US’ Murphy meets on repatriation

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Minister of the Interior Sar Kheng met with US ambassador Patrick Murphy on Wednesday to discuss cooperating on repatriation after it had been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Murphy requested the two countries find a possible way to continue carrying out this work, according to a Facebook post by Sar Kheng.

In response, the interior minister said the Kingdom was committed to the principles and has a political will to continue with what both countries had agreed to in the past. He said although Covid-19 delayed this work, the principle and political will remain unchanged.

Cambodia and the US had a Memorandum of Understanding in 2000 concerning the repatriation of each other’s nationals should they fail to obtain citizenship in the other country.

Early this year, 25 Cambodians were repatriated from the US. Since 2002, nearly 800 Cambodians have been repatriated, according to the Khmer Vulnerability Aid Organisation (KVAO), an NGO that helps re-integrate them.

The meeting also touched on other issues related to law enforcement.

“Productive talk with [interior minister] Sar Kheng, part of 70th anniversary focus on law enforcement cooperation. [We] discussed efforts to combat trafficking of persons and drugs,
child protection, mutual obligations for repatriation, freedom of speech and assembly, and Cambodian sovereignty,” Murphy said in a tweet.

Interior ministry spokesperson Phat Sophanit told The Post on Thursday that there was no plan to move ahead with repatriation soon due to the pandemic. He said Murphy requested in the meeting that the interview with individuals to be repatriated from the US should be carried out via video conference, without having to perform direct interviews like in the past.

“The US ambassador requested that we use technology via video conference or whatever possible, instead of interviewing them directly. Samdech [Sar Kheng] did not object to the request if that could ensure clarity and accuracy of the identity of the individual to be repatriated.

“Samdech [Sar Kheng] said the delay of the work was due to technical aspects in addition to Covid-19. But in its stance, Cambodia’s stance is unchanged; we still implement what both countries had agreed to,” Sophanit said.

US embassy spokesperson Chad Roedemeier said on Thursday that all countries have an obligation under international law to accept the return of their nationals judged to be ineligible to remain in a foreign country.

“When asked, the US itself routinely cooperates with Cambodia and other foreign governments to expeditiously document and accept its own citizens.

“We look forward to continued cooperation with the Cambodian government to make progress on this important issue,” he said.

Human rights activists have decried the deportation of Cambodians from the US, saying it violates their rights.

Chak Sopheap, the executive director of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, told The Post that those deportees “were being doubly punished by being sent to the Kingdom”.

Political analyst Lao Mong Hay agreed. He said those immigrants did not have a normal upbringing. They came from families that had been uprooted by war and communism for which the US was partially responsible.

He added that those individuals were nurtured by US society and that the US was entirely responsible for their misbehaviour, not Cambodia.

“It is utterly unethical for mighty America to dump those bad guys in tiny Cambodia and force it to look after what is very much a product of American society,” he said.

Details: https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/us-murphy-meets-repatriation