South China Sea, the Code of Conduct (COC) textual negotiation has resumed, reflecting the strong will and commitment of ASEAN Member States and China to maintain stability, peacefully manage differences in the region as well as to ensure that resolution of conflict is built in accordance with international law including the UNCLOS. Two days ago, we welcome the appointment of the Second Foreign Minister, Dato Erywan Yusof of Brunei Darussalam, as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, paving the way for mediation work to establish a dialogue process and facilitate humanitarian relief. There are glimmers of hope that could lead us to brighter future.

9. Here's my last point. Respect for and promotion of fundamental human rights and freedoms to promote harmony and human dignity is undoubtedly a shared aspiration and goal. Cambodia, a young democracy in the making, is no exception. But in these stressing times, we have to be mindful of the potential manipulation of these fundamental rights to instigate hatred, social discord and instability. And too often, these fundamental rights are being used as a political tool at the expense of national sovereignty and in violation of the principle of non-interference. Human rights must be understood and approached in a holistic manner without double standards and with due respect for peace, stability, and social harmony.

Thank you for your kind attention.