



**ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION**  
**27<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
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**Remarks**

**HON. MANNY VILLAR**  
*(President, Senate of the Philippines)*

*His Excellency Noli de Castro, Vice President of the Republic of the Philippines,*

*The Honorable Jose de Venecia, Jr., the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines and the President of the 27th General Assembly of the ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION*

*Distinguished Parliamentarians from ASEAN and Dialogue Partners of the ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION*

*Ladies and Gentlemen:*

My warm greetings to all!! Welcome to the Philippines.

To participate in the general assembly of distinguished parliamentarians in ASEAN with our equally honored partners is already an honor in itself. To speak before this very prestigious conference, therefore, is even a greater honor.

Now more than ever, we realize that we all live in a global village. Concerns and challenges become so interconnected that only a collective approach involving all stakeholders can truly address them. The search for peace, unity and prosperity is as urgent and compelling now as it was in the past. The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization has emerged as an important vehicle in the pursuit of this objective.

As we look forward to carving a better future for our region and our respective nations, we are very much aware of the stumbling blocks along the way. We are the results of various antecedents in our diverse histories. Seen from the limited perspective of self-interests, our priorities differ. Our solutions to some problems are defined to a large extent by the influence of our cultures and levels of development.

It is indeed necessary to see the forest among the trees by looking at the many issues confronting us from the vantage point of sustained regional dialogues. We need to identify new pathways and stepping stones. We must establish a congruence in our responses by articulating a common agenda with policy recommendations and action strategies for expanded regional collaboration.

High on the list of issues on our agenda are the threat of global terrorism, the challenge of a globalized economic order and the creation of an ASEAN economic community.

We are deeply disturbed to know that terrorism today has become transnational and transregional. How can we cope with this danger that spares no one? What can we in the ASEAN community do to minimize the threat?

While security measures are of immediate importance, a long-term approach is equally relevant. With resolve, we can seek the removal of the seeds of suspicion, mistrust and hate that are transformed into acts of terror. We can achieve this goal by promoting continuous dialogues and building of consensus in the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The creation of an ASEAN economic community which has some of the features of the EEC was reiterated by Malaysian Prime Minister Dato Sari Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during the 38th ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting in Kuala Lumpur last August. The timetable was moved from 2020 to 2015.

Is the launching schedule realistic? How prepared are the ASEAN countries for the implications of a single economic community?

Regional liberalization with the lifting of trade barriers to facilitate the smooth flow of goods, services and capital across national boundaries provides opportunities for growth. It rewards the efficient and penalizes the less productive. A free market economy is premised on the dynamics of competition.

However, let us not ignore the lessons we are learning from today's global trade. There are strong and weak players. A few are rich and many are poor. It is precisely for this reason that there has been a repeated clamor from the developing countries that there should be a level playing field.

Regional liberalization will work best only when each participating economy has developed enough strength to withstand the challenge of competition and to profit from it.

An ASEAN economic community can pave the way for the flow of intraregional investments with its sphere. There are already some of these activities on the ground. We have Filipino companies which have established a presence in ASEAN countries. We call them OFC's or Overseas Filipino Workers Corporations. If it becomes easy for any home-grown investor to put money, technology and other resources in any place in ASEAN under the context of regional economic liberalization, we can look forward to greater growth and expansion in the region's economy.

There are other vital concerns that need our attention. We cannot respond to all of them and at the same time with as much effectiveness as desired. We must establish our priorities and refocus our performance targets in terms of what we can do immediately and according to the resources at hand.

Let us find great comfort and encouragement in the thought that there is no challenge, however great, that we cannot meet. There is no problem, however difficult, that we cannot solve. There is not task, however heavy, that we cannot accomplish.

As we learn from each other, as we generously share our experiences and ideas, as our national horizons blend to show an intimation of our shared future, we grow in wisdom and perspective for the benefit not only of our respective countries but also of ASEAN and the rest of the world.

**MABUHAY!**