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## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

### **European Union and Cambodian Government successfully conclude their eighth Joint Committee**

The 8th EU-Cambodia Joint Committee was held in Brussels on 13 March 2014 and was preceded by the subgroups on development cooperation, on trade and on institution building, administrative reform, legal and judicial reform, governance and human rights. The Joint Committee was co-chaired by H.E. Mr OUCH Borith, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and by Mr Ugo Astuto, Director for South and Southeast Asia, at the European External Action Service.

Both sides welcomed the meeting as timely and held frank and in-depth exchanges on a broad range of bilateral issues, including political developments in Cambodia and the EU. They exchanged views on Cambodia's reform agenda and priorities in the post-electoral context, emphasising reforms in the election process, governance and the respect for Human Rights as key drivers for Cambodia's democratic development. Land management was also high on the agenda. Multilateral and regional issues were also touched upon, in particular the Lower Mekong sub-region. The chairs of the subgroups reported to the plenary.

H.E. Mr. Ouch Borith stressed that through Cambodia-EU Cooperation Agreement, which forms the basis of our cooperation, the EU has provided substantial assistance to Cambodia covering several sectors. Ranging from public finance management and good governance, to food security and education, from poverty reduction to sustainable development and private sector development, the EU-sponsored programs and projects have made a significant

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positive impact on the living condition of the Cambodian people. He also expressed on behalf of the people and government of Cambodia his sincere thanks to the EU and its Member States for their invaluable assistance to Cambodia and its commitments to continue assisting Cambodia's development.

Director Astuto recalled: *"The EU has always been at the forefront to promote Cambodia's recovery and development. This 8th Joint Committee was an excellent opportunity to reaffirm our strong support for a democratic, prosperous and sustainable Cambodia. We discussed a broad spectrum of issues including human rights, trade and development. We reaffirmed our commitment to work for the consolidation of our relationship."*

The sub-group on "Trade and Investment", which was held on 10 March, noted the increase in bilateral trade, in particular Cambodia's export performance, with the EU now becoming the primary destination of Cambodian exports. The two sides discussed in detail the trade regime "Everything But Arms", which grants preferences Cambodia as a least developed country. They also addressed a number of other bilateral, as well as regional or multilateral issues. The EU being a major donor of trade related assistance, both sides agreed to continue working together towards improving Cambodia's business and investment climate.

In the sub-group on "Development cooperation", both sides took stock of ongoing bilateral, thematic and regional cooperation activities. Fruitful exchanges were conducted on both Cambodia's and the EU's future policy agenda and planning. This was especially significant in the context of the programming of EU development cooperation for 2014-2020 in Cambodia.

Dialogue in the sub-group on "Institution Building, Administrative Reform, Legal Reform, Governance and Human Rights" was candid and constructive and focussed on concrete cooperation in the protection and promotion of Human Rights, including on promoting the abolishment of death penalty. Freedom of expression and association, legal and judicial reform, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia, the situation of human rights defenders and trade unions representatives, as well as the protection of land and social rights were key priorities to address.

## **Background**

At the heart of the relationship between the European Union and the Kingdom of Cambodia is the 1999 Cooperation Agreement, which provides the legal basis for the Joint Committee. The Joint Committee, which normally meets every other year, alternately in Phnom Penh and in Brussels, allows the EU and the Royal Government of Cambodia to formulate recommendations and set priorities. Collaboration between the EU and Cambodia also takes place on the regional and international stage through fora such as ASEAN, ASEM and the WTO.

The EU is one of the main trade and development partners of Cambodia.

## Trade relations with the EU

Cambodia, as a Least Developed Countries, benefits from duty-free access to the EU under the Everything But Arms initiative. In 2013, Cambodian exports to the EU amounted € 2.4 billion, concentrated in clothing (68.8%), footwear (12.9%), bicycles (10.3%), rice (5.2%) and sugar (1.6%). In 2013 the EU has become the prime Cambodian export market.

## Development cooperation

The EU and its MS are the largest providers of assistance. The EU Group (Commission and Member States) disbursed altogether around **€151.6** million of funding to Cambodia **in 2012** (around €154.2 mio including Switzerland). This makes **the EU Group the largest (grant) donor in Cambodia**. Main priorities for ongoing EU interventions under the 2007-13 envelope are: Support to the National Strategic Development Plan (Public Finance Management, agriculture), education, trade related assistance, governance and human rights (incl. support to Cambodia's decentralisation reform and to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia). Total envelope for EU 2007-2013 was €143 million (without EU Member States). Cambodia benefits also from the thematic and regional EU funding programmes. Discussions on future programming for the EU's assistance to Cambodia under the Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2014-2020 are currently ongoing.

[http://eeas.europa.eu/cambodia/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/cambodia/index_en.htm)