



ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION
27TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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Statement delivered by

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*His Excellency Jose de Venecia, Jr., Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of the Philippines and President of AIPO,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Heads of AIPO Delegations,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen*

On the outset, let me convey the warm greetings and best wishes of Members of both Houses of Malaysian Parliament. In the same breath, I would like to put on record the Malaysian delegation's deepest appreciation and gratitude to our gracious host for the splendid preparations and magnificent hospitality accorded to us and the opportunity to renew and strengthen the bonds of friendship, respect and cooperation among our nations.

*Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Without doubt the establishment of a Parliament is the embodiment of people's sovereignty. Most academicians, in one way or another acknowledge that the functional performances of the parliament are elective, legislative, oversight and representative functions. But I would like to highlight here that there is another ever growing important function played by Parliaments -- the inter parliamentary relationship or better known in the academic circle as Parliamentary Diplomacy. Although foreign policy and state diplomacy has been the domain of the Executive branch of government but parliaments in their own accord have been playing a significant role. It is clear that diplomacy no longer can be the exclusive 'territory' of the Executive branch. Parliaments can play a viable role as a second track institutions in strengthening state bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations. Without doubt the importance of parliamentary diplomacy is in resolving current issues facing the international community, and encourages national parliamentarians to work towards international peace and stability by taking full advantage of all opportunities for engaging in parliamentary diplomacy, especially addressing regional issues.

Apart from this I feel there is a need to increase the number of international parliamentary organisations in the region, to create more regional platform for Parliamentarians to air their common views. We need to look at 'new' field of parliamentary diplomacy to explore since compared to Europe, our region still lags behind. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) can be an avenue for us to establish an

inter-parliamentarian forum to discuss issues pertaining to security matters covering not only the ASEAN region but also the Asia Pacific region with the inclusion of the super powers. The ARF is the primary security body for the Asia-Pacific region, which nobody disputes. At a time when the ARF's purposefulness and political relevance are challenged and put into question, delegates gathered at this meeting would unanimously agree that with its unique composition and comprehensive security concept as well as its crisis prevention and management capacities, the ARF still has the potential and has a relevant role to play in a region facing new security challenges.

In Europe for example, NATO Parliamentary Assembly which is the inter parliamentary organisation of legislators from the member countries of the North Atlantic Alliance as well as 13 associate members, provides a critical forum for international parliamentary dialogue on an array of security, political and economic matters. In the case of the Assembly of WEU, to which European national parliaments send delegations, is the only European assembly for security and defence issues. Likewise an ARF parliamentary Assembly will be the right path to take in realising an ASEAN Security Community (ASC) and the same time will give ASC more democratic legitimacy and provide the necessary two-way channel with public opinion.

By creating inter parliamentary forums focused on certain areas of interest such as security under the ARF banner will certainly give an opportunity to parliamentarians to use parliamentary diplomacy for the betterment of their people. I think by establishing an ARF inter parliamentary forum will enable us to bring Parliamentarians from Southeast Asia, Asia Pacific and South Asia to sit down and have focus discussions on security matters pertaining to this region.

*Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Today's national security is not only about defending your borders from external attacks but also acknowledging the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who seek security in their daily lives against the threat of disease, hunger, joblessness, crime, social conflict, political repression, and environmental degradation . . . Human Security. In order to realize ASEAN vision of a caring society, member states should give priority to the question of Human Security. Freedom from fear and Freedom to live in dignity as promoted in the UN Millennium Development Goals Declaration should be embraced by all member states as part of their effort to create a just ASEAN community based on the principles of law, human rights and democracy. Recognising the strong interconnections among political, economic and social realities, the ASC acknowledges the principle of comprehensive security, and commits to address the broad political, economic, social and cultural aspects of building an ASEAN Community.

The ARF can be seen as an extension of ASEAN's idea of comprehensive security, based on the ASEAN 'way' of conflict resolution which essentially, by consensus. The ARF is now the only official forum for stimulating confidence-building measures in Southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific in a wider context and the only regional governmental forum where states can air their grievances and engage in dialogue. At the same time the ARF is the only regional security framework in the world in which all the great powers are represented, that is the U.S., China, Russia, Japan and Britain, France and Germany as part of the European Union delegation. The ARF's wide participation reflect the great diversity that characterize the Asia Pacific region. The Bali Concord II affirms the ARF as "the main forum for regional security dialogue" and "the primary forum in enhancing political and security cooperation in the Asia Pacific region, as well as the pivot in building peace and stability in the region". More particularly, the Bali Concord II stresses ASEAN's role "as the primary driving force" of ARF.

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By setting up an ARF inter parliamentary forum will enable parliamentarians to deliberate in depth especially issues pertaining to comprehensive security that have regional consequences. Shortly after the establishment of ASEAN, member states found themselves “convinced that the time is propitious for joint action to give effective expression to the deeply felt desire of the peoples of South East Asia to ensure the conditions of peace and stability indispensable to their independence and their economic and social well being”. This is the well known ZOPFAN Declaration. Who else can echo the voices of the people better other than the regional Parliamentarians? One cannot deny that legislatures are still a major source of legitimacy for democracy. I am positive that a conducive political environment can be further enhanced with the establishment of an ARF inter-parliamentary forum. This forum will definitely empower the regional parliamentarians to play a greater role in regional security affairs.

Thank you.