

Statement
His Excellency SOK Chenda Sophea
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation
Kingdom of Cambodia
High-Level Segment of the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council
Geneva, 26 February 2024

Mr. President,

High Commissioner,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Over the decades, the escalation of global power rivalry and conflicts in many countries has left more than a quarter of the world's population living in affected areas. The lives of millions of civilians have been profoundly affected.
2. Cambodia is gravely concerned about threats to international peace and security. In response, we emphasize the critical need for peaceful dialogue and urge avoidance of actions that could precipitate severe humanitarian crises.
3. Armed conflicts must end to preserve dignity and humanity for all. Peace and security must be restored. International cooperation and mutual trust among states must be strengthened, alongside the establishment of robust international enforcement mechanisms.
4. As the preamble of the UN Charter states, we must "unite our strength to maintain international peace and security," fostering tolerance and coexistence as good neighbors.
5. After three decades of civil war, Cambodia places utmost importance on peace. We support the notion that peace is the highest and most noble aspiration of humankind, which must be ardently cherished and protected. Peace is an enabling right, preconditioning the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights – and the achievement of sustainable development.

6. Proper human rights and development cannot be sustained where peace is under threat or fragile. Accordingly, Cambodia has committed itself to promoting peace and security worldwide. We have dispatched 9,281 peacekeepers – including 762 women – to UN missions, protecting civilian lives in nine countries and maintaining peace and security in conflict areas.

Mr. President,

7. All human rights are organically interlinked and mutually reinforcing. Civil, political, economic, cultural, or social rights – including the right to development – must be treated fairly and equally, on the same footing and with the same emphasis.
8. In this context, our government has made significant efforts and achieved notable milestones in promoting and protecting the rights of our people. The civil-political space has been strengthened, and socio-economic rights have been invigorated. Furthermore, the new Cabinet, formed last year, is implementing the first phase of its Pentagonal Strategy, focusing on growth, employment, equity, efficiency, and sustainability.
9. With enduring peace and stability, Cambodia's annual growth averaged 7 percent between 2005 and 2019. Poverty was reduced from 50 percent to 9 percent over the same period. Consequently, Cambodia transitioned from low-income to lower-middle-income status. We are encouraged by a national review showing that most of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – along with our 18th goal of mine clearance – are on track, despite global economic uncertainties.
10. To reduce poverty, vulnerability, and inequality while boosting human development and economic growth, Cambodia has implemented wide-ranging social assistance schemes. These include a National Social Assistance Fund that strengthens protection in response to emergencies.
11. In July last year, Cambodia held general elections. Eighteen political parties participated, and more than 8.2 million people cast their ballots. The turnout of almost 85 percent was the highest since UN-supervised elections in 1993 – a clear indication of our people's growing political maturity and enthusiasm for exercising their democratic rights. Thousands of observers – including 333 foreign observers from 65 countries – widely assessed the election as free, fair, credible, and just. The upcoming Senate elections this month are expected to further reflect the general will of the people.

Mr. President,

12. Democracy is a shared value, achieved through learning, building, and strengthening gradually, taking national characteristics and contexts into account. Similarly, human rights are universal values for all humanity. As Secretary-General Guterres has stressed, “Human rights must never be a vehicle for double standards or a means to pursue hidden agendas.”
13. Regrettably, some countries have misinterpreted our application of laws designed to protect law-abiding citizens as clampdowns on freedom. Paradoxically, the same measures, when applied in their own countries, are considered necessary and lawful to maintain public order, social stability, and national security.
14. As a party to eight out of nine core UN human rights conventions, Cambodia's close and constructive cooperation with various UN mechanisms is well recognized by the Council. Last year, the Royal Government extended the mandate of the country's Special Rapporteur and renewed its MoU with the OHCHR Representative. The Special Rapporteur has enjoyed unfettered access to Cambodia, including meetings with several government leaders, including the Prime Minister.
15. This year, Cambodia is scheduled to engage in constructive dialogues under the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review and with the Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

Mr. President,

16. Our engagement with the international community and all human rights mechanisms is a two-way process. The agenda must be approached through a genuine dialogue-based method, emphasizing non-confrontation, non-politicization, and non-selectivity. Assessments should be fair, balanced, and objective, fully observing the Code of Conduct. Preconceived prejudices, prejudgments, or biases will only lead to a loss of credibility and erosion of mutual trust and cooperation.
17. To conclude, Cambodia remains resolute in our firm commitment to cooperate with all stakeholders to further promote and protect human rights within the framework of the rule of law and accountable institutions. We also remain firmly committed to advancing sustainable development and pursuing our irreversible democratic journey with pluralism.

Thank you