

**Remarks by H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan
The Secretary-General of ASEAN
At the Ceremony for the Transfer Office of the Secretary-General of ASEAN
The ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia
7 January 2008**

Excellency Dr. Hassan Wirajuda, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and Ibu Herawatie Wirajuda,

Excellencies, Governor of Jakarta and Mayor of the city of Jakarta, the Republic of Indonesia,

Excellency Ong Keng Yong,

Excellencies, the Ambassadors of Member States of ASEAN in Indonesia,

Excellencies, the Ambassadors of ASEAN Dialogue Partners, and others,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My family and I are greatly honoured by your gracious presence at this ceremony this morning.

I thank Excellency Ong Keng Yong – my good friend and predecessor – for his kind words about me and his best wishes for me as I take over the ASEAN Secretary-General post from him. I would need all the luck in this world to be as energetic and successful as Excellency Ong Keng Yong.

I think I am very privileged and fortunate to assume this post at this historic moment when ASEAN is making great strides and attracting international attention and support.

We all inherit a Vision, a Dream. Five great statesmen bequeathed to us, a new generation of Southeast Asian people, a legacy of peaceful co-existence in the midst of tremendous diversity here in the region. Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand met on a fateful day of 8 August 1967 to chart the course of their countries' future. They pledged their sacred honour to endeavour together for a better life in peace and prosperity for their peoples. They made their sacred oath to seal their fate in our names, the names of the peoples of Southeast Asia. That was when ASEAN was born, inspired by a common desire for a brighter and more secure future.

As stated in the Bangkok Declaration, the Founding Fathers of ASEAN desired “*to promote regional cooperation in South-East Asia in the spirit of equality and partnership and thereby contribute towards peace, progress and prosperity in the region*”. They also declared “*to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their peoples and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity*”.

Forty years on, their Vision and their Dream remain vibrant, vivid and clear. As I humbly accept the trust and confidence of the Leaders of ASEAN to coordinate the activities through the ASEAN Secretariat in our common quest for a better integrated, more efficient and more resilient regional organisation, I seek the cooperation and support of fellow ASEAN citizens and policy-makers, as well as the partners of ASEAN to work with us, the able men and women of the Secretariat, to turn the Vision and Dream of our Founding Fathers into reality.

ASEAN Leaders have already committed to the noble and ambitious vision of building the ASEAN Community by 2015. At their Summit in Singapore on 20 November, they signed the ASEAN Charter, which will be our new legal foundation and institutional framework to bring about the ASEAN Community.

The ASEAN Leaders also approved the Blueprint of the ASEAN Economic Community, which will be our roadmap for economic integration until 2015.

This year, we are going to come up with two more Blueprints: one for the ASEAN Political-Security Community, and the other for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. These two, together with the ASEAN Economic Community, constitute the three pillars of the ASEAN Community on which we will continue to build our cooperation and integration in the 21st century.

Quite obviously, a great deal of groundwork has already been done during the past five years. A great deal of institutional build-up has been done to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat.

You all would be pleased to know that under the initiative and leadership of Excellency Ong Keng Yong, the ASEAN Secretariat was ISO certified last year. We understand that the ASEAN Secretariat is the first of its kind to attain such distinction. This is why I say I am fortunate to come to this job at this opportune time. I have my own vision but that can wait.

Last Saturday, Excellency Ong Keng Yong spent three hours briefing me on ASEAN issues and Secretariat matters. He showed me a scroll of the "ASEAN Family Tree" which contains all the ASEAN bodies in our growing organisation. We now have one ASEAN Summit, 28 Ministerial Meetings, and over 100 senior official committees and working groups. I was taken back when he insisted that I need to learn to know about all their activities and attend all the Summits and Ministerial Meetings!

According to Excellency Ong Keng Yong's calculation, he had spent, on average, only ten days per month in Jakarta; the rest he spent attending meetings and conferences outside of Jakarta, or waiting in airline lounges and flying here and there in the ASEAN region and beyond. I wonder how such rigorous schedule is going to change me and my family.

My wife, Khun Alissa here, has already given me her notice. If I cannot spend up to twenty days in Jakarta, she would not join me here; she would rather be alone in Bangkok. But I believe she understands. The ASEAN Secretary-General job requires my presence everywhere in ASEAN and outside. In January, my schedule has already been fully booked! And the rest of the year is filling up steadily.

I know the regular duty will keep me extremely busy. But one of my priorities is to bring ASEAN to the 560 million people in our ASEAN region. Since the ASEAN Leaders have already shown their collective vision, and the ASEAN Governments have already agreed on the economic blueprint and other cooperation programmes, now it is the time to capture the imagination of our people; make them aware of what we are doing; explain to them, in their national languages (not just English, which is the only working language in ASEAN) so that they understand and see the benefit of having ASEAN. Eventually, popular debates about ASEAN can be generated; and popular support may be mobilised.

To be successful and meaningful in building the ASEAN Community, these 560 million people must be part of this historic mission. This is, in fact, clearly stated in the ASEAN Charter.

This is indeed a formidable task and enormous responsibility. The staff at the ASEAN Secretariat and I would need all the assistance and support we can get, not only from within ASEAN, but also from all everywhere outside ASEAN.

My message to our friends and partners from outside ASEAN is that ASEAN is certainly a great opportunity for dialogue and cooperation. Your continued support for ASEAN will certainly lead to win-win outcome. This ASEAN region is growing peacefully and prosperously. We will continue to do our utmost in making you feel welcomed and appreciated in our region. A successful ASEAN Community will be the cornerstone of peace, prosperity, and human development for East Asia and Asia-Pacific. At the minimum, this is one good region that the rest of the world has nothing to worry about.

My office and my Rumah ASEAN (near the Royal Thai Embassy on Jalan Imam Bonjol) will always be open to welcome you. Finally, I thank you all once again for your gracious presence at this ceremony.

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