



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR VANU GOPALA MENON,
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS,
ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
(ASEAN), AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON
“THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS
IN THE MAINTENANCE OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY”,
6 NOVEMBER 2007, SECURITY COUNCIL CHAMBER**

Thank you, Mr President, for giving me the floor. I am making this statement on behalf of the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Let me add that we are extremely pleased to see a fellow member of ASEAN presiding over the Security Council.

2 The end of the Cold War marked the end of an era where global conflicts were seen through the prism of only two lenses. Today, we live in a more complex and interconnected world, where there are many new actors on the international stage and more variables and alignments to consider. While the threat of global war has receded, smaller conflicts that are often asymmetric, low-intensity and diffuse have proliferated. It has become a messier world.

3 This situation presents new challenges to global peace and security. Obviously, the UN and the major powers have a crucial role to play. But in a globalised world, regional cooperation can also play a key role. Indeed, even the UN Charter recognises the role which regional arrangements can play in helping the UN achieve its objectives.

4 All over the world today, regional initiatives are proliferating. Some are modest in their objectives, providing forums to meet and consult. Others are more ambitious. They discuss security or create free trade areas. They foster joint efforts against problems like drug trafficking and terrorism. Many of these regional initiatives are open and inclusive and should be encouraged to remain that way. Those which are superfluous will gradually wither away. International organisations like the UN, WTO, WHO, IAEA and UNEP should work with those that remain, strengthening their capabilities and encouraging mutual learning. At their best, these regional initiatives create a habit of cooperation and reduce misunderstanding.

5 The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN has played this role. 2007 is a special year because it marks 40 years of unity. ASEAN has come a long way since its establishment by the Bangkok Declaration in 1967. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, and with regional disputes still fresh in memory, ASEAN began with the modest aim of keeping the peace in Southeast Asia. It was a mechanism for member countries to manage common threats, while balancing internal sensitivities and conflicts. In short, ASEAN was born out of the strategic imperatives of its times. With the end of the Cold War, peace returned to Indochina and ASEAN gradually expanded to include the newer member-states of Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia to become a community of ten.

6 ASEAN has been about establishing a norm of cooperation and dialogue among its members. Economic cooperation was always a key point. In 1992, ASEAN decided to establish a free trade area in stages. We are largely there for trade in goods. For investments and services, we have some way to go. But there is the will to press on and transform ASEAN into one economic space. Four years ago, when the Leaders of ASEAN met in Indonesia, they took a major decision to establish an ASEAN Community by 2020 with three main pillars - security, economic and socio-cultural. Earlier this year, they further agreed to accelerate the establishment of the ASEAN Community by 2015. To create such a community, an ASEAN Charter will be signed later this month in Singapore to provide a legal framework document for the further strengthening of ASEAN. It will help remake ASEAN into a more effective, cohesive and rules-based organization, through, for instance, establishing provisions for dispute settlement by independent panels. Blueprints for each of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community will also map out concrete initiatives, targets and timelines to achieve this goal. The first such Blueprint for the economic pillar will be adopted later this month.

7 ASEAN has also been about engaging the external environment. For ASEAN to prosper, we have always recognized the importance of maintaining good relations with all the major powers in the region. ASEAN has dialogue partnerships with the US, the EU, Russia, China, Japan, Korea, India, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. ASEAN has been playing a bridging role of sorts. It is the driving force behind the creation of such key regional groupings as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit. The ARF is the main security forum in the Asia-Pacific region, bringing together 27 participating countries including ASEAN, the US, the EU, Russia, China and India. Through its many confidence-building measures and preventive diplomacy activities, the ARF has contributed to the stability and security in the region. Economically, ASEAN has negotiated, or is in the process of negotiating, free trade agreements with China, India, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand, and the EU, and a closer economic partnership with the US. We have a simple strategy, which is to give all of them a strong stake in our regional stability, unity and development. Strategically, some of the most important sea lanes pass through ASEAN waters. About a third of global trade, half of global oil trade and 80% of the oil bound for China and Japan pass through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore.

8 Through the ASEAN-plus groupings and the East Asia Summit which includes Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand, we are creating a new architecture of peaceful cooperative development in the larger East Asia. The East Asia Summit process is maturing into an important regional forum that is progressing beyond dialogue into concrete cooperation. Let me stress that while ASEAN is not big enough to be a major global player, ASEAN plays a significant role in holding Asia together and keeping it open to the rest of the world. ASEAN is outward-looking and inclusive, and through our various external linkages, seeks to engage all who have a stake in the region's future.

9 ASEAN is a work in process. Like other regions in the world, we face many problems - economic development, terrorism, drug-trafficking, environmental degradation, maritime security, ethnic/religious divisions and avian flu, among others. However, what each of us in ASEAN has come to appreciate is that without ASEAN, each of these problems is much harder to solve. And ASEAN alone cannot solve any of them. We have to work with other countries and with international organisations like the UN. We are grateful for their assistance, their partnership and their cooperation.