

**High-Level Symposium on “The Future We Want, the  
Role of Multilateralism in a Post-COVID World”**

27 October, 2020

**Keynote Address by**

**H.E. PRAK Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International  
Cooperation**

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*Excellency Madame **Pauline Tamasis**, UN Resident  
Coordinator,*

*Excellency Dr. **Chhem Rithy**, Minister Delegate attached to  
the Prime Minister,*

*Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. First of all, let me congratulate the National Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations (NIDIR) for its active intellectual contribution to important issues of national and international interest. This second COVID-19 related symposium is definitely the type of topics of great importance in this current turbulent world. For this High-Level Symposium on “The Future We Want, the Role of Multilateralism in a Post-COVID World”, NIDIR could not have a more relevant partnership to engage with.

2. *Madame Pauline Tamasis*, I am pleased that the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Cambodia is partnering with NIDIR to make this event a reality today.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

3. What sort of future do we all want? To most of us, it is such a straightforward question with obviously a simple and idealistic answer. Under normal circumstances, we all want peace, safety, security, prosperity, and [OPTIONAL: *for grand-parents like myself*] a better world for our grand-children. Unfortunately, as it happens, we are not living under normal circumstances.

4. As the world marked this year the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, several compounding factors have converged to test the "*raison d'être*" of this global multilateral institution. The COVID-19 pandemic is perhaps "the straw that broke the camel's back", as the expression goes. I may sound a bit pessimistic but the truth is that under normal circumstances when multilateralism was functioning at its best, the world would have all the solidarity, the will and the combined resources to deal with this health threat. But that is not the case, and we all know that. Intense geo-political

rivalries, bordering the new Cold War, have hampered efforts to tackle the spread of the virus and further aggravated the world economies.

5. Seventy-five years ago, following the devastation of the Second World War, the international community has resolved to oppose war and to promote international cooperation, to oppose the law of the few and to promote the strength of the many. And so, multilateralism was born, institutionally symbolized by the United Nations. Now, more than ever, in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic, I don't believe that we can afford to throw this multilateral legacy to the winds. This is the time to reinvigorate this legacy by showing "more solidarity" and "more cooperation".

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

6. As dramatic as the plight of people who have suffered under the COVID-19 pandemic, we can't neglect the misery of others affected by other climate related phenomena. We have all seen what devastating impacts torrential rains and floods have caused on the lives of Cambodians throughout the country these last weeks. Climate change is real and as deadly as COVID-19. No country on its own could tackle the climate change issue. Only through a strong and effective

multilateralism can we hope to overcome these natural calamities.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

7. Cambodia's foreign policy is firmly underpinned by a strong spirit of multilateralism. In his remarks at the High-Level Meeting to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations held last September, Samdech Techo Hun Sen stressed that, and I quote: *"Cambodia recognizes the central role of multilateralism in addressing complex global challenges we face today. Our challenges are interconnected and can only be addressed through reinvigorated multilateralism."* End quote.

8. Nearly two years ago, when Samdech Techo Hun Sen has committed to host the Asia Europe Summit (ASEM13), supposedly this year, he wanted to contribute in the most concrete ways possible Cambodia's commitment to advance multilateralism. Second only to the UN, ASEM is the largest building block for effective multilateralism to tackle global and regional issues and other transnational and non-traditional threats.

9. At my level, together with my ASEM Foreign Minister colleagues, we have endeavored to issue last September a strong Ministerial Statement on COVID-19, in which we reiterated the close cooperation among ASEM Partners to respond appropriately to the

challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including disallowing the existing gender inequalities to worsen and protecting all of those in vulnerable situations.

10. Moreover, we underscored ASEM partners' commitment and I quote "*to accelerating the post-COVID-19 sustainable socio-economic recovery, stimulating economic development and financial resilience and building a more fair, sustainable, and inclusive future for all.*" End quote. In my humble view, ASEM multilateral contribution will lead to a more rapid recovery process and to the achievement of our Sustainable Development Goals.

11. Lastly, I would not render justice to our courageous Cambodian Blue Berets if I don't mention Cambodia's active engagement in this UN multilateral peacekeeping framework. Since 2006, Cambodia has deployed 7,123 peacekeepers to partake in the UN peacekeeping operations in 9-war-torn countries, mainly in the African continents.

12. *Madame Pauline Tamasis*, I'm sure you know that more than 400 Cambodian women (419) have been involved in UN peacekeeping missions. Our women peacekeepers have served as medical and security personnel, civil engineers, and mine clearance experts. Cambodia is ranked number 17 out of 120 countries that

dispatch women to UN PKO. Among ASEAN member states, Cambodia is presently ranked second on women participation.

13. Again, this is another aspect of the future we want for mankind: Peace and Security. With peace, there is great hope to realize the noble goals under the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

14. On this positive note, let me wrap up my keynote speech with my wish for a fruitful exchange, and I look forward to read at some point the outcome of your deliberations.

**Thank you!**