



**KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA**



Royal Embassy of Cambodia  
Singapore

**NATION RELIGION KING**



Singapore, 12 June 2019

Ms. Tham Loke Kheng,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Mediacorp

Dear Ms. Tham Loke Kheng,

I am writing in reference to a recent media report by Channel News Asia ( CNA ) about Cambodia, entitled "INSIGHT: China's Chequebook Diplomacy", which was published on CNA's website on 01 Feb 2019 and broadcast on CNA TV Channel. I am extremely disappointed with the content of this media report that, based on one-sided information and/or superficial analysis, presented the untruthful information about Cambodia, particularly development in Sihanoukville, which has misled the public opinion and damaged Cambodia's image and reputation.

CNA's reporting on the negative effect of the development in Sihanoukville by Chinese investors and the growing number of Chinese tourists in this city did not reflect the real situation there. It ignored the fact that Chinese investment and tourists have significantly contributed to the socio-economic development of Cambodia through creating jobs for Cambodian people in various sectors including garment and textile manufacturing, processing industry and services. The Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone, for instance, has offered thousands of jobs to the locals. Furthermore, China's grant aid and concessional loans have been playing a crucial role in supporting Cambodia's development in various sectors, especially infrastructure connectivity. It is clear that this CNA report was not trying to cover comprehensively the reality of the Chinese's investment and presence in Sihanoukville. Instead, it was trying to highlight only the negative views based on the opinion of two local people. How can the views of these two people represent the majority of Sihanoukville residents and reflect the reality in Sihanoukville.

The report also presented the land issue based on one-sided information without looking deeply into the root causes of the problem and made a baseless assessment that the land issue is caused by the rising number of Chinese investment. We are very doubtful on the purpose of – the CNA's reporting on this issue and we have noted that the way of collecting information in this regard is superficial. Indeed, the Royal Government of Cambodia has made tireless effort

in resolving land problems throughout the country. As of May 2019, over 5.2 million land titles have been issued to Cambodian people, namely 74% of an estimated 7 million land titles that the Government of Cambodia has committed to complete registration by 2021.

This report by CNA disparagingly and unfairly stated that “Cambodia is also in danger of losing the flexibility in charting its own independent foreign policy framework after falling deeper into China’s sphere of influence” and cited as an example that “in 2016, Cambodia blocked ASEAN from issuing a strongly-worded statement on China’s reclamation activities in the South China Sea”. This groundless accusation made against Cambodia is not acceptable. I would like to draw to your attention that Cambodia is an independent and neutral country; and, like Singapore, Cambodia, has the right to carry out its foreign policy in accordance with its own Constitution as well as international laws and norms for the sake of its national interests and for contributing to peace and stability in the region and the world. With regards to the South China Sea (SCS) issue, Cambodia’s position remains unchanged. Cambodia, as a non-claimant state, does not take sides. Indeed, ASEAN is not a court to judge on the SCS territorial disputes. Cambodia always encourages and calls for all parties directly concerned to resolve their territorial disputes in a peaceful manner through bilateral consultations and negotiations. It is in the best interest of the whole of ASEAN to maintain a thriving ASEAN-China strategic partnership and to safeguard regional peace, stability and shared prosperity.

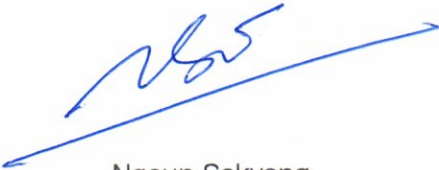
The report made unfounded assertion that Cambodia now has been sucked into intractable debt trap through massive loans, investment and financial assistance from China. In fact, the Cambodian government is capable of managing its own economic and financial policies. We have followed a stringent policy in borrowing money from our main donors, including China, Japan, Republic of Korea and Asian Development Bank only where necessary for our country’s development and economic growth. As a matter of fact, the present value of Cambodia’s public external debt to its GDP is only 21.4%, a very low distress level compared to the sustainability threshold of 40%; and this fact is recognized by major international financial institutions such as the IMF, WB and the ADB. Therefore, the assertion that “Cambodia is being sucked into an intractable debt trap” is not only erroneous, but also greatly tarnishing Cambodia’s image and painting a bleak picture of Cambodia-China relations.

“China’s Chequebook Diplomacy” is not the only CNA news report presenting negative content on Cambodia. CNA’s report entitled “Silk and Road: Thailand and Cambodia-Twist in the Track” also presents a biased, misleading and half-truths picture about Cambodia and Sihanoukville development.

In conclusion, as Cambodia and Singapore have enjoyed long-standing friendship and close cooperation in various sectors and are members of the same family of ASEAN, I would highly appreciate it if the above comments could be published in full on the CNA website as a right to answer. I also hope that future stories about Cambodia should refrain from imbalanced reflection of negative content and should be based on whole truths and facts so that they can enhance the credibility of CNA and contribute to the positive development of Cambodia-Singapore bilateral relations.

It seems to me very desirable that we can meet for a fruitful exchange concerning honest information about Cambodia.

Sincerely Yours,



Ngoun Sokveng,  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
of the Kingdom of Cambodia to the Republic of Singapore