

Luncheon Address
On
Governance and its Implication for Cambodia

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- His Excellency Ambassador K Kesavapany, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
- Excellencies
- Ladies and Gentlemen

A warm greeting and good afternoon to all of you! I hope you have a good lunch.

Before I approach the topic of my talk, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my most sincere appreciation to Ambassador Kesavapany, the Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and his team, as well as to all sponsors and supporters for the superb hospitality given to me and to all the Cambodian delegation attending this important Forum. I also would like to present my warm congratulation to ISEAS for putting up an excellent Cambodia Forum, with which the Cambodian Institute for Co-operation and Peace is honoured to take part as co-organizer.

A quick review of the program would confirm that indeed the Forum is conducted in the context of Cambodia increasingly engaging with the international community and facing the challenges of catching up with its neighbours after years of internal problems. All topics of the presentations in the forum reflect the dynamic of a changing national environment as well as the challenges Cambodia is facing to adapt and make itself competitive. I strongly believe that good and bad lessons can be drawn out from this Forum and we can learn from the rich experiences of Singapore in order to prepare ourselves for the noble task of re-building our nation. More importantly, I believe that this Forum will certainly bring about stronger and closer bilateral collaboration between Cambodia and Singapore in an atmosphere of deep understanding and mutual respect.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, I am honored to be given this opportunity to share with you some of my personal humble thoughts and reflection on the topic of governance in Cambodia – which is a foundation towards stability, security, and prosperity.

In this short remark, I will attempt to explain how I understand governance, and review briefly how Cambodia approaches it. At the end, I will make some general statements on what is required to put into effect the good governance.

1- What is ‘governance’?

Good governance has long been a topic of discussion in the international arena, particularly how its influence is wielded within the realm of democracy and economic development. With no doubt, good governance is pivotal to the development process by bringing about effective democratic institutions and sound macroeconomic policy.

‘Governance’ comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Here, the role of the state is regarded as that of creating and ensuring stable political and legal environment conducive to sustainable development. Complementarily, the role of civil society institutions and organizations are viewed as a means of facilitating political and social interaction and mobilizing groups to participate in economic, social and political activities.

However, ‘governance’ not only defines as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development, but it also includes the promise of how best it can deliver an accountable and transparent services to the public and how principles of human rights and democracy are integrated. Here, governance is being evaluated against its effectiveness to guarantee the right to health, sufficient food, quality education, fair justice and personal security.

Therefore, I am of the view that ‘good governance’ is an essential element for successful national development strategy.

Good governance must supersede bad governance. To recognize bad governance is not difficult. Several indicators of bad governance are: absence or lack of transparency and accountability, no credible and independent judiciary system, weak law enforcement, inadequate social justice, pervasive corruption, which result

in high poverty rate, deepening discrepancy between the rich and the poor, and lack of protection and respect of human rights and democratic principles.

2- How Cambodia approach ‘governance’?

Talking about good governance in Cambodia, we need to understand it in a comprehensive way and need to emphasize the roles played by the state, the international donor community/development partners, NGOs, research institutes and think tanks, and the middle class. These actors collaboratively design and make a strategic planning for the good governance and development in Cambodia.

The 1993 Constitution stipulates that Cambodia is a multiparty, liberal democracy in which the Cambodian people are masters of their country and exercise their powers through the national assembly, senate, government, and court. All citizens have the right to establish associations and political parties. The constitution incorporates the rule of law and human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to good governance by focusing on four reform areas: (1) anti-corruption, (2) legal and judicial reform, (3) public administration reform including decentralization, and (4) reform of the armed forces, especially demobilization.

The Cambodian Government has been using a number of tools to improve good governance and economic development in Cambodia. These are Governance Action Plan, National Plan for Public Administration Reform, National Strategic Development Plan, Rectangular Development Strategy, and Cambodian Millennium Development Goals.

However, good policies have to be based on objective thinking and statistical analysis. We have to accept the reality that poverty rate in Cambodia is still relatively high comparing with ASEAN family members. We have to acknowledge that we still lack both hard and soft infrastructures necessary for sustainable development and poverty reduction. We have to learn that we can not rely too much on external sources of economic growth. We need to stand stronger on our own feet.

3- How can Cambodia achieve good governance?

As a Cambodian, I am proud to be part of the successful political economic and institutional reforming process and achievement of the Royal Government of Cambodia in the last decade. In addition, I applaud the recent efforts of the Royal Government in curbing illegal logging in Cambodia and passing the long awaited Anti-Corruption Law. The Anti-Corruption Law, with strong political commitment toward reform process which will definitely contribute to transparency, accountability and good governance.

The amplitude of efforts and the challenges that lie ahead for Cambodia are enormous in pursuing the principles of good governance. Good governance can only be achieved with vigorous and constant reform processes. However reform, in itself, is not just a shallow word. Implementing reforms require not only political will, but also considerable human and financial resources. Cultural and political context have to be taken into account. This process of reform requires all relevant stakeholders. Everyone should participate actively not just observe and criticize.

To systematically resolve the obstacles Cambodia is facing with regards to good governance, we need to have a strong state institution working closely with the private sector and civil society. We need to build the national capacity for change at all levels as the world is changing very rapidly in a nonlinear pattern.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

I personally prefer to compare “governance” to “driving a car”. To drive a car, we need to have at least three components: a roadmap showing direction where you want to go; the physical body of the car itself represents the mechanism or process through which we use to embark on our destination; and finally, we need a licensed operator to drive the car safely to the intended destination.

A roadmap is a short term and long term strategic planning of how we want to develop our country. The body of the car is the formation of the political, social, and economic system in which there is a presence of well functioning institutions and organizations. The driver is the leader who is capable, honest and committed to the process of nation building.

Driving in Cambodia is a big challenge. The road is small. There are so many motorbikes and the respect of traffic rules is limited. It is said that if we can drive in Cambodia, we can try around the world. This implies that to have good governance in Cambodia is challenged by many factors. It is impossible to have perfect

governance system overnight. It needs and continued efforts with strong commitment.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen

Before I conclude, allow me to share with you some of my modest thoughts on the ways to move forward. To achieve good governance, Cambodia needs a development policy that is more broad based and pro-poor, invest more in hard and soft infrastructure, promote education, especially in the rural areas, provide adequate health care services, and ensure that the judicial system is well functioning, independent from political influence. In addition, we need to further improve the law enforcement and strengthen our national capacity to adapt to changes taking place at home, in the region, and around the world.

Thank you very much for your kind attention!