



ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION
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Opening Statement

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**BREAKTHROUGH IN AIPO AND ITS CRUCIAL ROLE IN ASEAN'S MOVEMENT
TOWARD COMMUNITY**

Friends and colleagues—

WE CONVENE with both AIPO, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization, and its *mother-*organization, ASEAN, at the beginning of an *epoch-making* transformation.

ASEAN is moving decisively toward its *long-time* dream of *unifying* the whole of Southeast Asia politically, economically, and culturally.

And in ASEAN's movement toward community, AIPO will have a *crucial* role—because *only* AIPO can provide the *parliamentary* and *constituency* support for ASEAN's vision of transforming our 10 states into one *caring* and *sharing* community.

Both security and economic *compulsions* are driving the ASEAN states toward closer union.

Big powers, international terrorists, and ideological extremists threaten to turn our region into a strategic *playing field* for their various geopolitical goals.

While in East Asia—and in the world—ASEAN faces *increasingly tough competition* for trade and investment.

II. AIPO'S CRUCIAL ROLE IN UNIFYING SOUTHEAST ASIA

SOUTHEAST ASIA'S UNIFICATION, therefore, has become *not just an ideal* but an *imperative*.

And there is *no way* that an ASEAN community can be built *without* its would-be architects *engaging* the *enthusiasm* of ordinary Southeast Asian peoples.

The lessons of the European Union teach us that elite *technocratic* arrangements—made *over the heads* of ordinary people—have limited popular appeal.

ASEAN's peoples will embrace ASEAN only if they see it as a beneficial influence on their daily lives.

ASEAN's peoples will keep the ASEAN vision in their hearts only if they feel the vision is their *own*.

And who can communicate this vision of community to everyday Southeast Asians better than their *own* parliamentary representatives?

Because ASEAN's architects—the *Standing Committee* of Foreign Ministers and the *Leaders' Summit* of Heads of Government—realize this, we were able this year to strengthen *qualitatively* the *synergy* between AIPO and ASEAN.

The first formal AIPO-ASEAN consultations in 27 years

Last June—for the *first time* in AIPO's 27 years—AIPO and ASEAN consulted *formally* on regional affairs.

On the invitation of the Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee, I—as President of this 27th Assembly—met with Malaysia's Foreign Minister *Syed Hamid Albar*, together with senior officials of ASEAN and of the Malaysian foreign ministry, on how AIPO can help bring ASEAN closer to our peoples—the peoples of Southeast Asia.

The agreements that Minister Albar and I reached were subsequently *ratified* by the ASEAN Standing Committee.

I am happy to transmit these undertakings to you for your consideration.

On AIPO's behalf, I suggested—and Minister Albar agreed—that ASEAN and AIPO should consult regularly.

Hence, *not only* would the President of AIPO and the Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee meet *regularly* from now on.

The ASEAN Leaders *would also receive* the AIPO President at their yearly Summit—at a briefing he would give them on AIPO's activities.

In turn, AIPO would invite the Summit Chairman to address its yearly Assembly.

And since the Philippines is *coincidentally* Chairman of this year's ASEAN Summit, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has graciously agreed to start off this new era in AIPO-ASEAN relations by addressing our 27th Assembly, and receive AIPO's representatives in October or November before the Cebu Summit.

III. HOW AIPO CAN HELP RAISE AWARENESS OF ASEAN AMONG THE PEOPLES OF THE REGION

MINISTER ALBAR AND I AGREED that the electoral constituencies represented by AIPO's member-Parliaments make the best *conduits* for propagating awareness of ASEAN throughout the region.

Through face-to-face encounters as well as through party chapters and through the mass media, AIPO lawmakers can initiate discussions on ASEAN among their constituencies.

Already ASEAN is seeking *inputs* from Southeast Asian civil-society groupings for the draft of an ASEAN Charter. The writing of this document—which is being advised by an Eminent Persons Group—should be a good occasion for bringing ASEAN’s programs before our constituents.

Regionally and nationally, AIPO members should speak out in favor of an ASEAN Charter that expresses the sentiments of ordinary Southeast Asians—that reflects faithfully their needs, their wants and their hopes.

Socializing our young people in ASEAN civics

I also suggested to Minister Albar that our national education systems would be the most natural way of *socializing* particularly our young people in ASEAN *civics*.

And this could be accomplished by our ensuring that *basic curriculums* in every member-state include the history, culture, geography, and economics of all the ASEAN nations—emphasizing the ties of blood, culture and history that distinguish the Southeast Asian peoples.

IV. OTHER AGREEMENTS BETWEEN AIPO AND ASEAN

THE ASEAN STANDING COMMITTEE accepted several other projects that I brought up on AIPO’s behalf.

I proposed that ASEAN invite the six powers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to accede to the ASEAN agreement on counter-terrorism. You will recall that we initiated the first Philippine-Indonesia-Malaysia anti-terrorist coalition a month after 9/11, 2001, later joined by Thailand, Cambodia, Brunei, Australia and others.

Cooperation between ASEAN and the “Shanghai Six” could stem the movement of extremists from Central Asia toward Southeast Asia—and give ASEAN counter-terrorist agencies early warning of terrorist plots from the heartlands of *jihād*.

On AIPO’s behalf, I also proposed the *creation* of a Standby ASEAN Disaster Relief Fund for rescue, relief, and reconstruction in the aftermath of the natural calamities that all too often befall regions of Southeast Asia.

Such a Fund may be built up from international humanitarian contributions and specific allocations from the national budgets of the participating countries. And the Fund could be managed by a regional institution such as the Asian Development Bank.

Philippine proposals to ASEAN

I also took the opportunity to seek ASEAN’s endorsement of two Philippine proposals to the global community.

The *first* seeks the creation of an *Interfaith Council* in the United Nations system that would coordinate the interfaith dialogues the UN has approved and started to organize.

The *second* proposal is for a large-scale *debt-for-equity* program that would enable the 100 poorest countries—in agreement with creditor-states and lending institutions—to divert a percentage of their debt-service payments into national anti-poverty programs under the UN’s Millennium Development Goals to reduce poverty by 50 percent by the year 2015.

Our debt-for-equity program has already been endorsed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan and by the G-77 Countries (now 132) and China.

I am happy to report to you that only yesterday morning at the 4th Assembly of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP), where I sit as Chairman of the Standing Committee, 90 political parties (majority and minority) from Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and Oceania approved unanimously our proposal, which we earlier discussed at AIPO.

Most recently, the Pakistan, Russian, and Belgian governments also endorsed our debt-for-equity proposal. If finally approved by the creditor-countries and lending institutions, it will benefit not just ASEAN but many heavily indebted countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America as well, without debtors taking recourse to debt repudiation or debt moratorium.

V. AIPO’S TRANSFORMATION INTO AN ASEAN PARLIAMENT

LASTLY, I ALSO BRIEFED MINISTER ALBAR on the progress of AIPO’s own efforts to prepare itself for its regional legislative role.

We in AIPO have always regarded our organization as the *precursor* of what would be an ASEAN Parliamentary Council or an ASEAN Parliamentary Union—the beginnings of an ASEAN Parliament.

And already we have behind us a quarter-century of learning experience in the habits of regional cooperation.

Not only have we grown friendships, developed mutual understanding, and forged our solidarity here in AIPO.

These past years have also shown us the *practical* value of *fraternal* contacts built up during AIPO gatherings.

For instance, these friendships enabled President Arroyo and myself to persuade China and Vietnam to join the Philippines in a *trilateral* exploration (through our national oil corporations) of the South China Sea.

This historic agreement provides the beginnings of a settlement in the South China Sea that could avert a potential confrontation over conflicting claims to the area.

It is our hope that we can eventually discuss the other contested areas with our brothers from Malaysia and Brunei.

I hope our seismic agreement also offers a model for setting aside similarly contesting claims between Japan and China in the East China Sea, and between Japan and South Korea in the Sea of Japan (or what the Koreans refer to as the East Asia Sea).

IV. COMMUNITY IS THE WAVE OF OUR FUTURE

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT 15-20 YEARS, Asia and the Pacific still seem the regions with the greatest risk of major armed conflict.

And the *only real* solution—the *only lasting* solution—to these *tensions* is to embed all our countries in a network of economic, political and security relationships—in an Asia-Pacific *community of consent*.

Community, then, seems the wave of the future—not *only* for ASEAN *but also* for the whole of East Asia and the Asia Pacific.

And, indeed, the *instruments* of an East Asian—and a larger Asia-Pacific—community are already being laid—in the East Asian Economic Grouping (or EAEG) and in APEC, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

The EAEG would encompass the ASEAN-10 *plus* China, Japan and Korea.

The 21-member APEC would span all the states of the Pacific Basin—in Asia and in the two American continents.

It will be the historic task of our rising generation of political, economic, and cultural leaders to make these regional institutions work.

But it is *our burden*—and *our glory*—to lay the foundations on which these *communal* structures are to be erected, so that we can *then* turn *without distraction* to the work of delivering our people at last *from their bondage to poverty, ignorance and ill-health*.

A year of breakthrough for AIPO

In sum, this year has been a year of breakthrough for AIPO.

Our repeated calls for an eventual ASEAN Parliament—supported by thorough feasibility studies—have generated a *consensus* to rebuild and strengthen AIPO; and our Indonesian brothers, together with your representatives in the relevant committees have done magnificent work in this regard.

Now ASEAN's highest leaders are reaching out to AIPO for *active* consultations and assistance.

From Malaysia's Minister Albar, we have now transmitted our AIPO proposals to the new Standing Committee Chairman, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo, and to President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the new Chair of the ASEAN Leaders' Summit—which is scheduled to meet here in Cebu City in early December.

All these trends and events signify AIPO's evolution.

A full generation after its hopeful beginnings, AIPO has become dynamic and activist. I have no doubt it will soon become a full partner of the ASEAN leadership—and the *nucleus* of an eventual Parliament of *one* Southeast Asia.