



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

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*(Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Republic of the Philippines and  
Chairman, ASEAN Standing Committee)*

*His Excellency Vice-President Noli De Castro  
Honorable Speaker Jose de Venecia, President of AIPO,  
Honorable Heads of Delegation  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen*

I am honored to address this gathering of distinguished legislators from the ASEAN community. The outcome of this important meeting will certainly provide significant inputs in the course of the Philippines' ASEAN Chairmanship.

I thank the Honorable Speaker and AIPO President Jose de Venecia for his untiring efforts in making this assembly a success.

In four decades, ASEAN has made great strides and surpassed many challenges.

A child of the Cold War and an offspring of a bipolar world, ASEAN's infant eyes were witness to a bloody proxy right next door -- between superpowers and competing ideologies.

Ideological divides have long since dissipated. Nations where battles were once fought are now united with the rest of ASEAN. Outside powers that once sought dominance, are now ASEAN's firm partners.

Today, ASEAN serves as a model of how people of diverse backgrounds and cultures have come together for the fulfillment of common aspirations.

Through concerted efforts, the Association was able to enact groundbreaking plans of action, agreements and declarations, such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, ASEAN Free Trade Area or AFTA, the Vientiane Action Program (VAP) and the ASEAN Vision 2020. We have managed to move forward despite our limitations and differences. We have given way to consensus and remained united in our diversity.

Regional integration and community-building has always been part of ASEAN policy since its inception. The 1967 Bangkok Declaration later reinforced by the Bali Concord I and II and the ASEAN Vision 2020, envisioned a Southeast Asian community of nations, encompassing all countries in the

region. This dream was finally realized in 1999, when Cambodia was accepted as the tenth Member Country of ASEAN.

My dear colleagues in the ASEAN community, we find ourselves today, at the forefront of a changing global economic landscape.

Spurred by globalization and open markets, the Asia Pacific region has become the engine of growth of the world economy, led by China and India.

With a vast market of 2.3 billion people and the advantage of lower labor costs, China and India have, so far, cornered majority of the Foreign Director Investments (FDI) in Asia. Despite this challenge, ASEAN has the potential to compete head on with our dynamic neighbors in terms of investment opportunities.

With a total combined population of 50 million, living in an area of 4.5 million square kilometers, and with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$ 876 billion, ASEAN possesses the capability to contend with the other tiger economies in the region.

Through regional economic integration and broader multilateral linkages with our trade partners, we have the collective strength to compete with the rest of the world.

The opportunity for greater prosperity is there for us to seize.

We must strive towards greater regional cooperation and integration because that will be key to achieving our shared aspirations. We should all do our part to fulfill this vision and we can begin by crafting and implementing policies aligned with our collective agenda.

Today presents another opportunity for the Philippines to reaffirm its unwavering resolve to do its share for genuine community-building.

As Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee (ASC) from July 2006 to July 2007 and host of the 12th ASEAN Summit in Cebu in December, we commit ourselves to usher the region towards one ASEAN Community.

To highlight people-centeredness in ASEAN, the Philippines has chosen the theme - "One Caring and Sharing Community" for its Chairmanship.

I wish to inform this august assembly that the Philippines will push for the following initiatives during its chairmanship:

- Strengthen regional security with the adoption of the Convention and Declaration on Counter-terrorism
- Protection of basic rights, particularly those of migrant workers through a Declaration on the Rights and Protection of Migrant Workers
- Addressing the critical need for energy security cooperation with the holding of an Energy Summit to address our concern over rising oil prices
- Protection and promotion of biodiversity and sustainable development through the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) located in Los Baños, Laguna.

- Work on the Declaration on the Framework of the ASEAN Charter to support the efforts of the ASEAN Eminent Persons Group (EPG), which is tasked by the ASEAN Leaders to provide inputs to the Framework for the ASEAN Charter. With a Charter in place, ASEAN can move towards becoming a rules-based organization.

All these initiatives are geared towards our common aim of a people-centered approach for regional integration. We hop that through these initiatives, we can give a fresh impetus towards a closer understanding and cooperation among the ASEAN Member countries and our Dialogue Partners as we work hand-in hand to achieve the vision of a true community.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the call for closer cooperation among the ASEAN member countries and our Dialogue Partners as we move towards regional integration and genuine community-building.

United, we can and will move forward.

Thank you and good day.