

(Unofficial Translation)

**Interview of H.E. Senior Minister Prak Sokhonn,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation with
the China Youth Daily Newspaper**

Prak Sokhonn reiterated position on the South China Sea Issue and said that Cambodia and the United States relations have achieved a good start

China Youth Daily, 16 June 2017 (only in Chinese)

http://news.cyol.com/content/2017-05/16/content_16076128.htm

After attending the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen also paid an official visit to China from May 16 to 17. Cambodian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn, who accompanied Prime Minister Hun Sen for this visit, accepted the exclusive written interview responding to questions on Cambodia's position on South China Sea issue and Cambodia-US relations.

On the South China Sea issue, Prak Sokhonn first emphasized Cambodia's neutral position on the issue. He said: "Cambodia is not being pro any nations. Permanent neutrality is the principled position stipulated in the Cambodian constitution and its scope of application is not limited to the South China Sea issue." But Prak Sokhonn stressed that: "It is true, however, that Cambodia does have a special relation with China. It is a relation that was jointly created by His Majesty King-Father Norodom Sihanouk and Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai and other dignitaries. It has been carefully nurtured by generations of leaders that follow and has been consolidated as a time-tested solid tradition of friendship and cooperation based on mutual respect. Our two countries are intensifying our joint efforts to reinforce the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership that has brought about not only tangible benefits to the two countries and peoples, but also made positive contribution to promoting regional peace and stability, which is the cornerstone for long-lasting prosperity."

"We are encouraged by the recent positive developments and we support the ongoing process of dialogue between parties concerned in order to resolve their disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with international law including the UNCLOS."

"Cambodia attached great importance to the DOC, which is a milestone document to promote mutual trust and confidence between ASEAN member states and China and has encouraged all parties involved to undertake full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety," he said.

“At the end of March this year, Cambodia hosted the 20th ASEAN-China Joint Working Group Meeting on the Implementation of the DOC. We have achieved significant progress on the COC consultation with the drafting of the COC framework being almost finalized. This draft will be finalized on 17 May 2017.”

“Cambodia highly appreciated that ASEAN member states and China has put aside contentious issues and focus on the drafting process of the COC framework with a view to get it done by mid of this year,” he stressed. In order to maintain the current favorable condition, Cambodia calls on all parties concerned to actively engage in dialogue and to exercise their utmost self-restraint to avoid any further complication of the situation in the South China Sea and undermine the COC framework drafting process.

“On 4 May, I together with other ASEAN foreign ministers had the first ever meeting with the US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson since the new administration of President Donald Trump took office,” he said.

“I stressed on the importance and the need to continue strengthening ASEAN-US Strategic Partnership for the sake of peace, security and prosperity in the region.

“I had the opportunity to meet with Honorable John F. Kelly, US Secretary of Homeland Security,” he said. “We exchanged frank and candid views on how to further foster mutually beneficial cooperation in key areas specifically border security, trafficking in person, illicit drug and cooperation on repatriation among others.”

“I also met with Honorable Thomas A. Shannon, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, during which we have discussed about the friendly relations between Cambodia and the United States and how to further strengthen the trade cooperation between the two countries,” he said.

“We had a fruitful discussion especially on efforts to further increase trade cooperation between the two countries to a higher level. I requested the US to consider providing additional Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and quotas to promote trade and further enhance labor opportunity. I also requested the US to invest more in Cambodia and we agreed that the partnership between Cambodia and the US should be strengthened through open and frank dialogues to avoid misunderstanding.”

“Under Secretary of State also reiterated what Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Patrick Murphy told me during his visit to Cambodia in April underlining that the US fully respects Cambodia’s sovereignty; it does not interfere in Cambodia’s internal affairs and it seeks improved relations.”

“With these positive outcomes, we could say that bilateral relations with the new administration has had a good start.”
