

## "The Significance of Meeting our Development Commitments"

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Thank you Deputy Minister Oh Joon  
Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen

It is an honour to have been asked to speak during this session to articulate a vision for the 4th High-level Forum to be held here in Seoul in 2011.

We heard this morning about the global effort to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goal targets; we talked about the need for aid delivery and management to be better organised; and we heard how more recent global challenges require that we review our efforts to ensure that aid is used for maximum effect.

In sharing my vision for the High-level Forum, and focusing in particular on our joint development commitments, I wish to draw on my personal experience as Secretary General of the Royal Government of Cambodia's aid mobilisation and partnerships agency: the Council for the Development of Cambodia. This will put the issues we discussed this morning in context, and will highlight three key points:

First, I will argue that an adaptive and country-led approach is critical to securing the reforms, more efficient practices and the stronger national systems that are required to ensure that aid delivery is linked to the achievement of the MDGs.

Second, I will consider the continued requirement for a strong global effort to reform aid management practices and the manner in which they need to be more closely aligned to partner countries own efforts.

Finally, I will observe that the multi-stakeholder development partnership, although critical to our efforts at national and global level to achieve the MDGs, is complex in nature. It requires significant investment and explicit acknowledgement of issues such as power and culture if it is to deliver on its supposed benefits of more efficient aid delivery, a greater contribution to capacity development, and more impact on development results.

Ladies and gentlemen, the first point I wish to elaborate on is the need for **an adaptive and country-led approach**. In 2000 the Millennium Declaration heralded an almost unprecedented commitment to a partnership focused on reducing global poverty. The Paris Declaration of 2005 then represented a consensus on the need to reform aid delivery in order to accelerate progress towards the MDGs. These global commitments provide a rallying point for the world: for donors, for partner country governments and for civil society. But 10 years after the Millennium Declaration, and almost at the end of the 5-year period covered by the Paris Declaration, we recognise that progress is driven by country-specific factors as well as by global trends.

Cambodia has made significant progress in reducing poverty over the last decade. This has been driven by sustained high economic growth rates that have directly benefited the Cambodian people: the most recent UN Human Development Report shows for example, that in the last ten years average life expectancy has risen by 7 years, literacy has increased by 10 percentage points and income per capita has increased by 50%. This performance is impressive by any standard.

But Cambodia's own development trajectory, and its experience in managing development partnerships, emphasises the specific nature of the Cambodia development context that is based on stability, the role of the private sector, and an approach that utilises the technical and

financial resources made available by a range of international partners, both public and private. It is these particular drivers of growth and transformation that inform the manner in which policies are developed, strategies are implemented, and each partner is held mutually accountable for results.

A key lesson after a decade of such rapid transformation is that we must not lose sight of these fundamental drivers of change. We need to acknowledge the complexity of reform, especially in the area of governance that must accommodate priorities such as stability and capacity development. We must also recognise that changing aid relations, and the introduction of new aid practices, are themselves complex reforms that imply changing mindsets and behaviours as preconditions for success. At a minimum, this means taking a more integrated approach to how we manage related reforms in areas such as public finance, civil service reform, decentralisation and capacity development. Aid effectiveness must be part of this broader effort to manage change and deliver results. In all of these change processes, securing political leadership and developing capacity is perhaps the key to successfully linking the principles of the Paris Declaration with our commitments to the MDGs.

Recognising these contextual factors in Cambodia we have learned from our experience of Paris Declaration implementation and adopted a more reflective and evidence-based approach. This emphasises the link to initiatives at sector level, ensuring that aid effectiveness efforts are prioritised, relevant and attainable. More important, they have the high-level commitment of Government and donors working in partnership in each respective sector. Our aid policy now identifies capacity development, and the related core governance reforms, as perhaps the principal rationale for development cooperation. And it adopts a broader perspective on the use of programme approaches that can strengthen partnerships so that our shared commitments can be brokered and implemented in an environment characterised by ownership, mutual accountability and a focus on results.

So country context matters, ladies and gentlemen. But our global commitments continue to be the catalyst that galvanises our work at country level and this brings me to the second of the points I wish to make: that **a strong global effort to reform aid management practices must continue beyond the lifespan of the Paris Declaration.**

Just as Cambodia has learned from its own experience, we have also been an active and committed global partner in matters related to aid effectiveness. This has allowed us to learn as well as to contribute to these international efforts. These global experiences entirely re-enforce our country-based findings that we need to view our aid effectiveness efforts as reforms, not as technical initiatives or discrete activities that are divorced from wider reforms and sector programmes. More important, it means that we need to take a long-term view, learning from the global evidence presented in Accra that clearly shows that while we are making progress, it has been slower than we had hoped for.

Changing the way we work, as partner countries and as donors, will take time. There are issues of political leadership, bureaucratic inertia, vested interest and change management that we need to acknowledge more honestly. And only by acknowledging them can we then identify the longer-term measures that we can implement – individually and collectively – to meet our development commitments. As the evidence base grows – with the 2nd round of the Evaluation and the final survey of indicators - the 4th High-level Forum must therefore be prepared to address these areas of difficulty so that the nature of blockages can be clearly identified and concrete action taken as part of a new "post Paris" approach.

Global partnership – and increased resolve – are an imperative, especially as we tackle new challenges associated with the global economy and the prospect of climate change.

This brings me to my third and final point, which relates to **partnership at the national and global level.** We implicitly accept that a development paradigm founded on the principles of partnership is the appropriate mechanism to improve aid delivery and to secure progress towards the MDGs. Our approach to partnership is based on an assumption of consensus and

equality, but it perhaps under-estimates the difficulties of dealing with issues such as culture, power, accountability, interest and motivation that can undermine the potential of partnership-based models:

- At no point in the Paris Declaration framework, or in the analysis that has followed, has the issue of power been considered, even though the premise of ownership assumes that there is willingness, ability and capacity on both the donor and partner sides to effect the required changes in aid relations.
- Equality is another area that requires more reflection, especially where these new approaches to aid delivery imply more donor engagement in policy processes, which can of course be sensitive, as well as harmonisation amongst donors of different size, interest and perspective.
- Consensus also runs strongly through the Paris Declaration, as it does through the MDGs. Yet can we be certain of firm commitment to aid effectiveness principles when incentives, accountabilities and attitudes to risk – of individuals, ministries and donor agencies – are usually more complex than the rationality-based foundations of the Paris Declaration concedes?

The partnership paradigm requires a more open and frank discussion, ladies and gentlemen. Indeed, I believe this issue will become even more critical in the period leading up to our 2011 meeting as global challenges, the entry and influence of new donors, and a growing call for a reformed aid architecture will become more pressing. I therefore hope that the High-level Forum can place it centre-stage on the agenda as a step towards refining the arrangements for meeting our development commitments.

Ladies and gentlemen

I have identified three issues, each of which demonstrates that the Paris Declaration and its implementation can best be described as a "work in progress". It is an unfinished agenda. But more than that, perhaps we also need to acknowledge that, once we look closely at the evidence of implementation, changes need to be made in its approach. These changes should:

1. Support greater learning and adaptation to country context, recognising complexity and the longer-term outlook that is required to manage change;
2. Maintain global resolve to meeting our joint commitments; and
3. Explicitly acknowledge that the partnership paradigm – while offering great potential to help us reach our shared goals - is a complex issue that requires a more sensitive handling of issues such as power, culture and accountability.

Our next High-level Forum therefore provides a most important opportunity and we must not shy away from addressing these difficult issues. This means of course that its organisers face a formidable challenge as it will be necessary to:

- Secure continued – and perhaps increased - political leadership for aid reform;
- Move away from aid effectiveness being perceived as a technical agenda, emphasising its political nature and relevance to broader reform and change processes; and
- Accommodate the full range of views that can help to cement the link between aid effectiveness work and the development results to which we have made a commitment.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. These views are based on the Cambodia experience but ultimately they are a personal perspective. I hope they have helped to stimulate your own thinking and possibly to have made some modest contribution to the preparation of the 2011 High-level Forum and to meeting our development commitments.

Thank you for your attention