



ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION
27TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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Statement by

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(Secretary-General of ASEAN)

1. Firstly, let me express my sincere appreciation to the President of AIPO for his kind invitation for me and the ASEAN Secretariat to attend and address the 27th General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization. I would like to congratulate the Philippines for its efforts in organizing this important event in this beautiful resort city of Cebu.
2. Next year AIPO will observe its 30th year of establishment. Over the three decades of its existence, AIPO has grown to be a viable organization and an important partner in supporting ASEAN's regional initiatives. In many ways, AIPO's development has run parallel with that of ASEAN, and the contributions of ASEAN Parliamentarians towards regional integration efforts have helped shape ASEAN into a cohesive regional entity which is held as an example worldwide.
3. ASEAN is undergoing transformation to enable it to better address the challenges of the new millennium. Our Leaders have articulated in the ASEAN Vision 2020, their hope for an ASEAN Community, based on the foundations of peace and security; an integrated single market and a community of caring societies.
4. The Vientiane Action Programme (VAP) provides a blueprint for the period 2004-2010 to realize the ASEAN Community, through the three pillars of the ASEAN Security Community (ASC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). In the VAP are programme measures which when implemented will provide the framework and the foundation for a strong ASEAN Community.

Advancing the ASEAN community

5. I am pleased to inform AIPO that progress towards the implementation of the VAP programme measures for the ASC, AEC and the ASCC has been very encouraging. In the context of the ASC, all ASEAN Assistance Treaty which will provide a firm basis for addressing transnational crime issues at the regional level.
6. Where the AEC is concerned, ASEAN is looking beyond just creating a common economic space among its Member Countries. Building on the gains of the ASEAN Free Trade Area, we are now in the process of negotiating various forms of free trade and investment arrangements with ASEAN's key trading partners namely, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand. Based on the progress thus far we are confident that free trade agreements would be in place by 2015.

7. In building a community of caring societies as envisaged under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, several agreements and joint declarations have been signed on issues ranging from protection of women, children, the elderly and migrant workers to emerging infectious diseases such as HIV and AIDS and avian influenza. These agreements and declarations have paved the way for closer collaboration at the regional level among governments, NGOs and CSOs in addressing the socio-cultural concerns. The convening of the Civil Society Conference in the sidelines of the 11th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 and the next such Conference in the Philippines in December 2006 are important steps in engaging the civil society in ASEAN'S COMMUNITY BUILDING EFFORTS.

Meeting the Challenges- Thinking Regional Acting National

8. While we are not disappointed with the progress made so far, we also realize that there is still much that needs to be done to fully realize the vision of an ASEAN Community. An important challenge for us at this point is the implementation of agreements and treaties that have been agreed upon at the regional level. In many cases, these regional instruments require ratification by national legislatures as well as amendments to existing national legislations to reflect regional interests. In addressing this challenge, the role of ASEAN Parliamentarians is vital. We need to mainstream the work of ASEAN in the agenda of our respective national legislatures to ensure that regional and national priorities are harmonized for the benefit of all.

9. Yet another challenge is narrowing the development gap that exists between ASEAN member Countries. The initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) has been put in place as a mechanism through which the more advanced and developed ASEAN Member Countries can assist in building capacity and strengthening institutions in the new and less developed ASEAN Member Countries, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam. In undertaking activities under the IAI, the concerned Member Countries seek funding through their national budgetary process. As national budgets are approved by their respective national legislatures, parliamentarians can play a critical role in supporting these funding requests.

10. At the sub-regional level a number of initiatives have been put in place such as the IMT-GT, BIMP-EAGA, GMS and ACMECS. Although these initiatives lie outside the formal ASEAN cooperation framework and are driven by other developmental organizations (e.g. ADB) and the private sector, their success has impact on regional integration efforts towards an ASEAN Community. I hope AIPO could also look at these initiatives and identify areas where it can further assist and facilitate the development of these sub-regional entities.

Conclusion- Fortune Favors A Prepared Mind

11. The eminent scientist Louis Pasteur once remarked that "Fortune Favors a Prepared Mind". For the vision of an ASEAN Community to effectively take hold and be a reality, it must be socialized into the minds and hearts of all ASEAN citizens. It is a monumental task, but I believe that if we take one step at a time we may be able to reach our common goal. AIPO is an organization of 'people's representatives' and therefore an important conduit for bringing ASEAN to the people. As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of ASEAN's establishment the advancing ASEAN'S vision "as a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies."

I wish the 27th General Assembly of AIPO every success. Thank you.