The 6th High-Level Brainstorming Dialogue on Enhancing Complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

“Progress on implanting action under the Complementarities Initiatives”
By H.E. Mr. Theng Pagnathun, Delegate of the Royal Government of Cambodia in charge of Director General of Planning, Ministry of Planning, Cambodia

Excellencies Co-Chairs,
Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen

Cambodia acknowledges and greatly appreciates the initiative and efforts of the UN-ESCAP to organize the 6th High-Level Brainstorming Dialogue on Enhancing Complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development today in Bangkok, Thailand. The dialogue well-reflects the high commitment of the ASEAN member states in the context of fighting COVID-19 and in achieving the SDGs. This initiative is highly regarded by the Royal Government of Cambodia as an inclusive, deliberative, and consensual platform of discussion with relevant member countries.

It is very encouraging to see the ASEAN members are forward-looking. There would be an opportunity in crisis, and this view is a good way to think of the recovery once the immediate response has been well managed. Such a kind of thought also reassures our commitment and efforts to undertake response measures across many policy areas.

Cambodia has been fully committed to realizing the SDGs as reflected in Cambodia’s VNR 2019. However, our impressive socio-economic achievements have been set back by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have been severely affecting all dimensions of sustainable development.

Since 1994, Cambodia recorded the lowest economic growth in 2020, contracted by 3.1 percent. The impacts, especially potential increase in poverty associated with job losses, could have been even worse had there not been the Government’s timely response measures in COVID-affected sectors. To respond to the COVID-19 crisis, the Royal Government of Cambodia has launched a series of key interventions to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate the collateral damage in COVID-affected sectors with a whole of government approach as well as a whole of society approach.

Considering that COVID-19 vaccination would be instrumental in bringing the country’s economy to the pathway to recovery, the Royal Government launched the vaccination program in early February 2021 and has accelerated it quickly. Cambodia is the second most vaccinated country in ASEAN.
In this unanticipated circumstance, targets originally set within the national SDGs framework might need to be reviewed in order to retain flexibility during the implementation.

The aspiration to accelerate actions to achieve the SDGs is also shared and reflected in the Economic Recovery Plan 2021-2023, which focuses on two main pillars: 1) economic survival and revival, and 2) a strong foundation for growth and resilience; and underpinned by a three-pronged approach: recovery, reform, and resilience.

Since we expected to resume our new normal of life soon and will gradually open up our economic activities, we will also keep track on our implementation of the SDGs. Within this fast-evolving context, I would like to highlight some key priority works as follows:

- Turning the COVID-19 into opportunities for domestic reforms and social resilience by strengthening health and social protection systems to be ready to respond to future crises or risks;
- Prioritizing public expenditures towards sectors related directly to the SDGs, including education, health, social protection, agriculture, and infrastructure;
- Promoting trade policy and trade facilitation as well as providing preferential treatment to developing countries for expanding greater openness of international trade and supporting stronger multilateralism and globalization;
- Continuing to strengthen financial stability and diversification as well as promoting the role and dynamism of the private sector to fulfill the financing need to achieve SDGs;
- Ensuring continuity of ODA, especially financial assistance towards sustaining the momentum of the SDGs; and
- Strengthening the ownership by building partnerships between all development actors.

Finally, as the COVID-19 pandemic has tested the solidarity, unity, preparedness and leadership within not only the country but also the region, I would highly recommend that the member states enhance and foster their solidarity, unity, and cooperation within the region to jointly fight against the current and future challenges caused by the geopolitical tensions, environmental shocks and the pandemics in order to increase the socio-economic developments and to achieve the targets set in the SDGs.

Thanks for your attention.