



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

H.E. ABDULLAH TARMUGI
(Speaker of the Parliament, Singapore)

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

It gives me great pleasure to be here with my distinguished colleagues and fellow Parliamentarians. Please allow me to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our Philippine hosts for graciously hosting the 27th AIPO General Assembly here in Cebu and for the warm and generous hospitality accorded to my delegation and I.

Mr. President,

These are exciting times for ASEAN. How we respond today to the challenges presented by a rapidly changing global marketplace and strong international economic competition will shape the future of ASEAN in this century. The past decade has given us valuable lessons on how interdependent our economies have become. This is why ASEAN countries have consciously pursued “prosper thy neighbour” policies to ensure a shared prosperity across our lands, and worked towards the formation of a single market. When the ASEAN Single Market is established, goods and services will be able to move freely across borders, and curbs on flows of capital will ease. Our region will be a cheaper place to do business in, and our home-grown businesses will be able to compete globally on a solid footing.

The results of our efforts are slowly becoming apparent. A recent PriceWaterhouseCoopers study notes that foreign direct investment into the region surged 48% to US\$38 billion in 2005. This surpasses levels seen before the start of the 1997 – 1998 financial crisis. Intra-regional trade is also strong. The indicators for the first quarter of 2006 show that this trend is set to continue. These statistics provide an encouraging sign that we are forging ahead in the right direction.

Increasingly too, ASEAN countries are coming together with a common vision of what we want to achieve in the larger global architecture. The ASEAN Economic Ministers have agreed to accelerate the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community from 2020 to 2015, and there also appears to be positive movement to similarly accelerate the establishment of the ASEAN Security and Socio-Cultural Communities. This will help create a unified region with a market and production base of over 500 million people and a GDP of over US\$700 billion. This is all the more important taking into account the revitalization of India and the re-emergence of China.

If ASEAN plays its cards right, we will be able to ride on the waves of this Asian renaissance. ASEAN's drive to strengthen our external linkages also feeds into this overall goal. The successful launch of the first East Asia Summit last year has helped entrench ASEAN's role as a key driver in regional processes. ASEAN will also continue to work through other regional for a like the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN+3 framework as well as ASEAN's Dialogue Relationships to create an open and inclusive architecture, where all countries are stakeholders in the peace and prosperity of Southeast Asia.

Mr. President,

Developments in AIPO itself mirror the changes on ASEAN's horizon. Our discussions towards making AIPO a more effective organization are bearing some fruit. As the only inter-parliamentary forum in the region, AIPO is well positioned to reflect the views and aspirations of ASEAN citizens. To this end, the AIPO President had met then Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee, Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar of Malaysia, for consultations between ASEAN and AIPO for the first time in Kuala Lumpur earlier this year. This newly-established platform is a good one and also dovetails with ASEAN's broader goals of diminishing the distance between citizens and officials. This process has potential and should be nurtured, and allowed to mature into a forum for substantive dialogue.

I also understand that there has been good progress on work towards the establishment of an ASEAN Charter, with the Eminent Persons Group's report to the ASEAN Leaders expected this December. The ASEAN Charter, when completed, is envisaged to be a landmark document mapping out the future direction of ASEAN. The ASEAN Charter is also likely to give greater definition to the parameters of regional cooperation; help strengthen regional processes and institutions; as well as give a major push to regional integration efforts.

Mr. President, I think that on our part, AIPO should also follow such developments within ASEAN more closely as there will be important implications for AIPO, even as we proceed with our own strategic review on ways to transform this Organization into a more effective one. We must continue to press ahead boldly and confidently with practical and concrete measures to transform AIPO into a more effective and closely integrated institution and within the broader view of what ASEAN is seeking to achieve. I also fully welcome AIPO's efforts to consult and work more closely with ASEAN so that we can be more closely aligned towards the common vision of building an ASEAN Community.

Mr. President,

The Philippines has recently assumed Chairmanship of ASEAN. We are confident that the Philippine Chairmanship and the upcoming ASEAN Summit in Cebu will provide important impetus to ASEAN's integration efforts. We have much to do. Our delegation looks forward to a meaningful exchange of views with our colleagues, and we stand prepared to work with you towards making this a fruitful meeting.

Thank you.