



KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA
NATION RELIGION KING

**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

**Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
on the Decision of the European Commission
on Tariffs Preferences under the EBA regime**

The Royal Government of Cambodia (Government) regrets the unjust decision of the European Commission (EC) on 12 February 2020 on the temporary partial withdrawal of Everything But Arms (EBA) trade preferences under Article 19 of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) Regulation of the European Union.

The application of the concept of "serious and systematic violation" enshrined in the GSP Regulation, triggered by many misperceptions and misunderstandings about the actual realities in Cambodia, has been applied arbitrarily to launch the withdrawal procedure against our country.

Despite grounding on the EU's values and principles of human rights and democracy, the decision is politically driven and is devoid of objectivity and impartiality, two fundamental principles which are to be expected from the EC as a supra-national body. The decision is nothing less than the application of a double standard when it comes to the EU's preferential practices with other trading nations. While the decision acknowledged the "tangible progress" made by the Government in many areas in response to the concerns raised by the EC, it failed to recognize and respect the fundamental issue of Cambodia's sovereignty, which can't neither be the subject of negotiation for trade preferences nor be a trade-off for any development assistance. The Government remains firm in its principled position in rejecting any attempt by external parties in their use of trade and development assistance as pretexts to justify their interference in Cambodia's internal affairs.



With the single exception related to the judiciary process, which is carried out in full compliance with Cambodian laws and within the clear purview of Cambodia's independence and sovereignty, the Government's actions within the dialogue period have been more than substantial vis-à-vis the EU's long list of concerns. In the area of land disputes, labor rights, media freedom, all of which are acknowledged by the EC as having tangible progress, the Government is and will continue to address the few remaining shortcomings.

In terms of political space, the Government has acted in good faith on anything that it could have done, save for actions that are tantamount to infringing the sovereignty of the nation. For the records and for the sake of transparency, Cambodia upholds a multi-party democratic system with 20 political parties taking part in the last election in 2018. It is currently home to 5,441 registered local NGOs and associations, 800 printed media organizations, 70 online publications, 22 TV stations, and 330 radio stations. Cambodia is one of the only three countries in ASEAN that has ratified all 8 core ILO labour conventions where workers can be represented by 5,045 registered trade unions. These numbers are not just mere statistics, they are "clear and convincing evidences" of the political liberties, the open space for civil society, and the unfettered freedom that people in Cambodia enjoys now.

Notwithstanding the EC's decision on this trade matter, Cambodia remains firmly committed to further enhancing its relations with the European Union based on the spirit of mutual respect and interest all the while reaffirming its full aspiration to remain within the region a multiparty liberal democracy.

Phnom Penh, 12 February 2020.

