

**OPENING REMARKS by
H.E. PRAK Sokhonn, DPM and FM
At the Gender, Law and Armed Conflict:
At the Intersection of International Humanitarian Law and
the WPS Agenda Workshop**

06 December 2022, 09:00 – 15:15
Raffles Hotel Le Royal Phnom Penh



- *Her Excellency Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister of Women's Affairs,*
- *Mr. Juan-Pedro Schacrer, ICRC Head of Regional Delegation to Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Thailand,*
- *Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. I am pleased to open this **“Workshop on Gender, Law and Armed Conflict”**. What is interesting and unique is how its sub-theme **“At the Intersection of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda”** brings together the notion of gender in humanitarian context and present it through the lens of the WPS angle. I am happy to see that, in the last month of our ASEAN Chairmanship, my Ministry could manage to collaborate with the **Ministry of Women’s Affairs** and the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** to promote this agenda, which, by the way, is one of Cambodia’s priorities.

2. Last month, Cambodia has completed hosting the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits and Related Summits with remarkable success. There were tremendous challenges in every aspect of the meetings but our Leaders have been able to

hold very productive dialogues to address many issues and crises facing our region and the whole world. The WPS agenda, which highlighted the critical role that women can play in terms of peacebuilding and security, was certainly high on the list of our chairmanship as attested by the adoption of the **ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security**. With this instrument in place, we have the prerequisite framework to mobilise at the national and regional levels concrete actions covering the pillars of women, peace and security, namely: the protection, participation, prevention, and relief and recovery.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. The significant role that women have played in the area of peacekeeping operations is certainly noteworthy. Since 2006, more than 8.000 Cambodian Blue berets served in 9 countries under the umbrella of the United Nations. Currently, 801 Cambodian troops, out of which 118 are women, are serving in South Sudan, Lebanon, Central African Republic and Mali. In terms of women peacekeepers, Cambodia ranks number 2 in ASEAN and number 12 among all troops contributing countries.

The ASEAN Defense Ministers have expressly recognized women's role when they adopted the **Concept Paper on Enhancing Supporting Mechanism for ASEAN Women Peacekeepers**. More recently, at the ADMM Plus that was held in Siem Reap, they have expressed their commitment to strengthen meaningful participation of women in peace and security cooperation, in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

4. In my view, the approach we have taken on WPS is not limited nor restricted only to peace and conflict issues. We have engaged in other dimensions, the like of human security and sustainable development. We all can appreciate the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the job prospect and well-being of women and children even during peacetime. This is an integral aspect of security as well.

5. That is why during our chairmanship, we have pushed hard on the important roles that women have played in maintaining economic security and recovery. On that note, I want to recognize the hard work of **Her Excellency Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister of Women's Affairs**, and as far as I know, the whole working team from the ministry, for successfully convening the 2nd ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit last October under the theme "**Building a More Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Future: Unlocking Women's Entrepreneurship in ASEAN**".

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

6. The world is now facing many political issues and humanitarian drama as a result of the ongoing geopolitical rivalries and the great power's competition. The ongoing crises and armed conflicts in many parts of the world have taken a heavy toll on our people, and mostly on women and children. I believe that we, as responsible stakeholders of the international community, should take appropriate actions to ensure that women and children in those conflict-affected areas are safer, from all forms of violence. Safer, that is all we can realistically hope for.

7. This is where the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) comes to play. It is the body of law that governs armed

conflicts, it is designed to protect combatants and civilians of all genders by restricting the means and methods of warfare. If we can use the IHL to add legal force to the WPS protection pillar, I believe it would be a big step forward.

8. As such, I do hope that our panel discussions today could seriously look into this WPS-IHL linkage and come up with some possible approaches to synergize the two elements. The impact we will have in the lives of women and children in conflict-affected areas will be greatly improved. On that positive note, I wish you all a good deliberation.

Thank you.