

Opening Remarks for Civil Society Day

14 June 2017, Cambodiana Hotel, Phnom Penh

H.E Bun Honn, Secretary of State of Ministry of Interior

Ms Hun Boramey, Chair of CCC EXCOM and Country Director of ActionAid Cambodia,

Mr. Soeung Saroeun, Executive Director of CCC

Excellences representatives of the Royal Government of Cambodia, all Representatives from the Civil Society (from around the country) and the Private Sector, and colleagues from the Diplomatic Community, development Partners and UN Agencies; representatives from the other / neighbouring Mekong countries!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- As representative of the European Union and Development Partners, I am very honoured to be with you for this Civil Society Day, a day that gives us an opportunity to **celebrate the work of the vibrant civil society of Cambodia** and share your **success stories, challenges and plans for the future**. It is also an opportunity to enhance collaboration and discuss development trends.
- The European Union has always **actively promoted and supported the role of Civil Society Organisations in Cambodia's** policy and development frameworks, in recognition of their role as important development actors in their own right. We have worked over the years with many of you and we hope to do so in the future.
- I'm also very pleased to be opening this event together with the Secretary of State of the **Ministry of Interior**. The EU has always underlined that civil society is an important partner for any government. An **empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system** and is an asset in itself. It represents and fosters pluralism and can contribute to more effective policies, equitable and sustainable development and inclusive growth.
- The EU is glad to see the Royal Government of Cambodia efforts to **open up the space for Civil Society**. The December 2018 decision to abolish the 3-day notification rule, the subsequent **consultations** with national NGOs set up by the Ministry of Interior and international NGOs set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are seen as a positive development. We also see that both **RGC-NGO dialogues at national level as well as at provincial level are now being structured**; under these new frameworks **we do hope that the relationship can remain positive and constructive between NGOs and the Government**.
- We are not only supporting CSOs financially! (*Reference to ongoing EU calls for proposals*). The **European partners** – which are operating in Cambodia under a joint strategy and mechanism (many of you have been consulted recently on our last Joint Monitoring Report!) are **committed to further promote operating space and enabling environments for civil society and will**

support civil society's own commitments to improve their effectiveness, transparency, accountability and ensure their actions are results-oriented.

- We are also keen to continue supporting the **multi-stakeholder dialogue** between the Royal Government, CSOs, Development Partners and the private sector. This type of dialogue cannot only serve to greatly enrich public debate and build awareness of citizens, but also results in useful concrete suggestions and proposals for the authorities.
- In Cambodia, European partners have set out how they will take forward these engagements through the **European Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Cambodia 2014-2019**. This year we are embarking on the revision of this CSO Roadmap as well as in parallel the drafting of the next European Joint Strategy to support the development of Cambodia. There will be consultations with you but **I look forward to further hearing feedback from you as to how we can improve this partnership** and move forward on **how to work better together in further strengthening Cambodian civil society** in line with the global governance policy agenda.
- Looking at the **agenda of today** I see you will have the chance to discuss many key issues pertaining to the operating environment for CSOs including the issue of enabling environment, financial sustainability and human capital development.
- **These topics are essential for the functioning of civil society** and not exclusively in Cambodia. In a landscape of changing development financing, it is becoming more critical to reflect on how to improve the cooperation amongst organisations, and in particular across different types of civil society organisations such as academia, NGOs, membership associations, community groups etc. to **strengthen the voice of citizens** in policy discussions.
- I am also glad to see that you want to engage on some of the key areas on which you work on and that are crucial to Cambodia's development like **Natural Resources, Gender and Social Inclusion or even Anti-Corruption**. I am looking forward to a joint reflection on the role of Cambodian civil society in the changing national and international context of development, notably the localisation of the SDGs and Cambodia's graduation to middle income country status. I'm looking forward to receiving feedback from these sessions.
- Last but not least I would like to once again give my sincere thanks for all your hard work. Your commitment is greatly appreciated and should be praised more often than once a year during a Civil Society Day.

Thank you very much for your attention.