



Joint Press Release: European Union and Cambodia hold 10th Joint Committee Meeting

Brussels, 14 March 2018

The 10th EU-Cambodia Joint Committee Meeting was held in Brussels on 14 March 2018 and was preceded by subgroups on development cooperation, and on institution building, administrative reform, legal and judicial reform, governance and human rights, and on trade and investment.

The EU welcomed and praised Cambodia's progress and achievement in socio-economic rights and valued the good cooperation with Cambodia over the past two decades. The EU and Cambodia reaffirmed their commitment to deepen their relationship and cooperation based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and open dialogue and by promoting the implementation of the objectives set out in the 1997 Cambodia-EU Cooperation Agreement.

The meeting allowed for an exchange of views on a broad range of bilateral issues, including current political development in Cambodia and the EU, multilateral and regional issues such as the Mekong Sub-region, EU-ASEAN relations, climate change and human rights cooperation in UN fora.

The European Union presented the Council Conclusions adopted by the EU Foreign Affairs Ministers on 26 February 2018 in which the EU expressed serious concerns about recent developments regarding democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law in Cambodia. In response, Cambodia recalled that recent development in Cambodia are actions of the competent authorities and the judiciary organs to enforce rule of laws, protect its sovereignty and maintain the core interest of peace and stability of Cambodia for a harmonious society and the continued sustainable development. Cambodia reiterated its commitment to uphold the pluralistic society and respect of fundamental freedom and human rights as enshrined in Cambodia's Constitution and relevant laws. Cambodia reaffirmed its commitment to conduct the general election on 29 July 2018 in an orderly, smooth, free, fair and peaceful manner.

The Cooperation Committee reviewed the outcomes of the three sub-groups that were held in the run up to the Committee meeting.

In the sub-group on Development Cooperation, held on 12 March, the two sides reviewed the EU's support to the Royal Government's reform programmes and its plans to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. EU development cooperation is closely aligned to the Royal Government's Rectangular Strategy and its sectoral reform programmes. The EU will continue to assess its development cooperation programmes with a view to ensuring the strengthening of democratic principles, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Cooperation focusses on three sectors - agriculture and natural resources management; education; and governance and administration (including support to public financial management and decentralisation). Thematic and regional programmes in areas such as environment, climate change, trade related assistance and human rights were also discussed, as well as EU support for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia.

The sub-group on Institution Building, Administrative Reform, Legal Reform, Governance and Human Rights on 13 March discussed and exchanged views on progress and challenges on issues such as freedom of expression and the media, the fight against corruption, economic land concession for sugar plantations, strengthening of civil society, the rights of women and children, and labour rights. The EU reiterated its call on the Cambodian Government to engage in a constructive dialogue with the opposition and to take all necessary measure to ensure a political environment in which opposition parties, civil society and media can operate freely. The Cambodian government affirmed its commitment to further strengthen the rule of law and democratic structures as an underpinning for sustainable and equitable growth free from any foreign interference.

The sub-group on Trade and Investment, also held on 13 March, reviewed EU-Cambodia bilateral trade and the investment climate in Cambodia. Bilateral trade was over €5 billion in 2017 (UNCOMTrade Data). The two parties addressed a number of issues in relation to the uptake of the 'Everything But Arms' arrangement which has helped improve bilateral trade and contribute Cambodia's impressive economic growth over recent years. Furthermore, the parties discussed market access for European companies in Cambodia and reviewed trade developments in regional and multilateral fora. The two sides agreed on the importance of an open and liberalized investment framework in Cambodia to encourage further investment from the EU to Cambodia to support regional value chains and Cambodia's economic diversification. The EU congratulated Cambodia for joining the EU Patent Validation Agreement extending the coverage of European patents to Cambodia and the deposit of the instrument of ratification of the Geneva Act of the Lisbon Agreement on Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The EU recalled that the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including labour rights, underpins the continued eligibility for EU trade preferences under the EBA for LDCs. The EU expressed its concerns in particular on the issue related to Economic Land Concession for Sugar Plantation, human rights and labour issues and that urgent action on the Cambodian side is needed to address these issues.

The Joint Committee was co-chaired by Ms. Paola Pampaloni, Deputy Managing Director Asia and Pacific of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and Mr. Luy David, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

It was agreed to hold the 11th Cambodia-EU Joint Committee and its three Sub-group meetings in 2020 in Cambodia.