



9 SEP 2020

Senator the Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Women

MC20-006324

RECEIVED

24 SEP 2020

Office of Julian Hill MP

Mr Julian Hill MP
Member for Bruce
PO Box 7427
DANDENONG VIC 3175

Dear Mr Hill

Thank you for your letter of 22 July 2020 regarding the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) trade preferences for Cambodia and the 21 July joint letter published by Human Rights Watch.

We are concerned about Cambodia's adherence to the human rights standards it has committed to uphold under international and domestic law. We are also concerned about the profound challenges COVID-19 presents to countries in the region. While Cambodia has to date recorded relatively few cases, it is highly vulnerable to the economic impacts of the pandemic and at risk of losing decades of development gains.

Australia supports an open, democratic and resilient Cambodia and we judge constructive engagement to be more likely to influence positive change than punitive measures. Australia is helping Cambodia address its current health, economic and strategic challenges by pivoting our development partnerships to support the COVID-19 response. To encourage trade, Australia provides complete duty free access for imports from all Least Developed Countries. We combine this with high-level advocacy for human rights and support for civil society and voices independent of government.

I raised concerns with ongoing restrictions on democracy and human rights with Cambodia's Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn at a meeting in September 2019. Australia raised these concerns again during bilateral Senior Officials Talks in the same month.

Our Ambassador in Phnom Penh, Pablo Kang, regularly raises concerns with restrictions on free speech, association and political expression in Cambodia with senior representatives of the Cambodian Government, including in his introductory call with Prime Minister Hun Sen in January 2020. The Ambassador has raised the Law on Associations and NGOs and the State of Emergency Law (not yet in effect) at senior levels, including with the Defence Minister and the Police Commissioner-General.

The Ambassador meets Kem Sokha, and other political actors, and frequently raises concerns about Kem Sokha's trial with Cambodian government counterparts, including the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Interior Sar Kheng. Australian Embassy officials have attended every hearing of the trial and will attend again when the trial recommences.

Ambassador Kang liaises and coordinates with other Ambassadors in Cambodia on these matters, and engages with civil society organisations on the matters raised in the open letter.

Australia uses the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) to make our concerns known. During the HRC's 43rd session in February 2020, we called on Cambodia to allow all political parties, civil society and media to operate freely, and to ensure due process and procedural fairness in the trial of Kem Sokha.

If you would like to discuss our approach to Cambodia in more detail, please contact my office to arrange a briefing with relevant Departmental officials and my Adviser at a suitable time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Marise Payne', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

MARISE PAYNE