

**REMARKS OF
H.E. DR. KAO KIM HOURN, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASEAN**

*Gala Dinner to Celebrate Over 30 Years of the
Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace*

1 June 2026, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

***Good Evening, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen and Dear Friends,***

1. First of all, let me start by thanking the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) for the kind invitation. I have not been back to CICP for quite a long time. When I received the invitation, I felt very delighted that the invitation was extended to me. I am delighted to be here with all of you this evening to celebrate this 30th Anniversary of founding of CICP. It is a deep honour and a genuine joy to be with you this evening as we gather to celebrate a truly special occasion; the 30th Anniversary of the CICP.
2. Looking around this room tonight, I am reminded that great institutions are, at their heart, gatherings of people bound by shared purpose. And so, before anything else, let me simply say: thank you very much for being here, and for being part of this story. To capture the spirit of tonight's celebration, allow me to reflect on what I called four Ms – not magic and miracle or what we called mainland and maritime of ASEAN. The four Ms are referred to as milestones, memories, moments, and meanings, particularly in regard to the journal of CICP
3. First on the Milestones: Thirty years is a remarkable milestone in the life of any institution. It is a special occasion to celebrate what has been achieved, yes; but more than that, it is an opportunity to honour the journey itself: a journey shaped by dedication, perseverance, partnership, and an unwavering commitment to Cambodia's national reconciliation, development, regional engagement, and international cooperation. As you may recall, in the early days, we talked so much about the spirit of national reconciliation in this country.
4. CICP began with very limited resources, modest facilities, and a small but deeply committed team driven by a strong sense of purpose and a clear and bold vision, especially the Board of Directors at that time. I was in fact recruited to take CICP from paper into reality at that time from the very beginning of CICP. From those humble beginnings, it grew steadily, consistently, purposefully, into one of the leading think tanks not only in Cambodia, but across the ASEAN region. Today, it stands as a respected platform for policy dialogue, strategic research, and regional cooperation. That transformation did not happen by accident. It happened because of people. People in this very room, many I

have not seen for a long time, including my old friends, many who came before us who had the conviction, the spirit and the determination, particularly the founders, members of the Board of Directors.

5. Second, on Memories: CICIP was born at a deeply significant moment in Cambodia's modern history. In the 1990s, Cambodia was emerging from decades of conflict, isolation and genocide. It was rebuilding with a renewed sense of hope, and a fierce determination to restore peace, strengthen national institutions, and reconnect with the region and the wider world.
6. I could remember the atmosphere of that time. Many Cambodians who had been also educated abroad began returning home, drawn back not by comfort or certainty, but by a profound sense of purpose and responsibility. When they returned to Cambodia in 1990, they came back to a nation facing immense challenges and yet, the strong sense of optimism. There was something in the air: an aspiration, a collective belief that a better future was not only possible, but within reach, especially with a number of leaders in this country who were so determined to turn this country around. I can now say, in looking back, there were many positive memories of recent Cambodia.
7. There was also a shared understanding, one felt deeply across Cambodian society, that rebuilding the country was not only about physical infrastructure. It was equally about building institutions, strengthening human capacity, fostering open dialogue, and preparing Cambodia to re-engage with its neighbours, working with the neighbours of the sub-region, the regions, as well as with the world at large. It was in this broader spirit of nation-building that CICIP found its purpose and its place.
8. Third, on Moments: Among the defining chapters in CICIP's history is the role it played in Cambodia's integration into ASEAN. CICIP organized hundreds of meetings, seminars, conferences on ASEAN and ASEAN-related matters to promote and sell ASEAN to the people of Cambodia. As Secretary-General of ASEAN, this is a chapter I hold with particular fondness.
9. As Cambodia prepared for ASEAN membership in 1999, CICIP was quietly but meaningfully at work promoting greater understanding of regional processes, multilateral diplomacy, and the norms and values that underpin ASEAN cooperation. Through research, dialogue, and sustained engagement with regional partners, the institute contributed to the broader national efforts that brought Cambodia fully into the ASEAN family. It was the kind of contribution that rarely makes headlines, but which matters enormously.
10. On Meanings: Perhaps most importantly, tonight carries deep meaning because the story of CICIP is, in my view, inseparable from Cambodia's own journey of reconstruction, reintegration, and intellectual renewal following one of the most difficult chapters in Cambodia's recent history.
11. CICIP has always been more than a think tank. It has been a gathering place; a space where policymakers, diplomats, scholars, researchers, civil society

representatives, and young leaders from Cambodia and beyond could come together, exchange ideas, and grapple with the questions that shape the region's future and Cambodia's own future. In a world that sometimes moves too fast for careful reflection, that space matters more than ever. In short, there was a space for dialogue, for diplomacy, and for true exchanges of ideas.

Your Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen and Friends,

12. Over three decades, CICP's contributions have touched what I would describe as six pillars - the six Ps: peace, progress, prosperity, partnerships, people, and pragmatism.
13. On peace: at a time when the world faces growing uncertainty and division and fragmentation, institutions committed to constructive dialogue and mutual understanding are increasingly a necessity. CICP has consistently provided that platform, bringing together thought leaders, thinkers, policymakers and practitioners from across Cambodia and the region and of course from ASEAN Member States, and in doing so, has contributed quietly and genuinely to regional peace, stability and cooperation. Dialogue, consultation and engagement, are, after all, the lifeblood of ASEAN.
14. On prosperity: it is often said that peace is the foundation of progress. CICP has enriched the conversation and dialogue on ASEAN integration, economic cooperation, sustainable development, peace and security, all issues that touch the lives, the well-being and livelihoods of millions of people across our region.
15. On partnerships: CICP's achievements belong not to one institution alone, but to the constellation of partners, national, regional and international, who have walked alongside it, provided support, and woven it into wider networks of cooperation, collaboration and exchange. This evening is as much a celebration of those partnerships as it is of the institute itself.
16. On people: as Ms. Pok Marina has just mentioned, beyond its research and policy work, CICP has invested in something even more lasting: the next generation. Young Cambodian researchers, analysts, diplomats, and professionals have grown within and through this institution, going on to serve Cambodia and ASEAN with distinction. That human investment, quietly made over thirty years, may well be CICP's most enduring legacy and tangible contribution.
17. Finally, on pragmatism: as a proud member of the ASEAN-ISIS network and other networks including the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific or CSCAP, CICP has consistently translated ideas into practical, grounded policy recommendations. That pragmatic spirit, the hallmark of Track 2 diplomacy at its best, has defined the institute's approach throughout its history.

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18. Moments like these remind us that nothing of lasting value is ever built alone, and so it is only right, on this joyful evening, to acknowledge those whose generosity, wisdom, vision, and friendship have made CICIP's journey possible and enduring.
19. To the Royal Government of Cambodia, whose steadfast support has been foundational throughout CICIP's journey: I would like to acknowledge and thank HRH Prince Norodom Sirivudh and other distinguished members of Board of Directors, H.E. Keat Chhon, H.E. Ung Huot, for example, whose vision, encouragement, and unwavering commitment during the institute's formative years gave CICIP both its direction and its spirit. The institute bears their footprint and imprint in the best possible way.
20. To the successive leadership teams, researchers, staff members, fellows, and partners, whose professionalism, contribution and dedication built this institution year by year: you are the reason we are here tonight. To ASEAN Member States, partners, development agencies, universities, and friends from the region around the world who have offered partnership and trust over the decades: your investment has borne real and lasting fruit.
21. And to the many young Cambodians who have been part of CICIP's journey; your energy, your intellect, and your commitment inspire enormous confidence and optimism for the future of this country.

Your Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen and Friends,

22. For those of us who witnessed CICIP's earliest years, there is something deeply moving about tonight. To see how far this institution has travelled, from modest, hopeful beginnings to a respected voice in regional affairs and diplomacy, is a reminder of what vision, perseverance, and genuine collaboration can achieve together.
23. That journey is not only a source of pride and inspiration; it is also a reminder that CICIP's mission remains as vital today as it was three decades ago. As the institute steps into its fourth decade and beyond, it is my sincere hope and wish that it will continue to serve as a centre of strategic thinking, a forum for honest dialogue, and a bridge of cooperation between Cambodia, ASEAN, and the wider world.
24. In many ways, that spirit, I think we should continue to build on. Before I close here, let me say a few things about Germany and the EU because of the partnership with Germany. Next year, ASEAN and the EU will be commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Dialogue Partnership. It has been

an enduring partnership between ASEAN and the EU and, of course, between ASEAN and Germany. This year is a very special year, and it is the 10th Anniversary of Development Partnership between ASEAN and Germany. We understand that Germany has requested to elevate the partnership to the next level and that is the Sectoral Dialogue Partnership. I believe it's just a matter of time before Germany can be granted with the new Sectoral Dialogue Partnership. I was just in Germany recently attending the Munich Security Conference and my working visit to Berlin to promote the strong relations, cooperation and partnership between ASEAN and Germany. I want to say thank you very much to KAS for your active support here in Cambodia and in the various ASEAN Member States in the region. Your support will go a long way. This year, as reminded by the Ambassador of Germany to ASEAN, Germany has invested a lot in the ASEAN Community-building. I hope that this will continue.

25. On this joyful occasion, please join me in extending warm congratulations to the Cambodia Institute for Cooperation and Peace on its 30th Anniversary. May it continue to grow from strength to strength, advancing peace, deepening cooperation, and building understanding for Cambodia, for ASEAN, and for the world we all share.

26. Thank you very much. And I wish everyone a truly wonderful evening.

