



**ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION**

**27<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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**Statement delivered by**

**HON. PETER SLIPPER**

*(Member of Parliament, Australia)*

It is a great pleasure and honour to address the 27<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization. The Assembly is taking place at a significant time – when ASEAN is approaching its fortieth anniversary (in August 2007). Our participation in this Assembly provides us with an opportunity to renew our friendships and to reaffirm the very valuable relationships and cooperation which Australia has with ASEAN.

Australia appreciates highly the contribution which ASEAN has made to peace, regional cooperation and prosperity in Southeast Asia since 1967. Australia was the first country to establish a multilateral relationship with ASEAN – in 1974. Australia was proud to be able to celebrate thirty years of our cooperation with ASEAN at the special Commemorative Summit attended by Prime Minister Howard, Prime Minister Clark of New Zealand and the leaders of ASEAN, in Vientiane in November 2004. Australia's commitment to ASEAN and its contribution to peace and prosperity was re-emphasized by our accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in December 2005.

Australia has valued highly the regular dialogues with our ASEAN neighbours through the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conferences (since 1979). We have also welcomed the opportunity to be able to join as founding members in the ASEAN Regional Forum (in 1994) and in the new East Asia Summit, inaugurated last December in Kuala Lumpur.

Our networks of bilateral and multilateral relations with ASEAN enable Australia to develop and advance the many interests we have in common. We all share a commitment to peace and security which we have pursued in many years, including opposition to the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and support for the maintenance of maritime security. We are also working together in other areas vital to national and human security, including efforts to eliminate trafficking in people and the trade in narcotics.

In the past five years we have needed to expand our cooperation to oppose terrorism. Australia and ASEAN have been able to develop valuable coordination of our efforts in this area through extensive bilateral cooperation and through avenues including the ASEAN – Australia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism (July 2004), the Bali Ministerial dialogue on counter-terrorism and crime established between Australia and ASEAN Senior Officials in September 2004.

Australia is seeking to contribute to mutual understanding and tolerance among religions and cultures across the region, through the Interfaith Dialogue processes. The Interfaith Dialogue process brings together faith and community leaders from countries in the region to help empower moderates and

underline the key role of faith and community leaders in bridging differences and building harmony in the region.

A mutual commitment to economic growth and progress is continuing to draw our countries together. By 2005 our two way merchandise trade reached A\$43.9 billion – an increase of 25 percent since 2001. In 2005, Australian exports to ASEAN were valued at A\$15.9 billion, representing 11.4 per cent of Australia’s total merchandise exports. In 2005, imports to Australia from ASEAN reached A\$28 billion—an increase of 38 percent since 2001. Indeed, ASEAN was Australia’s biggest source of imports. Combined two-way trade in services totaled A\$11.4 billion in 2005.

We are aware of the important steps ASEAN is now taking to implement its commitment to develop the ‘ASEAN Economic Community’ – to create an integrated market among the ASEAN members by 2015. Australia has already signed bilateral Free Trade Agreements with Singapore and Thailand and negotiations are underway with Malaysia. Our countries are now engaged in negotiations to develop a multilateral free trade agreement between Australia, New Zealand and the ASEAN nations. We believe that when these negotiations are concluded and an FTA developed, this will consolidate further Australia’s economic integration into the region and benefit all of us.

Aid continues to play a valuable role in both humanitarian assistance and in helping to build the infrastructure and capacities which support further growth. Australia’s development cooperation program for ASEAN countries for 2006 – 07 amounts to \$628 million. This includes Australia’s commitment to assistance in recovery from the devastation caused by the tsunami in December 2004. Through the Australia – Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development, we are contributing \$1 billion in assistance and loans over a five year period, both in and beyond tsunami affected areas. Australia is also providing \$45 million over six years to assist ASEAN on a multilateral basis. Australia has made an ongoing commitment to assist ASEAN’s less developed members, in line with the Vientiane Action Plan.

While cooperation between our government proceeds, relations between our peoples are also being expanded and deepened. Education is a key element in our cooperation. We are glad to have been able to welcome over 69,000 students from ASEAN to Australia in 2005. Australian institutions have also established many centres in the ASEAN region; including the RMIT campus which has been established in Ho Chi Minh City; the private research and teaching university in Singapore being established by the University of New South Wales, and the medical college to be opened by Monash University in Malaysia next year.

ASEAN countries have been a popular tourist destination for Australians for many years. We continue to welcome warmly visits from our neighbours in ASEAN. We received over 600,000 tourists from ASEAN in 2004.

The rapidly growing interactions between our peoples underscore the importance of continuing dialogue and cooperation. We therefore look forward to the next stages of Australia’s cooperation with ASEAN – including the second meeting of the East Asia Summit, which will meet here in Cebu in December of this year.

As ASEAN is approaching its fortieth anniversary it is an auspicious time for us to renew the contacts between our parliaments. We are confident that the relationship between Australia and ASEAN will continue to benefit our countries and peoples.