

Canada and Cambodia: Partners in Prosperity

By Christian DesRoches, Ambassador of Canada to the Kingdom of Cambodia

In 2024, Canada proudly re-established its embassy in Phnom Penh, a milestone that reflects our renewed commitment to Cambodia and the broader Southeast Asian region. This decision was more than symbolic—it was a strategic investment in the future of our bilateral relationship. By restoring a permanent diplomatic presence in Phnom Penh, Canada signaled its intent to deepen economic cooperation, enhance diplomatic and educational ties, and ensure that our bilateral relationship translates into tangible benefits for Cambodians and Canadians alike. The reopening of the embassy provides a vital platform to support Canadian businesses already thriving in Cambodia, to expand trade and investment opportunities, and to foster the people-to-people ties that are the foundation of lasting prosperity.

When Canada unveiled its Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2022, it marked a turning point in our foreign policy. The strategy recognized Southeast Asia as a priority region for expanding trade, strengthening security cooperation, and deepening our diplomatic footprint. For Canada, this is not simply about diversifying markets—it is about building enduring partnerships with countries whose dynamism will shape the global economy for decades to come. Cambodia, with its youthful population, strategic location, and impressive growth trajectory, is central to this vision.

Over the past decade, Cambodia has emerged as one of Southeast Asia's fastest-growing economies. Its garment industry, agricultural exports, and tourism sector have driven remarkable progress, while new opportunities are opening in digital services, renewable energy, and infrastructure. For Canadian businesses, this is fertile ground. Our commercial presence in Cambodia has expanded significantly, and the success of Canadian companies here demonstrates the strength of our bilateral relationship.

relationship. The Canadian International School of Phnom Penh stands as a vivid symbol of the deep, long-standing ties between Canada and Cambodia. Its curriculum, values, and community culture reflect a blend of Canadian educational excellence and Cambodian heritage, showing how both nations invest in each other's future. Likewise, Cambodian students studying in Canada bring back skills and perspectives that enrich their communities. And Canadian entrepreneurs working in Phnom Penh and elsewhere in Cambodia gain insights into Southeast Asia's dynamism. These human connections are the foundation of sustainable trade relations.

Looking ahead, Cambodia's hosting of the Francophonie Summit in November 2026 will be a milestone moment. As a proud member of the community of French speaking nations, Canada sees this summit as an opportunity to showcase the values of linguistic diversity, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation. It will also provide a platform to highlight Cambodia's growing role on the international stage and to deepen bilateral ties. For Canadian businesses, the summit will be a chance to explore new partnerships, expand networks, and reaffirm our commitment to Cambodia's future.

As a time of growing international uncertainty, high-level meetings such as the Francophonie Summit also provide a valuable opportunity to reduce the risk of conflict. We live in challenging times: global supply chains are shifting, climate change is reshaping economies, and geopolitical tensions are upending supply chains and multilateral agreements. As countries whose prosperity depends on rules-based international trade, Canada and Cambodia have a shared interest in upholding the global rules and norms that have driven peace and prosperity over the past few decades. By investing in sustainable industries, promoting inclusive growth, and strengthening international cooperation, we can ensure that our trade relationship is resilient and future-proof.

In this regard, the next major step on the horizon is the ASEAN-Canada Free Trade Agreement (ACAFTA). A successful conclusion of ACAFTA negotiations in 2026 would carry real weight for Cambodia. It would give Cambodian exporters more predictable, preferential access to the Canadian market, helping them stay competitive as global supply chains shift, and sustain

Take ABA Bank, a subsidiary of National Bank of Canada. Today, ABA is one of Cambodia's leading financial institutions, providing modern banking services to millions of Cambodians. By supporting small and medium enterprises, ABA is helping to unlock the entrepreneurial spirit that drives Cambodia's economy. Similarly, Manulife has played a pioneering role in introducing life insurance to Cambodia, empowering families to plan for the future with confidence. And Angkor Resources is contributing to responsible resource development, ensuring that Cambodia's natural wealth is harnessed in ways that benefit communities and respect the environment. These companies are not just investors—they are partners in Cambodia's development story.

The numbers speak for themselves. By 2025, Canada had become the third-largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Cambodia. This is a remarkable achievement, underscoring the confidence Canadian firms have in Cambodia's economic trajectory. It also reflects the growing recognition that Cambodia offers opportunities across diverse sectors—from finance and insurance to agriculture, renewable energy, and digital innovation. As Canadian investment expands, so too does the potential for knowledge transfer, job creation, and long-term economic resilience.

Cambodia is also enjoying considerable success in the Canadian market. Indeed, Canada is the fourth largest destination for Cambodia's garment, footwear and travel goods sector. Cambodia's high-quality manufacturing and competitive production capabilities position it as a reliable partner. These trade flows not only support economic opportunity in Cambodia but also deepens the broader relationship between the two countries, reinforcing shared commitments to sustainable growth and open markets.

But trade is not only about goods and services; it is about people. Educational exchanges, cultural programs, and professional partnerships are weaving a fabric of mutual understanding that strengthens our economic

Cambodia's access to the Canadian market after its graduation from Least Developed Country status in 2029. It would also signal deeper economic cooperation between Canada and ASEAN, creating opportunities for investment, skills development, and diversification that support Cambodia's long-term growth. Finally, ACAFTA would provide Cambodia with a valuable stepping stone as it build up its capacity to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Achieving progress on this ambitious agenda will not be easy. It will require the Royal Government of Cambodia to continue taking concrete steps to strengthen good governance, accountability and effective service delivery through the implementation of meaningful reforms. This will, in turn, create the favourable investment climate that will allow businesses and workers to prosper. Canada is committed to continue supporting Cambodians on this journey. Together, Canada and Cambodia can build a partnership that is more than transactional. It can be transformative, anchored in trust, driven by innovation, and guided by shared values.

As Ambassador, I am proud of the progress we have made, but I am even more excited about what lies ahead. The Francophonie Summit will shine a spotlight on Cambodia's role as a bridge between cultures and economies. It will also remind us that trade is not just about numbers—it is about people, ideas, and shared aspirations.

Canada and Cambodia are partners in prosperity. Our relationship is built on respect, strengthened by commerce, and enriched by human connection. As we look toward the summit and beyond, I am confident that our bilateral trade relations will continue to flourish, bringing prosperity to both our nations and contributing to a more resilient Indo-Pacific region.