

Statement of
H.E. PRAK Sokhonn,
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
of the Kingdom of Cambodia
At the High-Level Segment of the 52nd Session of the Human
Rights Council
28 February 2023, Geneva

Mr. President,
Mr. High Commissioner,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. This year marks the anniversary of two major events on Human Rights, the first one is the 75th year of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and the second one is the 30th year of the “Vienna Declaration and Program of Action”.

2. At a time when our world is subject to enormous pressure arising from so many crises, all with severe human rights implications, I reckon that this Council will agree with me that there are great merits for all of us to get inspired from the spirit of these declarations.

3. All human rights, be they civil, political, economic, social, and cultural as much as the right to development, merit a fair and equal treatment on the same footing and with the same emphasis. Here I want to quote the remarks of High Commissioner Türk, I quote, “There is no one-size-fits-all approach to every situation”, unquote. As such, our human rights agenda must be addressed through a genuine dialogue-based approach of non-confrontation, non-politicization, and non-selectivity. But foremost, they must be based on verified

sources of information and take into account the respective national particularities of each country.

Mr. President,

4. I am pleased to share with this august body that Cambodia has faithfully subscribed to the above principles, as attested by the steady progress we have made across-the-board. The most recent human rights success is with our non-discriminatory and almost-universal vaccination program against the COVID-19, where we were able to secure a strong “herd immunity” and reduce daily fatality to zero since last April.

5. We have rolled out wide-ranging social protections to assist pandemic-affected, inflation-hit, and vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. Considerable progress has been made in the complex problem of land issues as well. Similarly, the labor law is being applied more and more extensively to different sectors. In sum, to “leave no one behind” is the spirit driving all of our development and human rights initiatives.

6. We aim to establish a National Human Rights Institution in the near future, with the full support of the OHCHR and the Asia Pacific Forum. To that effect, we have conducted extensive consultations with multi-sectoral stakeholders, including thematically diverse NGOs. Lately, both country and thematic mandate holders of this Council enjoyed an unfettered access to the Kingdom. Last month, Cambodia extended the 3-decade-old presence of the OHCHR’s field office. There is no other country who has done so, and this Council should be appreciative of this sovereign magnanimity. While they enjoy our cooperation, we only ask for a fair, balanced, and objective assessment done in full

observance of the Code of Conduct. Preconceived prejudice, prejudgment or bias will only lead to the loss of their credibility and the erosion of our mutual trust.

7. I wish to stress that Human Rights can become a human wrong when they are politicized and weaponized for political and economic gains. As much as the minority has rights so it is for the majority. This minority, which by far does not represent all the 6,000 Associations and NGOs working in our country, should be more transparent and less biased in their prejudicial political discourse. Notwithstanding this fact, our government has recently concluded the fifth bi-annual partnership dialogue with them to further address their concerns, including the ongoing amendments of the Law on Associations and NGOs.

Mr. President,

8. As a young liberal democracy, Cambodia has held regular multi-party elections and last year's communal election has reflected pluralism at its best, with 9 out of 17 contesting parties winning seats across the country. Cambodia is looking forward to holding the upcoming general elections this July in a free, fair, just and transparent manner, an election that will be fully reflective of the people's will.

9. As for freedom of expression, the media in my country remains alive and dynamic. Moreso, the high mobile internet penetration, which is one of the lowest costs in the region, has empowered ordinary citizens with unhindered access to file their grievances via social media platforms directly to our top leaders. Their voices are further amplified by the robust presence of some nearly 2,000 digital and traditional media outlets, including the critical foreign-funded ones. The

government continues to welcome lawful rallies, and do appreciate sincere and justifiable criticisms from various camps.

10. At the same time, we should never tolerate human rights abuses. Neither should we accept dangerous populist rhetoric and extremist politics that spread fake news, disinformation, hurl indiscriminate insults and slanders, incite racial hatred and xenophobia, and call on sedition. I wish to remind this Council that in most countries in the world, these criminal abuses of freedom of expression are punished by law.

Mr. President,

11. Now more than ever, the world needs peace and the rule of law in line with the UN Charter and international laws. In Ukraine, we are worried by the escalation of hostilities with more direct or indirect actors involved. We need to put peace at the heart of our words and actions. Our experience, as a former war-torn country, proves that war is the worst way to end war. Cambodia is fully behind the call of Secretary-General Guterres “to settle disputes peacefully without recourse to the threat or use of force, and to commit to non-intervention into domestic affairs, self-determination of peoples and the sovereign equality of Member States.”

12. Closer to my home, in Myanmar, the situation is still worrisome. The complexity of the crisis and their deep-rooted causes must be recognized. Ending the sufferings of the people of Myanmar, restoring peace and reconciliation have been the only goal of Cambodia’s efforts during the whole year of our ASEAN Chairmanship.

13. Let me conclude by asserting Cambodia's steadfast commitments to continue our genuine partnership to address human rights issues in alignment with our national priorities.

Thank you.